

## THE MEDIA EFFECTS ON THE LIFESTYLE AND SELF-ESTEEM OF AUDIENCES: PERCEPTION OF THE STUDENTS OF UNIVERSITY OF SWAT, KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA, PAKISTAN

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### ABSTRACT

The researchers analyzed at how media affects audiences' lifestyles and self-esteem, while students' perceptions are being studied with the primary goal of understanding how media contents affect audiences' roles in society—that is, how they perform their lifestyles and how they feel about themselves after watching media contents—either positively or negatively. This study, which is theoretically conducted using the key assumptions of cultivation theory, suggests that a high level of media exposure fosters a positive perception of the media's portrayal of fashion, hairstyles, body image, self-esteem, and general lifestyle. The findings mainly indicate the cultivation a positive perception about the media, as collectively 56% of respondents having daily watch of media from 6 to 8 hours and above 8 hours believe that media has a positive impact on the overall lifestyle and self-esteem of its viewers. The study also found that male and female respondents had differing attitudes toward media content related to lifestyles; female respondents were found to be more influenced by content pertaining to makeup, whereas male respondents were relatively highly influenced by content pertaining to health, such as exercise.

### Keywords

Cultivation, media contents, self-esteem, lifestyle, perceptions

### INTRODUCTION

The media influences people whether they hear it on radio, see it on TV, or read about it online. It also influences them when they read or watch advertisements that teach people how to look beautiful. There are numerous ways to learn about and view images of attractive women. A lot of people make a great effort to copy the appearance that the media portrays. Future generations should be extremely concerned about the content in the media, which primarily consists of photoshopped and altered photos that lead to a false perception of body image (Bareis, H. 2021).

Today's society is greatly influenced by the media, particularly young men and women. To put it mildly, everyone has seen or heard of some kind of advertisements promoting jewelry, cosmetics, or a

new line of clothes. They [advertisements] are almost entirely based on beauty. Most of the time the advertisements become challenging to reject when they are so strongly promoted by television, movies, magazines, and advertising agencies at large. Smith, E., (2016) argued that people are unable to escape it all, unless you are completely cut off from the outside world, which is not realistic, thus, it is nearly impossible to ignore it [the impact of media advertisement].

Both men and women have ignored the importance of their inner beauty over time, rather they observe what their eyes can see, not what their hearts can feel. A person's personality plays a big role in their inner beauty and what makes them attractive from the inside rather than just the superficial side that the

media constantly promotes (Nicholson, K. J., 2013). Given that each person is a distinct individual, why do people attempt to look the same? It is important to consider the audience's lifestyle and body image. Young adults today are greatly influenced by media, which also has a profound effect on everyone else's opinions and thought processes.

### **An overview of the Self-esteem and Lifestyle**

Alessandri, G., Vecchione, M., Eisenberg, N., & Laguna, M. (2015) argued that one of the first researchers in this field, Rosenberg (1965) defined self-esteem as a person's overall positive assessment of themselves that not only determines their lifestyle, but also motivates them to bring changes in it accordance with changing patterns in society. He went on to say that having a high sense of self-worth is about a person appreciating and respecting themselves. To a similar end, Sedikides and Gress (2003) defined self-esteem as a person's subjective evaluation of their own value, their level of confidence and self-respect, their lifestyle, and the degree to which they have positive or negative opinions about themselves.

According to Branden (1969), self-esteem is made up of two things: (a) believing in one's own effectiveness, which is based on believing in one's capacity to reason, learn, make wise decisions, overcome obstacles, and effect change; and (b) respecting oneself, which is based on believing in one's right to happiness and believing that people are deserving of the respect, love, and self-fulfillment that appear in their lives. However, he proposed that competence and worth are the two separate components that make up self-esteem. He describes self-esteem as "the experience of being capable of meeting life challenges and being worthy of happiness" based on the above two elements.

