

**Media Influence, Physical Appearance Comparison Behavior and Body Image  
Dissatisfaction among University Students**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study aimed to investigate the relationship between media influence, physical appearance comparison behavior, and body image dissatisfaction among university students. A total of 300 male and female students from universities in Islamabad and Rawalpindi were selected through purposive sampling to ensure a diverse academic representation. The Multidimensional Media Influence Scale (MMIS) (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004) the Physical Appearance Comparison Scale-Revised (PACS-R) (Schaefer & Thompson, 2018) and the Body Image Satisfaction Scale (BISS) (Holsen et al., 2012). The results revealed a significant positive relationship between media influence and body image dissatisfaction with a correlation coefficient of 0.279 ( $p < 0.05$ ), and physical appearance comparison behavior was found to mediate this relationship ( $F(2,297)=2126, p < 0.05$ ). Specifically, increased media influence was associated with greater body dissatisfaction, and this effect was further amplified through appearance comparison behavior. These findings suggest that media portrayals of idealized body images contribute to higher levels of dissatisfaction among university students. The findings further revealed no significant gender differences in body dissatisfaction, suggesting that male and female students experience comparable levels of concern regarding their body image ( $t(298) = .762, p = .44$ ). These findings have important implications for mental health interventions targeted at university students, particularly in creating awareness of the negative effects of media portrayals on body image and promoting media literacy programs to help mitigate these effects. Additionally, this research may inform public policy aimed at regulating media content to reduce unrealistic body standards and promote healthier, more diverse body representations. Future research should explore diverse media types and longitudinal effects to gain a deeper understanding of these dynamics.*

**Keyword:** Media Influence, University Students, Multidimensional Media Influence Scale, Physical Appearance Comparison Scale-Revised, Body Image Satisfaction Scale, Mental Health

**INTRODUCTION**

Until the late 1980s in Pakistan, only a few number of magazines and television were available. However, media landscape underwent rapid expansion in the subsequent years. This exponential growth resulted in the availability of many of local and foreign television magazines and channels for the Pakistani populace (Hussain, 2012; Ransome, 2024). This increased media exposure has not only transformed cultural norms but has also influenced perceptions of body image, dressing habits, lifestyles, and purchasing behaviors among the local population (Jalees & Run, 2014).

The influence of media on individual self-perception and body image provoked many people's thoughts in recent years, particularly concerning its impact on young individuals. Media channels, including television, magazines, social media platforms, and advertisements, constantly present audiences with idealized images and standards of beauty. These portrayals often depict unrealistic and unattainable ideals, contributing to widespread body dissatisfaction among women. The presence of such images creates an environment where physical appearance is highly valued, leading individuals to evaluate themselves against these unattainable standards (Grabe et al., 2008).

According to the research female university students are particularly vulnerable to the influence of media during this critical period of personal and social development. University life involves navigating new social environments, forming identities, and establishing self-worth, making young women especially susceptible to external pressures and comparisons. The pervasive nature of media influence during this formative period can profoundly impact their body image and self-esteem (Tiggemann & McGill, 2004).

Researchers further suggest that viewing idealized body images in the media can result in heightened body dissatisfaction and the internalization of unattainable beauty standards (Fardouly et al., 2015). Regular exposure to accurately curated images on media may lead university students to engage in upward social comparisons, contrasting their physical appearance with the idealized images seen on media platforms (Perloff, 2014). This pressure to conform with these ideals can foster negative self-perceptions and increase body dissatisfaction.

Furthermore, the influence of physical appearance comparison behavior extends beyond media interactions to interpersonal relationships within university settings. Peer comparisons and the quest for social validation can intensify as students navigate academic and social environments, potentially worsening body image concerns (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Tiggemann & Slater, 2014). This research builds on existing literature that highlights media as a characteristic in determining perceptions regarding one's body image and focuses on the specific context of university students in Islamabad, Pakistan. By exploring the intricate relationships between appearance comparison behaviors, body image dissatisfaction and, media exposure, the study intends to deliver valuable insights for both academic research and practical discussions on mental health and well-being among university students with varied demographics, such as, age, different field of education, area of living, and university (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014)

Despite the significant influence that media has on shaping body image, there is a noticeable gap in the research when it comes to studying how media exposure affects body image dissatisfaction specifically among university students or young adults in countries like Pakistan, India, and Sri Lanka. Previous studies, such as the one by Kapadia, (2009) have highlighted this lack of focused research in these regions. This absence of detailed studies is concerning, given the increasing media consumption among young adults in these countries. Therefore, this study aimed to fill this gap by conducting focused research to understand the media influence on body image dissatisfaction and physical appearance comparison behavior among university students in Pakistan.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The media plays a powerful role in shaping societal standards of beauty by frequently showcasing idealized body types that are often unrealistic and unattainable for the average person. These idealized images are pervasive, appearing in magazines, television commercials, movies, and advertisements. Over time, repeated exposure to these images can profoundly influence how individuals, especially women, perceive their own bodies (Sparhawk, 2003). Research has consistently demonstrated that these portrayals can

