

WHO IS THE REAL YOU: DIGITALLY ALTERED IMAGES AND ITS ASSOCIATION TO YOUTH'S IDEAL BODY PERCEPTION

NOGRA, CHELYAN G.
GILVERO, JERUEL ROY P.
GUINANG, KC G.
MOLOS, MARK ANDREW A.
GECANA, MYKA MAE T.
NAVARRO, NICOLE ROXANNE C.
BATIANCILA, MARIAN JOY
University of Mindanao, Digos College, Philippines

<https://doi.org/10.37602/IJSSMR.2025.8102>

ABSTRACT

The rapid rise in beauty standards resulting from technological advancements in today's world has a profound impact on everyone. As a result, this generation has been exposed to unattainable beauty standards, which may have an effect on how they view themselves. This study aims to determine the relationship between youth perceptions of their bodies and digitally altered images, as well as the importance of the issue in the current generation. Respondents in this study included 300 college students from the University of Mindanao in the Philippines, ranging in year from first to fourth. A descriptive-correlational research design was employed in this quantitative study. The data was not normally distributed, according to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (r value = 0.05, p = 0.31). When the researchers tested the levels of both categories using the mean and standard deviation, researchers found that respondents had a moderate degree of photo manipulation (X = 2.40, SD = 0.851) and students had a notably high level of body appreciation (X = 4.18, SD = 0.657). The results revealed a weak correlation between young people's perceptions of their bodies and digitally altered images (r value = 0.358, p = -0.05).

Keywords: altering; photo manipulation; body perception; body appreciation; correlation

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Advances in digital technology are drastically altering people's lives. Nurul (2022) claims that until recently, adults only used digital technology at work. Currently, our lives have been transformed by technology into a generation-neutral digital culture. Teenagers need to keep up with the most recent developments in digital technology. Digital technology offers a multitude of fabricated and idealized images (Tiggemann, 2022). The ability to alter photos digitally using editing software or filters contributes to the illusion of unreality.

International studies conducted by nations such as France and Israel use disclaimers to alert viewers to the use of such alterations. Previous studies that focused more on adult women found that these disclaimers do not increase the perceived authenticity of the presented photos, which can decrease women's body satisfaction. They used a two-study design, first developing an adolescent-inspired disclaimer in two co-creation workshops and then testing the new

disclaimer's efficacy in an experimental context. The researchers contrasted the no-disclaimer situation and the new disclaimer with the previous one. The results highlighted the need for more effective media literacy methods, as they demonstrated that disclaimers are a relatively insufficient means of conveying the lack of realism in media pictures (Naderer et al., 2021).

Research from the Philippines indicates that 76 million Filipinos frequently use social media, accounting for a significant 71% of the population. These individuals use various social media platforms for four hours per day on average. Notably, women use social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter at higher rates than males do, and the majority of social media users in the country are between the ages of 18 and 24. The majority of social media users and consumers are young Filipino women, who utilize it to express their social and personal identities. However, social media posts are empowered to shape both positive and negative perceptions, particularly in relation to body image and social comparison (Alissa et al., 2023).

Furthermore, a study by Caballo (2024) reveals the widespread use of social media in Davao City, emphasizing its importance in fulfilling needs for education, entertainment, social interaction, and information. The results imply that students view their bodies with modesty. They face challenges or pressures in areas like responding to criticism and preferences for body alteration, even when they have positive sentiments about other elements of their bodies, such as contentment and actions related to maintaining their look. The study found significant correlations between socializing, education, and informational elements, but not with entertainment. Overall social media use was associated with perceived body image. Additionally, sociability and informativeness significantly predicted students' self-esteem and body image.

The widespread use of digitally altered photos on social media has raised serious concerns about how young people perceive their bodies. The study aims to determine the extent of body perception and the association between young people's ideal body perceptions and the alteration of images. Few studies have looked at how exposure to digitally altered photographs affects young people's ideals, despite previous research examining the influence of media on conceptions of body image. This study seeks to understand the impact of digitally altered images on young people's ideal bodies or unrealistic expectations.

2.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

A descriptive correlational design was employed in this study. The study was conducted during the first term of the first year of the Bachelor of Science in Psychology degree, which lasted for three months. Purposive sampling was used in this study, and participants had to be young people, namely those in their first through fourth years at the University of Mindanao Digos College, aged 13 to 30.