According to Abdel-Khalek, A. M. (2016), self-esteem is a crucial indicator of emotional health. Western psychologist William James maintained that a key component of mental health is self-esteem. In addition to feeling less depressed, anxious, and in a bad mood, people with high self-esteem also experience greater joy, optimism, and motivation. Compared to those with low self-esteem, those with high self-esteem exhibit greater efficacy in self-regulation and goal-directed behavior, as well as greater perseverance in the face of setbacks (Di Paula and Campbell, 2002).

Abdel-Khalek, A. M. (2016) argued further that individuals with low self-esteem experience depression, aggression, feelings of worthlessness to improve their lifestyle and inferiority, as well as emotional instability. Internet addiction is strongly and negatively correlated with self-esteem. Similarly, men tend to value themselves more than women do (Abdel-Khalek, A. M., 2016). Research revealed that boys and girls derive their sense of self-worth from different sources. Boys derive their sense of self-worth from objective success, whereas girls derive it more from their relationships (Heatherston and Wyland, 2003). On other hand, scholarship indicates that people with higher academic achievement also had higher self-esteem than people with lower achievement (Tsai et al., 2001).

### **Media, Self-esteem and Lifestyle**

Young people's self-esteem is being negatively impacted by the media's portrayal of unrealistic body images, which is having an impact on their life decisions. According to Hafeez, E., & Fasih, T. (2018) Pakistan is regarded as the world's fifth-largest young nation. Young people in the country between the ages of 15 and 33 make up about 63 percent of the total population. Young adults' eating and clothing habits have significantly changed as a result of globalization. To put it plainly, we discover modifications in young people's lifestyles. With just a tiny screen and social networks like Facebook and Twitter, people can communicate with anyone, anywhere in the world. They are keeping up with the latest lifestyle trends. A. J. Vassallo et al. (2018) argued that among young people, celebrities also create new trends. It was found that the majority of the young people were ardent fans of these celebrities. Young people will stop at nothing to support the celebrities they adore. Therefore, it is evident that the media uses all available channels to shape people's opinions. The significance of eating habits, body image, and body concern are all influenced by the media. Swat has a reputation for its customs, however, there have been a lot of changes recently in terms of eating customs, dress codes, etc. This is mostly because of the media's impact. The majority of studies on self-esteem and lifestyle have been conducted in Western nations; very few have been conducted in Pakistan, and none in Swat. Thus, the purpose of the current study is to look into how students' think about the way their lifestyle and self-esteem are affected by the media.

Fernandez, S., & Pritchard, M. (2012) argued that media and self-esteem have a complicated relationship with a mixed pattern of relationships; meta-analyses typically find statistical effects that are statistically significant but small in magnitude. The majority of social media users report no change in self-esteem as a result of their use, but a small minority report either positive or negative effects. This suggests that the true relationship between social media use and self-esteem is individual-specific and depends on media exposure and susceptibilities.

Sofia Fernandez and Mary Pritchard (2012) viewed that over the past few years, there has been a rise in women's body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem due to the media's potent ability to convey expectations about how men and women should look. Since there are not many reviews on media's impact on young, particularly students, and their lifestyle and self-esteem that were done in Pakistan, the main goal of this study is to look into how the media affects students' self-esteem and the lifestyle.

#### **Brand Activism, Self-esteem and Lifestyle**

According to Craddock, J., et al. (2018), brand activism is a growingly popular practice in which businesses choose to publicly declare their support for social causes and, in some cases, modify their operations to further these causes. Brand activism typically addresses social, environmental, or human issues that are not directly related to the business's main offerings or methods of operation. Dove initiated activism in September 2004 when they hired the PR firm Edelman to assist them in conducting research. The goal of the study, "The Real Truth About Beauty: A Global Report," was to gain a better understanding of how female beauty is portrayed. This research motivated the company to take action to alter their perception, which launched Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty. According to the company, beauty should be a source of confidence rather than anxiety, so they want to help women everywhere have a positive relationship with their appearance, boost their self-esteem, and realize their full potential.