contribute to negative self-perceptions. Women, in particular, may begin to measure their worth or attractiveness against these media images, which are often heavily edited or altered to fit a certain ideal. As a result, many women find themselves dissatisfied with their own bodies, feeling that they fall short of the standards set by the media. This dissatisfaction might result aversively such as having no self-confidence, elevated body shame, and in some cases, unhealthy behaviors aimed at trying to achieve these unattainable body types. Moreover, the constant comparison to these media portrayals can reinforce the belief that one's value is tied to physical appearance, further exacerbating body image concerns. This media-driven pressure to conform to a narrow and unrealistic standard of beauty highlights the substantial impression of media representations on people's body image and general health (Sparhawk, 2003). According to Mills et al., (2017) exposure to these media images can lower self-esteem and contribute to unhealthy eating habits and patterns in people with increased exposure to media. This media influence is a significant factor affecting the mental and physical health of young individuals. Research of Sarwar et al., (2022) on undergraduate scholars in Pakistan underscored the harmful outcomes of excessive social media consumption. It revealed a prominent association between prolonged use of these platforms and increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. This correlation suggests that while social media offers valuable opportunities for communication and interaction, its overuse can detrimentally impact mental health, highlighting the need for balanced and mindful engagement with these technologies. According to Zafar & Mobin, (2024) the rapid rise in social media usage poses a potential threat to mental health, especially among young people. Research on Pakistani university students found that too much usage of media was strongly linked with higher depression, anxiety and stress levels. They further pointed toward the fact that considering the potential impacts of media on the psychological wellbeing of Pakistani youth, the administration of the country should initiate public awareness drives to coach the public regarding the vulnerabilities of excessive media use and encourage healthy online habits. Furthermore, individuals who have developed mental health issues due to overuse of social media should receive appropriate treatment and therapeutic support. According to Cherry, (2024) the extensive reach of social media underscores its significant role in the lives of adolescents, who often use these platforms to connect with others who share similar interests. According to Erickson's psychosocial development theory, particularly the identity versus identity confusion stage, adolescents are in a critical period of identity formation. Social media provides them with opportunities to explore and establish their identities in a supportive environment where they can share their experiences and express themselves freely. Dar & Nagrath, (2022) also proclaimed that social media exerts a profound influence on lives of young people, offering various positive opportunities. It enables them to form friendships, nurture creativity, and support each other in facing challenges such as bullying. However, the impact of social media is not entirely positive. Over time, adults can become vulnerable to aversive effects including diminished self respect and a negative body image. Hence, the dual nature of social media's influence highlights the need to understand and address its potential effects on adults' well-being.

Body image can simply be referred to as how a people interprets things related to their body and how they believe it is viewed by others (Khor et al., 2009). When individuals feel unhappy with their body image, this is referred to as "dissatisfaction with one's bodily image," a word frequently discussed in psychological sciences and public health literature. During adolescence, a rise in societal pressure is experienced by both genders to attain an "ideal" body figure, which is typically a thin physique for female and a slim, strong build for male (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2003). Such perfectionism in bodily shapes are often strengthened by widely held cultural representations and mass media. The affirmation of these media-promoted body models can significantly contribute to body dissatisfaction, particularly among females (Knauss et al., 2007). In the early 1990s, problems like eating disorders and disappointment in body image were not prevalent in Asia (Khandelwal et al., 1995; Zia, 2007). However, a relative research between Asian and Caucasian females revealed that, generally, Asian females reported greater satisfaction and contentment with their body image compared to their British Caucasian counterparts. However, a study conducted in the United Kingdom revealed that white females exhibited higher levels of body dissatisfaction and concerns

about calorie intake paralleled to Pakistani and Indian girls residence of similar environment (Ogden & Elder, 1998). This suggests that while media exposure is constant, cultural background and possibly acculturation levels may mediate the extent of body dissatisfaction (Jalees & Run, 2014). In contrast, another study found that Pakistani and Indian female settlers in UK were significantly displeased with their body shapes and images (Mumford & Choudry, 2000). This discrepancy highlights the complex interplay between media influence and individual cultural identities. It suggests that while some ethnic groups may initially show resilience against media-induced body dissatisfaction, prolonged exposure and acculturation pressures may eventually lead to increased dissatisfaction (Nasser et al., 2003). Harriger et al., (2023) examined the content of body-positive videos on TikTok to assess whether these videos genuinely promote positive body image. Analyzing 342 videos under the hashtag #bodypositivity, they found that while the videos were intended to promote body positivity, the majority still reflected unrealistic beauty standards, primarily featuring young, White women who adhered to Western beauty ideals. Only about a third of the videos included explicit positive body image messages, and while negative or objectifying content was rare, the overall messaging often failed to break away from conventional beauty standards. This indicates that even content labeled as “body positive” on social media platforms like TikTok can perpetuate unrealistic ideals rather than challenge them.

Contrastingly, a cross-cultural study involving students from India, Tibet, France, and the United States found no significant correlation between socioeconomic status, media exposure, and body image (Rubin et al., 2008). Complexity of issues related to body image and the varying factors that influence them across different cultural contexts. The rapid expansion of media in Pakistan has significantly impacted the media consumption habits of the local population, with individuals averaging three to four hours of media use daily. This shift has led to a distortion of cultural norms and values (Jalees & Run, 2014; Zia, 2007). As a result, there has been a notable rise in depression and low self-esteem among young adults, particularly females (Qidwai et al., 2010). This trend is accompanied by an increase in eating disorders, especially among Karachi residents that were female medical students (Memon et al., 2012). In addition, Hussain, (2012) explained that the facts and the rise of media have successfully converted the all God’s creatures into a cyberspace. Information, news, and events now travel without barriers, reaching audiences around the globe instantaneously, often before governments can respond or exert control. This increased media presence has profoundly influenced social, economic, and political aspects of life. People’s thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions are heavily shaped by the images and narratives presented in the media. This pervasive influence extends to all individuals, including common citizens, elites, decision-makers, and statesmen. The obsession with media-driven body images has become so pronounced among local females that many experience profound dissatisfaction with their body image. As a result, some resort to extreme measures such as starvation, leading to severe eating disorders (Jiotsa et al., 2021; Hussain, 2012). Traditionally, Pakistani females prioritized familial and societal connections with minimal concern for body image. However, this is no longer the case. Influenced by reference groups and superstars, they adopt fashion and mentoring rehearses that deviate from traditional Pakistani norms (Abideen et al., 2011).