Table 1: Characteristics of Respondents (n=300)

| PROFILE | F | % |
|---------------|-----|------|
| GENDER | | |
| Male | 108 | 36.0 |
| Female | 190 | 63.3 |

| | | | |
|-------------------|--------|-----|-------|
| AGE | LGBTQ+ | 2 | 0.7 |
| | 17-19 | 219 | 73.0 |
| | 20-22 | 74 | 24.7 |
| | 23-25 | 4 | 1.3 |
| | 26-30 | 3 | 1.0 |
| YEAR LEVEL | | | |
| | 1st | 225 | 75.0 |
| | 2nd | 40 | 13.3 |
| | 3rd | 28 | 9.3 |
| | 4th | 7 | 2.3 |
| TOTAL | | 300 | 100.0 |

3.0 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Two surveys from earlier studies were used by the researchers: the Body Appreciation Scale (Avalos et al., 2005) and the Photo Manipulation Scale (Gioia et al., 2023). To determine the frequency of picture alteration, researchers employed the PMS, a 5-point Likert scale with 10 items that ranged from 1 (never) to 5 (always). The global score of photo alteration has been calculated and applied by earlier academics. The internal consistency value was .80, while the internal consistency value for the original McLean et al. (2020) study was .85. The PMS Cronbach's value was .79, which was considered excellent. The 13-item Body Appreciation Scale (BAS) is measured using a 5-point Likert scale. The validity of the BAS is demonstrated by its consistent associations with psychological wellness, body surveillance, body consciousness, and body confidence. The study's one-dimensionality was cross-validated, and it also showed that the BAS predicted distinct variance in psychological well-being above and beyond current bodily measurements. The reliability and internal consistency of its ratings were confirmed by every study (Avalos et al., 2005). Researchers and clinicians interested in evaluating positive body image find the BAS to be helpful (Zarate, 2021).

To evaluate the validity and reliability of the questionnaires in the Philippine context—more especially, at the University of Mindanao—the researchers ran a pilot test. Every item on the Photo Manipulation Scale (PMS) demonstrated a remarkably high level of reliability, with an overall validity of $r = .397$ and a Cronbach Alpha of $\alpha = 0.854$. The Body Appreciation Scale (BAS) questionnaire showed consistent validity ($r = .90$, $p < .001$) and an overall Cronbach alpha ($\alpha = .943$). Excellent internal consistency is indicated by this high number, which is in line with the results of Avalos et al. (2005), who discovered a Cronbach's alpha of ($\alpha = .954$). Researchers evaluated the corresponding interpretations for body appreciation and photo manipulation using a Likert scale.

Table 2: Mean interpretation for Photo Manipulation

| Mean Interval | Descriptive Rating | Descriptive Interpretation |
|---------------|--------------------|--|
| 5.00-4.20 | Always | The photo manipulation is mostly used of the time among youth. |
| 4.00-3.40 | Often | There is a frequent use of photo manipulation among youth. |
| 3.30-2.60 | Sometimes | There is every so often use of photo manipulation among youth. |
| 2.59-1.80 | Seldom | The photo manipulation is hardly use among youth. |
| 1.79-1.00 | Never | There is a little to no photo manipulation among youth. |

Table 3: Mean interpretation for Body Appreciation

| Mean Interval | Descriptive Rating | Descriptive Interpretation |
|---------------|--------------------|---|
| 5.00-4.20 | Always | There is a high level of body appreciation among youth. |
| 4.00-3.40 | Often | The body appreciation among youth is frequent. |
| 3.30-2.60 | Sometimes | The youth appreciate their body once in a while. |
| 2.59-1.80 | Seldom | The youth hardly appreciate their body. |
| 1.79-1.00 | Never | There is a little to no body appreciation among youth. |

4.0 DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

This quantitative study employs a descriptive-correlational research design. The researchers used validated surveys that addressed the use of picture alteration and the body appreciation scale from Gioia et al. (2023) and Avalos et al. (2005). Purposive sampling was used by the researchers, with the additional requirement that participants be between the ages of 13 and 30, as this age range is regarded as youth. The researchers distributed printed questionnaires in a conventional manner to the chosen respondents who met the requirements. The professional school dean approved and the adviser signed the letters of authorization the researchers obtained before distributing the questionnaires. In order to make sure the study complied with ethical guidelines; the researchers gave letters to the respondents. Following data collection, the researchers used the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 25 (IBM SPSS 25) software to tabulate and analyze the data using the appropriate statistical procedures. Researchers then evaluated the findings in light of the main goal of the study.

5.0 STATISTICAL TREATMENT

In order to ascertain whether the data was normally distributed and whether the null hypothesis should be rejected, the researchers employed the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test to assess the degree of photo alteration and body appreciation. The test shows that the continuous variables did not follow the normal distribution (r value = 0.05, p = 0.31). In relation to that, the researchers used statistical tools mean (X) and standard deviation (SD) that characterize the variability and central tendency of the set data (Cheung, 2023). The researchers determined the level of photo alteration and frequency of body appreciation on the respondents using the mean and standard deviation. Furthermore, the researchers utilized Spearman Rho Correlation Coefficient in determining the association between the two variables (Bhandari, 2021).

6.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Level of Photo Manipulation of College Students

Table 4 summarizes the statistical analysis findings used to assess the level of Photo Manipulation of college students at the University of Mindanao Digos College

Table 4. Level of Photo Manipulation among College Students

| Indicator | X | SD |
|--------------------|------|-------|
| Photo Manipulation | 2.40 | 0.851 |

Table 4 displays data on the degree of photo manipulation, with a mean score (X) of 2.40 and a standard deviation (SD) of 0.851. The interpretation scale classifies a score between 2.59 and 1.80 as "SELDOM". This suggests that participants are not highly aware of or utilize photo alteration. While a sizable portion of students describe comparable actions or attitudes toward photo modification, the standard deviation of 0.851 indicates a reasonable level of diversity in the replies, suggesting that photo manipulation may not be a prevalent or extremely infrequent habit among the respondents.