Bareis, H. (2021) argued that despite the counter-cultural approach taken by organizations like the Dove Company and Darling Magazine to present a genuine image of beauty, women continue to suffer from the effects of the media's unrealistic portrayals of beauty standards, and social media sites like

Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok exacerbate the problem. This is true even after twenty years of Dove campaigns.

#### **Theoretical Perspective- Cultivation Theory**

The audience that spends the majority of their time watching television is more likely to cultivate their conception of the real world, according to George Gerbner's cultivation theory, which was developed in the 1960s and forms the theoretical basis of the study (Gerbner & Gross, 1986). The researchers Morgan and Shanahan (1990) claimed that "cultivation research examines the extent to which cumulative exposure to television contributes to viewers' conceptions of social reality in ways that reflect the most stable, repetitive, and pervasive patterns of images and ideologies that television presents." The circumstances where damages have been established over time are referred to as cumulative exposure.

Morgan, M. and Shanahan, J. (2010) argued that viewers' perceptions of the real world are altered by media exposure. The audience will be more influenced by media exposure and time spent consuming it. According to the cultivation theory, media consumers who consume more content have perceptions that match what they see in real life. Viewers' perceptions are gradually and subtly influenced by television exposure. It affects both men and women equally; men's perceptions of their own bodies are correlated with their exposure to ideal-body images on television (Dallesasse, S. L., & Kluck, A. S. 2013).

Stein, J. P., Krause, E., & Ohler, P. (2021) pointed out that Instagram is more closely associated with perceptions that are other-focused than with perceptions that are self-focused, and thus the audience perception is influenced by frequent exposure to others' virtual self-presentations. A false impression of an ideal body image is created by the increased exposure to heavily Photoshopped photos and videos, especially targeting women. This leads to stress and depression in the real world. The idea that the media presents an idealized body leads to the emergence of a negative body image. Yu, J., Dong, H., Wu, Q., Yang, Y., & Pi, H. (2021). argued that low self-esteem is a result of young girls developing a negative body image due to high media exposure to thin ideals; thus, the negative body image, leading to negatively affect self-esteem, is developmental. Martin, J. B. (2010) argues, applying social

comparison theory and cultivation theory, that ideal body image perception is concerned more with the media-depicted world than with the real world. In terms of cultivation theory and social identity theory, youth are particularly at risk for developing low self-esteem as influenced by the media (Martins, N., & Harrison, K. 2012).

In light of the above discussion, the researchers conducted this study within the theoretical framework of cultivation theory. By examining University of Swat students' perceptions, the study aims to assess the effects of media on audiences' self-esteem and lifestyles. The following objectives, research question, and hypotheses are outlined by the researchers for this purpose.

**Objectives of the study**

- I. To examine the impact of media on the self-esteem of audience in district Swat
- II. To examine the effects of media on routine lifestyle of audiences.

**Research Question and Hypotheses**

H1. The heavy viewers perceive a highly positive impact of media on the lifestyle and self-esteem of the audience.

H2. There are significant differences in approach of male and female viewers towards lifestyle and self-esteem related media contents and their impact on viewers”.

RQ.1. What types of changes in daily life have viewers noticed as a result of exposure to media content?

**Research Methodology**

Research methodology is the procedure used in a study that establishes the researcher's direction and the way in which the researcher carries out the

research; it serves as a guide for the researcher when presenting the data and findings regarding any issue (Sileyew, K.J., 2019). In order to investigate how University of Swat students perceived the impact of media on audiences' self-esteem and lifestyle, the researchers gathered information on the subject through survey methods.

Students enrolled at the University of Swat, whose ages ranged from 18 to 30, made up the study's population. The selection of university students served the purpose of mitigating the confounding bias resulting from the sample's educational attainment. The data collection tool employed in this particular research study was an online questionnaire in the form of a Google Survey. The English-language questionnaire took ten to fifteen minutes to complete. Three sections made up the survey: the first addressed demographics, the second media exposure, and the third respondents' views on lifestyle and self-esteem. Following a two-week interval, 205 respondents—126 female and 79 male students from the University of Swat in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan—provided the researchers with the needed data.