Physical appearance comparison behavior, where individuals evaluate their own looks against others, is a critical factor influencing body image and self-esteem. This behavior is engrained in theory of social comparison, that postulates the determination of individuals about their personal and societal worthiness on the basis of their looks in comparison to others (Festinger, 1954). Research consistently showed that physical appearance comparison is linked to body dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem. For instance, (Fardouly et al., 2015) revealed that females in early stage of life who compare their look to others more often on media reported high levels of dissatisfaction of body and disordered eating behaviors. Similarly, studies by Myers & Crowther, (2009) indicate that frequent comparisons to media images contribute to negative body image and self-esteem issues. According to Fardouly et al., (2017) individuals are more likely to participate in upward physical appearance comparative behaviors, which makes them to associate their appearance to others apparent as more attractive or better in some way. Leahey et al., (2007) reported

that these upward comparisons are positively correlated with increased body dissatisfaction and negative emotional states. When people make upward comparisons, they often feel inferior and dissatisfied with their own appearance (Wood, 1989; Coelho et al., 2023). This perceived inferiority can exacerbate negative body image and affect overall mental health. Comparatively, research by Taniguchi & Ebesu Hubbard, (2020) indicated that higher frequencies of comparison in physical appearance behaviors are generally related to increased dissatisfaction of body, negative emotions, and eating disorders, as well as decreased positive emotions. However, according to Fuller-Tyszkiewicz et al., (2019) specifically, upward appearance comparisons, which makes people to compare themselves to more attractive people around, this is particularly predictive of high body image dissatisfaction, negative affect, and eating pathology, while also correlating with lower positive affect. These findings underscore the significant impact that frequent physical appearance comparisons can have on an individual's body image and overall emotional well-being.

Cultural context also plays a critical role in how appearance comparison behavior manifests. In Western cultures, where being thin is often seen as the ideal body type, there is a higher tendency for individuals to compare their appearances with others. This behavior is strongly linked to increased levels of body dissatisfaction, as people often feel pressured to meet these narrow beauty standards. On the other hand, in non-Western cultures, the ideals surrounding body image can be quite different. These cultures might value other body types or have broader definitions of beauty that do not solely focus on thinness. Because of this, the effects of comparing physical appearances may be less intense or manifest differently in non-Western contexts. For instance, individuals in these cultures might be less likely to feel dissatisfied with their bodies, even if they engage in appearance comparisons, because the cultural ideals are more diverse and inclusive. The study by Swami et al., (2010) highlights how these cultural differences can play a moderating role. In non-Western societies, where different body ideals are emphasized, the negative impacts of comparing one's appearance to others might be less severe. While both men and women engage in appearance comparison, the focus and impact can differ. Women often focus on comparing their body shaping and weight to images they see in the media or to their peers. This behavior is strongly associated to elevated body dissatisfaction among women, such as many feel pressured to meet the unrealistic standards set by these comparisons. As a result, women are more likely to struggle with issues like eating disorders, where the desire to achieve a certain body type can lead to unhealthy eating habits and extreme dieting (van den Berg et al., 2007). Men, on the other hand, tend to compare themselves more in terms of muscularity and overall fitness. The pressure to achieve a muscular and fit body can lead to body image concerns that are different from those experienced by women. For some men, this focus on muscularity can result in practices like excessive exercise, where they spend an unhealthy amount of time working out in an attempt to build muscle. In more extreme cases, some men might turn to using steroids or other substances to quickly enhance their muscular appearance, which can have serious health risks (Olivardia et al., 2004). Both groups experience the negative effects of appearance comparison, but the ways these effects manifest are influenced by the different societal expectations and ideals for men and women.

In conclusion, the existing literature reveals a multifaceted relationship between social media use, body image dissatisfaction, and physical appearance comparison behavior. Social media platforms play a significant role in shaping the perceptions of individuals and their bodies and their engagement in appearance comparison behavior. While acquaintance to unrealistic pictures can intensify body dissatisfaction and encourage unhealthy comparison behaviors, there are also instances where media content may offer positive messages and promote self-acceptance. However, the prevailing trend often leans towards reinforcing unrealistic beauty standards, which can lead to increased dissatisfaction and detrimental behaviors. This underlines the necessity for further research to understand the intricate interplay between media exposure, appearance comparisons, and body image. Future studies should aim to explore how different types of media content affect these aspects and develop strategies to promote healthier self-perceptions and reduce the negative impact of appearance comparisons. Since the influence of media

continues to evolve, it is important to sort these issues for supporting positive body image and well-being in diverse populations.

### **Objectives**

1. To investigate the relationship between social media influence, physical appearance comparison behavior, and body image dissatisfaction among university students.
2. To explore the mediating role of physical appearance comparison behavior in the relationship between media influence and body image dissatisfaction among university students.
3. To study the gender differences in body image dissatisfaction.
4. To examine the difference in physical comparison behavior between undergraduate students and postgraduate students.

### **Hypotheses**

1. There will be a positive relationship between media influence, physical appearance comparison behavior, and body image dissatisfaction among university students.
2. Physical appearance comparison behavior will mediate the relationship between media influence and body image dissatisfaction among university students.
3. Male students will have more body dissatisfaction as compared to female students.
4. Postgraduate students will score high on physical comparison behavior as compared to undergraduate students.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Social Comparison Theory (SCT), introduced by Festinger (1954), provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the intricate dynamics of media influence, physical appearance comparison behavior, and body image dissatisfaction across the overall population. According to SCT, individuals, including university students in this study, engage in social comparisons to evaluate their abilities, opinions, and physical appearance in relation to others. When applied to the context of media, SCT elucidates that exposure to various media channels, adolescents, and young adults encounter unrealistic beauty ideals, leading to the internalization of societal standards. This constant exposure prompts individuals to evaluate their bodies in comparison to these ideals, aligning with SCT's fundamental premise of self-evaluation through social comparison. The lens of SCT facilitates an examination of how media influence shapes physical appearance comparison behavior in this demographic. As students navigate their dynamic social environment, SCT posits that these comparisons serve as a mechanism for self-evaluation, contributing to the formation of perceptions about one's appearance (Festinger, 1954).

Social Comparison Theory (SCT) provides a fundamental framework for understanding why and how individuals engage in appearance comparison. According to SCT, individuals have an intrinsic drive to evaluate themselves, which often involves comparing their abilities and appearance to those of others. These comparisons might be of two types, upward in which people associate themselves with someone better than them and downward in which people associate themselves with less attractive people than them. Upward comparisons, particularly in the context of physical appearance, are more common and can lead to feelings of inadequacy and body dissatisfaction (Festinger, 1954).

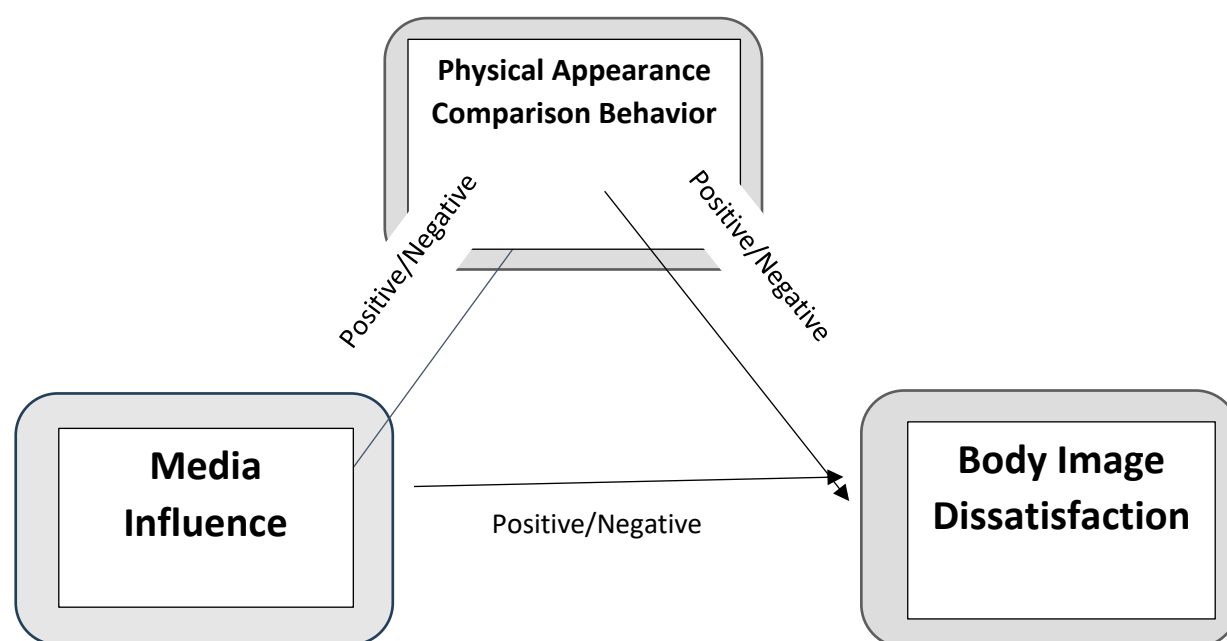
In addition to SCT, the Objectification Theory, proposed by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), builds upon the notion that societal objectification of women contributes to the internalization of an outsider's perspective on their bodies. This theory posits that exposure to media messages and societal norms emphasizing physical appearance over competence can result in objectification of self, whereby people internalize societal standards and appraise their worthiness on the basis of physical attributes. The constant

barrage of objectifying images by the media lead them to develop serious mental health issues including depression, anxiety, lower self-esteem (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Grabe et al., 2008). It is likely to develop behavioral issues like young adults strives to attain perceived ideal body images.

When considering gender differences within these theoretical frameworks, it is evident that societal beauty standards and media portrayals disproportionately affect women compared to men (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014). Women often face intensified societal pressures regarding physical appearance, aligning with SCT's premise of self-evaluation through social comparison. Moreover, the Objectification Theory explicitly addresses the societal objectification of women, highlighting the gendered nature of this phenomenon (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

However, these societal pressures and objectifying media messages can have detrimental effects on both individual and collective well-being. Young individuals may experience heightened levels of body dissatisfaction, increased susceptibility to disordered eating behaviors, and diminished self-esteem (Grabe et al., 2008). Moreover, the perpetuation of unrealistic beauty ideals and objectification can contribute to the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes and inequalities, reinforcing oppressive social structures and limiting opportunities for women to be valued for their talents, intellect, and contributions beyond physical appearance. Therefore, while these theoretical frameworks offer valuable insights into the dynamics of media influence and body image dissatisfaction, it's essential to acknowledge the negative consequences they entail and work towards fostering more inclusive and empowering representations of women in media and society.