**Findings and Discussion**

Following an analysis of the information gathered from the respondents through questionnaire about how media affects audiences' lifestyles and self-esteem, the following findings were discovered. These findings are presented in the tables below and are explained by means of testing the research hypotheses.

**Testing Hypotheses**

**H1.** The heavy viewers perceive a highly positive impact of media on the lifestyle and self-esteem of the audience.

**Table No. 1. Perception of audience about the impact of media contents on their overall lifestyle**

Level of exposure [in hours]	The media contents cultivate (N%)			Total
	Negative perception	Moderate	Positive perception	
-1 to 2	07 (23)	13 (31)	17 (13)	37 (18)
3 to 5	10 (32)	15 (36)	41 (31)	66 (32.19)
6 to 8	08 (26)	10 (24)	47 (36)	65 (31.71)
More than 8	06 (19)	04 (09)	27 (20)	37 (18)
Total	31 (100)	42 (100)	132 (100)	205 (100)

$X^2(4, N=205) = 34.81, p=0.00, V=0.41$

The above table No. 1 illustrates the responses of the audience on the basis of their exposure to media [in terms of hours], whereas the study is designed to classify the audience into three categories, i.e., low, moderate, and high, in terms of their hour's long exposure to media contents. Those audiences who expose themselves to media for less than one to two hours [-1 to 2 hours] are considered to have a low level of media exposure, whereas those with a moderate level of media exposure consist of respondents who expose themselves to media for 3 to 5 hours daily, while those who expose themselves to media contents for 6 to 8 hours daily and more than 8 hours daily are considered to have a high level of media exposure. The findings, which are much in line with the key assumptions of cultivation theory, suggest that the high level of exposure cultivated a positive perception about the media, as collectively 56% of respondents having daily watch of media from 6 to 8 hours and above 8 hours believe that media has a positive impact on the overall lifestyle and self-esteem of its viewers.

Whereas a total of 67% of respondents fall into the low and moderate levels have seen the minimal impact of media contents on the self-esteem and lifestyle of media users. While the low and moderate levels together have shaped 55% of respondents, they believe that the media contents cause a negative impact on the lifestyle and self-esteem of the audience. The statistical findings, i.e.,  $X^2(4, N = 205) = 34.81, p = 0.00$ , and  $V = 0.41$ , indicate that there is a significant relationship between the level of exposure to media contents and perception regarding the impact of media on the lifestyle and self-esteem of the audience.

The above findings and discussion confirm the first hypothesis of this study, which states that “The heavy viewers perceive a highly positive impact of media on the lifestyle and self-esteem of the audience.”

H2. There are significant differences in approach of respondents towards lifestyle and self-esteem related media contents and their impact on viewers.

**Table No.2. Level of changes in the pattern of self-esteem and lifestyle of the audience after their exposure to media contents.**

The above table No. 2 indicates the pattern of changes that occur in the self-esteem and lifestyle of the audience after they are exposed to media content.

Respondents	Levels of changes (N%)			Total
	Positive	Moderate	Negative	
Male	53	17	09	79
Female	79	16	31	126
Grant Total	132 (64)	33 (16)	40 (20)	205 (100)

$X^2(2, N=205) = 12.92, p < 0.02, V = 0.25$

The findings show that the majority of the respondents i.e. 64% [including male and female] viewed that the media has a lot of potential to bring positive changes in the lifestyle and self-esteem of the audience. However, 16% of the respondents expressed their view that media contents are capable of bringing moderate level of changes while 20% were found critical in this regard as they believed that media bring negative changes in the lifestyle and self-esteem of audience.

Of the total 79 male respondents, 53 were found to have a positive view of the media's role in influencing the lifestyle and self-esteem of media users, 17 believed that the media has a moderate amount of influence over audience lifestyle, and shaping their self-esteem, and 09 disagreed with the role of the media and claimed that it negatively influences user lifestyles. Comparably, of the total 126 female respondents, 79 were found to be positive about the role that media plays in influencing the lifestyle and self-esteem of media users, 16 believed that media has a moderate amount of influence over audience lifestyle, and 31 disagreed with the role of media, arguing that it negatively shapes audience lifestyles and self-esteem.