### Conceptual Framework



**Figure 1:** Mediating role of Physical Appearance Comparison Behavior on the relationship between Media Influence and Body Image Dissatisfaction in Female University Students.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

Cross sectional research design was employed through a survey method to investigate the associations between media influence, physical appearance comparison behaviors, and body image dissatisfaction among the selected sample of university students.

### **Study Area**

The study was conducted in the locale of Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

### **Sampling**

#### ***Sample Size***

The sample size for this study was determined through G-Power analysis to ensure adequate statistical power. Approximate sample size calculation was performed based on expected effect sizes and desired levels of statistical significance. However, a preliminary estimate suggested that a sample size of at least 300 female and male university students would be appropriate to detect meaningful associations between media influence, physical appearance comparison behavior, and body image dissatisfaction.

#### **Inclusion Criteria:**

The study included male and female university students with the age of 18-25 years, from all disciplines, who were enrolled in full-time undergraduate or postgraduate programs i.e., social sciences.

#### **Exclusion Criteria:**

The study excluded part-time or non-enrolled students.

#### **Sampling Technique:**

A purposive random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across different academic disciplines and years of study.

### ***Instruments***

#### ***The Multidimensional Media Influence Scale (MMIS) (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004)***

The MMIS is a well-established tool used to evaluate the complex effects of media on body image perceptions (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004). This instrument comprises 11 items, each designed to measure various aspects of media's impact on body image. Participants respond to each item using a 3-point Likert scale, with options ranging from Disagree to Not Sure to Agree.

#### ***Physical Appearance Comparison Scale-Revised (PACS-R) (Schaefer & Thompson, 2018)***

The Physical Appearance Comparison Scale-Revised (PACS-R) is a validated instrument consisting of 40 items, specifically designed to measure the frequency and intensity of appearance comparison behaviors (Schaefer & Thompson, 2018). This scale is tailored for the media context and captures how often individuals compare their physical appearance to others in various social situations, both online and offline. Each item on the PACS-R is rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Higher scores on this scale indicate greater levels of appearance comparison behavior.

***Body Image Satisfaction Scale (BISS) (Holsen et al., 2012)***

To assess participants' general satisfaction and dissatisfaction with their body and appearance, the Body Image Satisfaction Scale (BISS) was employed. The BISS consists of 18 items, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Participants were asked to evaluate how accurately each statement reflected their feelings. The scores from these responses were then interpreted using a predefined satisfaction rating table. Higher total scores indicate greater body satisfaction, while lower scores signify greater dissatisfaction.

**Procedure**

The study was conducted across various universities in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, with data collected through questionnaires from female and male students. The survey included demographic questions, followed by the administration of the Multidimensional Media Influence Scale (MMIS), Physical Appearance Comparison Scale-Revised (PACS-R), and Body Image Satisfaction Scale (BISS). Participants were informed about the voluntary nature of their participation and the confidentiality of their responses. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board prior to commencement. Participants meeting inclusion criteria; full time enrolled university students aged above 18, were invited to participate in the study. Purposive sampling technique was utilized to ensure diversity across academic disciplines and demographic backgrounds. Participants were provided with the informed consent before completing demographic questions on an online survey platform. The MMIS was used to assess the extent of media influence, the PACS-R was utilized to evaluate appearance comparison behaviors, and the BISS was administered to measure body image satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Confidentiality of responses was assured, and quantitative statistical methods, such as correlation analysis, were employed for data analysis. This comprehensive approach aimed to systematically investigate the intricate relationships between media influence, appearance comparison behaviors, and body image dissatisfaction among university students.

**Ethical Consideration**

In order to guarantee that the research design and data collection methods complied with ethical standards, the study received ethical approval from the appropriate institutional review board. Informed consent was sought from all participants, emphasizing the voluntary nature of their involvement and assuring them of the confidentiality of their responses. Given the delicate nature of the subjects pertaining to body image and self-perception, extra precaution was taken to ensure the participants' privacy and anonymity. The study is committed to fostering a safe and respectful environment for participants, acknowledging the importance of ethical considerations in research involving sensitive topics.

**RESULTS**

***Table 1: Demographic Information of the Participants (N=300)***

<i>Demographic variable</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Gender		
Male	150	50
Female	150	50
Age		
18-22 years	127	43.2
23-27 years	120	40
28-32 years	52	17.3
33-37 years	1	3
Education		

Graduate	81	27
Undergraduate	154	51.3
Postgraduate	65	21.7
Socioeconomic status		
High class	27	9
Middle class	262	87.3
Low class	11	3.7

**Note:** *f=frequency, %=percentage*

**Table 1** demonstrates the demographic information, which shows an equal gender distribution among the subjects, with 50% male and 50% female participants. The majority of participants are aged between 18-22 years (43.2%), followed by those aged 23-27 years (40%), with smaller proportions in the older age groups. In terms of education, most participants are undergraduates (51.3%), with 27% being graduates and 21.7% postgraduates. The socioeconomic status data reveals that the majority belong to the middle class (87.3%), while 9% are from the high class, and 3.7% are from the low class.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics (N=300)**

Scales	k	M	SD	a	Skew	Kurtosis	Range	
							Actual	Potential
The Multidimensional Media Influence Scale (MMSI)	12	21.70	7.82	.93	.39	-1.07	12-36	11-33
Physical Appearance Comparison Scale-Revised (PACS-R)	40	79.91	37.05	.98	.92	.068	40-200	40-200
Body Image Satisfaction Scale (BISS)	18	52.09	7.87	.70	-.06	3.87	20-83	18-90

**Note:** *M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, No. of items= k*

**Table 2** provides descriptive statistics for three scales: the Multidimensional Media Influence Scale (MMSI), Physical Appearance Comparison Scale-Revised (PACS-R), and Body Image Satisfaction Scale (BISS). The MMSI, with 12 items, shows moderate media influence ( $M = 21.70$ ,  $SD = 7.82$ ), good reliability ( $\alpha = .93$ ), and a slight positive skew. The PACS-R, with 40 items, reflects broad appearance comparison ( $M = 79.91$ ,  $SD = 37.05$ ) with excellent reliability ( $\alpha = .98$ ) and a more pronounced positive skewness of 0.92. The BISS, with 18 items, indicates high body image satisfaction ( $M = 52.09$ ,  $SD = 7.87$ ), with moderate reliability ( $\alpha = .70$ ) and a near-normal distribution reflected by a minimal negative skewness of -0.069. These statistics indicate that the data is normally distributed.

**Table 3: Correlation between Media Influence, Physical Appearance Comparison Behavior, and Body Image Dissatisfaction.**

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>
Media Influence	21.69	7.82	....	.303**	.279**
Physical Appearance Comparison Behavior	79.91	37.05		....	.260**
Body Image Dissatisfaction	52.09	7.87			....

**Note:** *\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

**Table 3** shows the correlation analysis of all the study variables, which indicates that Media Influence ( $r = 0.279$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), Physical Appearance Comparison Behavior ( $r = 0.303$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and Body Image Dissatisfaction ( $r = 0.279$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), are positively correlated with each other, suggesting that increase in one variable will cause an increase in other variable. The mean scores are 21.69 for Media Influence, 79.91 for Physical Appearance Comparison Behavior, and 52.09 for Body Image Dissatisfaction.

**Table 4: Regression coefficient of Media Influence and Body Image Dissatisfaction on Physical Appearance Comparison Behavior**

Variable	$\beta$	SE	T	95% CI		P
				LL	UL	
Constant	7.69	13.58	.566	-19.04	34.43	.572
Media Influence	1.18	.267	4.43	.659	1.71	.000
Body Image Dissatisfaction	.893	.266	3.35	.369	.1.41	.001

*Note: SE=Standard Error, CI=Class interval*

**Table 4** presents the results of the multiple regression analysis that examined the mediating impact of physical appearance comparison behavior on media influence and body image dissatisfaction. The regression coefficients reflect the intensity and direction of the relationships. The physical appearance comparison behavior's constant term (7.69) represents the predicted score when all predictor factors are zero; however, this constant (intercept) is not statistically significant ( $SE = 13.58$ ,  $p = 0.572$ ). The resulting  $R^2$  value of .125 indicates that 12.5% of the variance can be explained by the combined effects of body image dissatisfaction and media influence on the physical appearance comparison behavior. The hypothesis is supported by the large F-value ( $F(2,297) = 2126$ ,  $p = .000$ ,  $p < .05$ ), which shows that the data were statistically significant. Further, the results indicate that Media Influence significantly predicts Physical Appearance Comparison Behavior, with a coefficient of 1.18 ( $SE = 0.267$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), meaning that for each unit increase in Media Influence, Physical Appearance Comparison Behavior increases by 1.18 units. Similarly, Body Image Dissatisfaction also significantly predicts Physical Appearance Comparison Behavior, with a coefficient of 0.893 ( $SE = 0.266$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), suggesting that a one-unit increase in Body Image Dissatisfaction is associated with a 0.893-unit increase in Physical Appearance Comparison Behavior. Overall, both Media Influence and Body Image Dissatisfaction are important factors contributing to Physical Appearance Comparison Behavior.

**Table 5: T values showing difference between male and female students on the body image satisfaction scale (N=300)**

Variables	Male students (n=150)		Female students (n=150)		t(298)	P	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
BISS	52.44	9.03	51.75	6.52	.762	.44	0.08

*Note: BISS= Body Image Satisfaction Scale, M= mean, SD= standard deviation; P= probability*

Table 5 presents the t-test results comparing male and female scores on the Body Image Satisfaction Scale (BISS). Males ( $n = 150$ ) had a mean score of 52.44 ( $SD = 9.03$ ), while females ( $n = 150$ ) had a slightly lower mean of 51.75 ( $SD = 6.52$ ). The t-value (.762) indicates no significant difference between the groups, with a p-value of .04. The effect size, measured by Cohen's d, is small (0.08), suggesting that gender has a negligible impact on body image satisfaction in this sample.

**Table 6: T values showing difference between postgraduate and undergraduate students on physical appearance comparison behavior**

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Postgraduate students (n=65)</i>		<i>Undergraduate students (n=154)</i>		<i>t(217)</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Cohen's d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Physical appearance comparison behavior	89.17	41.15	74.92	34.70	2.62	.02	0.37

**Note:** *M*= mean, *SD*= standard deviation; *P*= probability

Table 6 shows a statistically significant difference between postgraduate and undergraduate students in physical appearance comparison behavior. Compared to undergraduate students (n = 154), postgraduate students (n = 65) reported a higher mean score (M = 89.17, SD = 41.15), whereas undergraduate students (n = 74.92, SD = 34.70) reported a lower mean score. At the 0.05 level, the t-test result showing that this difference is statistically significant is  $t(217) = 2.62$ ,  $p = .02$ . Cohen's  $d = 0.37$  indicates that the effect size is minor to moderately significant in practice.

## DISCUSSION

This study aimed to find out the association between media influence, physical appearance comparison behavior, and body image dissatisfaction among university students. The research also sought to regulate the direct consequence of media influence on body image dissatisfaction, alongside exploring how physical appearance comparison behavior mediates this connection. While existing literature highlights the significant role of media in shaping body image concerns through comparison behaviors (Barbierik et al., 2023), there is limited research focusing specifically on university students, especially within the Pakistani context. To address this gap and contribute to the understanding of these dynamics, three key hypotheses were formulated for the present study.