The statistical findings relating to the media contents that are responsible for bringing changes in the lifestyle and self-esteem i.e.  $X^2(2, N=205) = 12.92, p < 0.02, V = 0.25$  indicate that there is a significant relationship between the media contents and the changing pattern in self-esteem.

The above findings and discussion relating to the media effects on the lifestyle and self-esteem of viewers after they exposed to media or watching the

pattern of lifestyle and self-esteem daily on television channels, confirm the second hypothesis of this, which states that “there are significant differences in approach of respondents towards lifestyle and self-esteem related media contents and their impact on viewers”.

RQ.1. What types of changes in daily life have viewers noticed as a result of exposure to media content?

**Table No. 3. Audiences observed changes in their routine life after they were exposed to media content.**

Aspects of change	Male (N%)	Female (N%)	Total (N%)
Dressing	9(11)	17(13)	26(13)
Hairstyle	09(11)	11(09)	20(10)
Make-up	04(05)	50(40)	54(26)
Dieting	06(08)	09(07)	15(07)
Exercise	38(49)	18(14)	56(27)
No influence	13(11)	21(17)	34(17)
Total	79(100)	126(100)	205(100)

$X^2(5, N=205) = 34.81, p=0.00, V=0.41$

The above table No.3 shows the way the audiences change their different aspects of daily life after watching different trends in media. The findings indicate that both the genders are found heavily changing their dress/ pattern of dressing after watching a new trend of dressing in the media. In this connection, collectively 13% of respondents viewed that they prefer to change their dressing pattern in light of the trend being shown in media contents. Separately, the female dominates this aspect of life as 13% of female respondents, out of 126, are found changing their dressing pattern while 11 % out of 79 male respondents are of the view that they prefer to change their way/ style of wearing. However, unlike male, the female respondents are found more influenced by media contents, and hence, as shown in the above table, they are influenced towards makeup by 40%, although 17% of female respondents argued that they are never influenced by the media to change themselves. Another interesting observation is that 49% male increased their focus on exercise. The statistical finding relating to the media contents that are responsible for bringing changes in daily appearances of respondents i.e.  $X^2(5, N=205) = 34.81, p=0.00, V=0.41$  indicate that there is a

significant relationship between the media contents and the changes of daily appearances of respondents. The overall discussion, which is generated on the basis of findings of the tables above, addresses the research question of this study, which states that “What types of changes in daily life have viewers noticed as a result of exposure to media?”

**Conclusion**

The study after examining the students’ perception regarding the media role in influencing the lifestyle and self-esteem of the audience found that majority of respondents believe that media play its role positively in brining improvement in the lifestyle of its audience, thus enhances the self-esteem of its users too. The findings clearly indicate that students of University of Swat, which are taken as population, and who represent the youth were found positive towards media- the way it produces the contents relating to self-esteem and lifestyle. The positivity among the audiences increases with the increase in the time watch- indicating the level of exposure to media contents. The results show that the audiences having highly exposure to media perceive the media effects on the lifestyle and self-esteem of audiences more positive, believing the audiences are getting benefits from the media contents, motivating to change their routine lifestyle that leads them to strengthen their self-esteem. Thus, the findings support the key arguments of cultivation theory, which investigates the ways in which viewers' and audiences' perceptions of social reality were influenced by television. Gerbner looks into how people's perceptions of reality were shaped by television. Cultivation analysis, according to Gerbner (1970, p. 71), is the "study of the relationships between institutional processes, message systems, and the public assumptions, images, and policies that they cultivate." Reiterated by cultivation analysis, the television's message system created a worldview that would eventually come to pass. Similar findings were made in this study, wherein 56% of participants who watch media on a daily basis think that media positively influences viewers' overall lifestyles and self-esteem.

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