The first hypothesis of this study suggested that there will be a significant relationship between media influence, physical appearance comparison behavior, and body image dissatisfaction among university students. The findings from this study support this hypothesis, revealing that these three variables are positively related. The results of Pearson Correlation analysis indicate that as media influence increases, the physical appearance comparison behaviors and body image dissatisfaction among students also increases. This suggests that greater exposure to media content, which often emphasizes unrealistic beauty standards, is associated with more frequent comparisons of a person's physical appearance with others, ultimately leading to higher levels of dissatisfaction with their body image.

These findings are consistent with the existing body of literature, which has long established that media exposure plays a crucial role in shaping the perceptions of individuals regarding their bodies. For example, previous studies have highlighted how media, by promoting idealized images, can drive individuals to engage in comparisons that often result in negative self-perceptions (Perloff, 2014; Aparicio-Martinez et al., 2019). This is particularly relevant for university students, who are frequently exposed to social and academic pressures that may intensify their engagement in appearance-related comparisons.

The observed relationship between appearance comparison behaviors and body image dissatisfaction also aligns with prior research, which suggests that the more individuals compare themselves to others, particularly in terms of physical appearance, the more likely they are to experience dissatisfaction with their own bodies (Fardouly et al., 2015; Kumar, 2023).

The results not only confirm the proposed hypothesis but also shed light on the significant impact that media and social comparisons have on body image among university students. While the findings are consistent with what has been observed in other contexts (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014; Kumar, 2023; Aparicio-Martinez et al., 2019) they also highlight the importance of understanding these dynamics within the specific cultural and social framework of Pakistani university students (Abideen et al., 2011; Jalees & Run, 2014; Zia, 2007).

The first hypothesis further proposed that there is a significant positive relationship between media influence and body image dissatisfaction among university students. The findings from the correlation analysis confirmed this hypothesis, showing a significant positive association between media influence and body image dissatisfaction. This suggests that higher levels of media influence are linked to increased body image dissatisfaction among the participants.

These findings are consistent with previous research, which has documented the impact of media exposure on individuals' body image perceptions. Numerous studies have highlighted that media platforms, including television, magazines, and media, often promote unrealistic and idealized standards of beauty. Such representations can lead individuals, particularly young adults, to internalize these ideals and develop dissatisfaction with their own bodies (Grabe et al., 2008; Quittkat et al., 2019).

The positive correlation observed in this study can be explained by the concept of internalization, where individuals adopt the standards of beauty presented in the media as their own. When university students are frequently exposed to media content that glorifies certain body types, they may begin to compare themselves to these ideals, leading to feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction with their own appearance. This process of comparison and internalization is particularly pronounced in environments where media consumption is high and where appearance is heavily emphasized (Knauss et al., 2007; Henriques et al., 2020).

Moreover, social media plays a particularly influential role in shaping body image perceptions. Unlike traditional media, social media allows for more direct and continuous engagement with content related to appearance. This constant exposure, coupled with the interactive nature of social media, where users can receive immediate feedback on their appearance, can exacerbate body image concerns (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Tiggemann & Slater, 2014). Such concerns may cause psychological distress, compromised mental health, and potentially impact the academic and social aspects of university experiences (Chuang et al., 2023).

In addition, the significant relationship found between media influence and body image dissatisfaction may also be understood through the lens of social comparison theory. According to this theory, individuals tend to compare themselves to others who they perceive as better off, which can lead to negative self-evaluations. In the context of media influence, students may engage in upward social comparisons with idealized images, resulting in increased body dissatisfaction (Festinger, 1954).

These findings underscore the importance of addressing the impact of media on body image, particularly in educational settings. Interventions aimed at increasing media literacy among university students could be effective in mitigating the negative effects of media on body image. By fostering critical thinking skills and promoting awareness of the unrealistic nature of media portrayals, students may be better equipped to resist the pressure to conform to these idealized standards.

The second hypothesis proposed that physical appearance comparison behavior will mediate the relationship between media influence and body image dissatisfaction among university students. The results

of the multiple regression analysis supported this hypothesis, revealing that both media influence and body image dissatisfaction significantly predict physical appearance comparison behavior.

The findings indicate that as media influence increases, students are more likely to engage in physical appearance comparison behaviors. This aligns with previous research, which suggests that exposure to idealized images and standards in the media encourages individuals to compare their physical appearance to those they see on various platforms. Such comparisons can amplify concerns about an individual's own body image, as students may feel pressured to conform to these often unattainable ideals (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014; Fardouly et al., 2015).

Moreover, the study also found that body image dissatisfaction is a significant predictor of physical appearance comparison behavior. This is consistent with the literature, which shows that individuals who are dissatisfied with their bodies are more likely to compare themselves to others, particularly those who embody societal standards of beauty (Vartanian, 2015; Coelho et al., 2023; Nawaz et al., 2023). The tendency to engage in these comparisons can further exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction, creating a cycle that reinforces negative body image perceptions.

The fact that both media influence and body image dissatisfaction contribute to physical appearance comparison behavior highlights the interconnectedness of these variables. Media influence, by promoting unrealistic beauty standards, triggers comparison behaviors, which in turn heighten body image dissatisfaction. This cycle suggests that interventions aimed at reducing the impact of media on body image should also address the tendency for social comparisons. By fostering media literacy and promoting a more critical engagement with media content, it may be possible to reduce the harmful effects of these comparisons on body image.

Furthermore, the results of the analysis support the second hypothesis, confirming that physical appearance comparison behavior plays a mediating role in the relationship between media influence and body image dissatisfaction. These findings contribute to the growing body of research that emphasizes the importance of addressing the role of media and comparison behaviors in shaping body image perceptions among university students.

The third hypothesis proposed that males would exhibit higher levels of body dissatisfaction compared to females. However, the results in Table 5 indicate that this hypothesis was not supported. The analysis reveals no significant difference in body dissatisfaction between male and female university students, as indicated by the t-value ( $t(298) = 0.762, p = .44$ ). This result suggests that both male and female participants reported similar levels of body dissatisfaction, contrary to the hypothesis that males would have higher dissatisfaction.

These findings diverge from some previous studies, which have often reported higher body dissatisfaction among females, typically due to societal pressures and unrealistic body standards commonly portrayed in the media (Quittkat et al., 2019). However, other research has increasingly recognized that males are also vulnerable to body dissatisfaction, particularly concerning muscularity and weight (Rosenqvist et al., 2024). The lack of a significant difference in this study could be attributed to the growing awareness and pressures faced by both genders in relation to body image, especially in the context of media influence, which affects both males and females through different but equally impactful portrayals of ideal body types. This result highlights the need for further exploration of gender differences in body dissatisfaction, potentially looking at other contributing factors such as age, media exposure, and cultural context, which might provide a more detailed understanding of the similarities and differences in body image concerns across genders.

Furthermore, fourth hypothesis of the study proposed that postgraduate students will score higher on the physical appearance comparison behavior than undergraduate students. Results of the study revealed a significant difference in the mean scores of undergraduate and postgraduate students. Hence, the proposed hypothesis of the study is supported by the results of the present study. The current results align with the previous studies which indicated similar findings by suggesting that students in higher levels of education may face extreme pressure and stress related to their physical appearance. For example, studies also indicated that students in higher academics experience complex professional and social networks, gatherings, and groups which increases their tendency to compare their physical appearance with others (Sundgot-Borgen et al., 2021; Viras & Vaghela, 2023). Moreover the academic institutes also expose students to environments and situations where they get to see peers with a lot of achievements and how they look presently, this might cause a distressing comparative situation for incapable students. The reasons for these findings could include the facts that students often experience keen expectations about their social, academic and professional image, which makes “a physical appearance comparison behavior” a noticeable characteristic in their daily routine. In addition, psychological factors, like elevated stress and self-assessing tendencies in post-graduate students may also be a contributing factor to their increased physical appearance comparison behavior. Whereas, undergraduate students are often less considerate about their appearance and mostly engage in activities that are less rooted in professional and social hierarchies. Their gatherings often include academic adaptation and a general sense of social integration where each explores their own style and way of looking as they are in an exploratory stage of their life in undergraduate studies. To conclude this result, it can be said that the educational level and associated psychological factors play a significant role in shaping the physical appearance comparison behavior of students.

Overall, this study sheds light on how media influence and body image dissatisfaction are linked through physical appearance comparison behavior among university students. The findings show that higher exposure to media can lead to more frequent comparisons of one’s appearance to idealized standards, which then heightens body image dissatisfaction. However, no significant gender differences in body image dissatisfaction is found in this study. Understanding that physical appearance comparison behavior mediates this relationship highlights the importance of addressing how students interact with media content. As well as, the difference in physical appearance comparison behavior based on the educational level. To counteract these effects, strategies such as improving media literacy and promoting realistic body standards could be beneficial.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this study explored the relationships between media influence, physical appearance comparison behavior, and body image dissatisfaction among university students. The results indicate that media exposure is positively related to body image dissatisfaction, with physical appearance comparison behavior playing a key mediating role. This confirms that media portrayals of idealized body images contribute significantly to body dissatisfaction by encouraging individuals to compare themselves to these often unattainable standards. Additionally, the study revealed that body image dissatisfaction and media influence both significantly affect physical appearance comparison behavior. This underscores the importance of addressing how media exposure and body dissatisfaction drive comparison behaviors, which can further intensify body image concerns. In addition, the study found no significant gender differences in body dissatisfaction, indicating that both male and female university students experience similar levels of dissatisfaction, challenging traditional assumptions about gender-specific body image concerns. The findings also highlight the need for strategies aimed at reducing the negative impacts of media influence. Promoting media literacy and encouraging realistic body standards may help mitigate the adverse effects of media-driven body image issues. Future research should continue to investigate these dynamics and explore effective interventions to support students in developing healthier body image perceptions.

## LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Following are the limitations and suggestions of the current study;

- The cross-sectional design limits understanding of long-term effects; future studies should adopt longitudinal approaches to track changes over time like using pre and posttests with a certain gap of years.
- The study focused on general media exposure; future research should investigate specific media types and content for more detailed insights.
- In future it is suggested to conduct qualitative studies to avail indigenous data about the media influence and body image dissatisfaction among university students. That is to capture the complex, cultural, and psychological characteristics that quantitative methods cannot fully address.

## Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have important implications for understanding the impact of media on body image dissatisfaction and appearance comparison behaviors among university students. By highlighting the significant role of media influence, particularly through traditional outlets like television and magazines, this research underscores the need for targeted interventions aimed at promoting healthier body image perceptions. Educational institutions and policymakers can use these insights to design culturally sensitive media literacy programs that help students critically evaluate media content and resist harmful beauty standards. Moreover, mental health professionals can incorporate these findings to develop counseling strategies that address body image concerns linked to media exposure, fostering better mental and emotional well-being. This study also calls attention to the importance of including both male and female perspectives in body image research, promoting a more inclusive understanding of media's impact across genders.

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