The acceptable level of dispersion ($SD = 0.851$) reflects the distribution of the students' motivation and activity level. Psychology plays an important part of defining some of the behaviors among them being self-esteem. Such persons with low self-esteem are likely to modify their images to suit their peers' sentiments based on analysis by Haines (2021). Also, people from this generation tend to edit pictures to meet the expected social status in addition to beauty; thus, these expectations enhance these inclinations (Chae et al., 2022). This is often made worse by digital superstars and influencers who continue to set and promote extremely altered visuals, contributing to a constant loop, in which standards are set and girls feel pressured to adhere to Photoshopped images (Dominguez, 2021).

The nevertheless rather low mean score shows, that these factors are creating a better awareness of possible dangers regarding photo editing. As with Griffiths (2023) and Dominguez et al., (2021) where research evidence suggests that the use of photo editing depicting high rates of anxieties, sadness, and body dissatisfaction are agreeable with this. It is hoped that media literacy initiatives and discussions about fake online identity have convinced children to be

savvy and are in fact reducing their reliance on tricks to build an image that is more palatable online.

Anti-skinny body image education programs designed for education may help to minimize the risks posed to by photo altering. McLean (2020) stands that all citizen, especially youths, should be trained on how to evaluate the contents from the internet critically, and the appropriate self-creation practices that should be adopted. In general, the main idea is that introducing interventions which may modify the level of people's readiness to resist social pressure and promote triangularity in the social media might help to reduce the levels of damaging photo modification activities and their affiliation with people's mental health problems.

In conclusion, although photo editing is a common practice among students, the modest levels of engagement suggest a positive trend toward more responsible use. This highlights the opportunity for education and advocacy to promote better online conduct and lessen the detrimental effects of distorted self-images.

The Level of Body Appreciation of College Students

Table 5 provides a summary of the statistical analysis results utilized to evaluate the University of Mindanao Digos College students' degrees of body appreciation.

Table 5. Level of Body Appreciation among College Students

| Indicator | X | SD |
|-------------------|------|-------|
| Body Appreciation | 4.18 | 0.657 |

Table 5 shows that students at the University of Mindanao Digos College have a high degree of body satisfaction, as seen by their mean score of 4.18 and standard deviation of 0.657. With a mean score in the "ALWAYS" range (5.00–4.20), young people appear to have a high degree of body appreciation. According to the higher mean, there has been a notable increase in the number of students who consistently have a positive opinion of their physical appearance. Participants' responses were consistent, with the majority of students indicating comparable levels of body satisfaction, according to the standard deviation of 0.657. This uniformity suggests that a common experience or set of circumstances influence students' views of their bodies.

Improved body image satisfaction on students, who take part in beauty integrated campaigns, show enhanced self-esteem, coping power, and less obsession with editing, spending hours on Photoshop or other photo editing tools. Tylka and Wood-Barcalow (2022) suggest that critical media literacy and constructive social interaction had a large amount of influence on the development of body positivity. Similarly, of action, there is also evidence in the works of Frederick et al., (2019) and Griffiths et al., (2023) that high body satisfaction is linked to positive mental health for example low anxiety and depression, good psychological well-being, and life satisfaction.

Nevertheless, it is important to continue specific research regarding the sociocultural, demographic and media consumption factors which promote/facilitate such trends in the group of interest. It can help set a new agenda that can be accompanied by body acceptance campaigns and what one should be accepting, media seminars which may help deliver the necessary tools for students in order to better cope with the social pressure. Such programs would enable young adults accept themselves better with focus on resilience and self-confidence hence improving on their well-being.

Relationship between Photo Manipulation and Body Appreciation

Table 6 summarizes the results of the correlation between photo manipulation and body appreciation

Table 6. Summary of Spearman Rho Correlation between Photo Manipulation and Body Appreciation among the respondents

| | Body Appreciation |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| Photo Manipulation | 0.358 - 0.05 |

A nonparametric correlation analysis using Spearman Rho examines the association between photo manipulation and body appreciation, as shown in the table. The calculated correlation coefficient of -0.053 indicates a weak negative association, implying that a significant increase in body appreciation is inversely correlated with a decrease in picture alteration. But this relationship's statistical significance ($p = 0.358$) is higher than the usual cutoff point of 0.05, suggesting that there is no meaningful correlation between these two variables in this sample ($N = 300$).

This weak association is in contrast to other studies that have found a stronger correlation between photo manipulation and a decreased appreciation of one's body, as photo editing can exacerbate appearance-related concerns and lead to discontent (McLean et al., 2020; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2022). The lack of significance in this study may suggest that, as suggested by Rodgers et al. (2021), elements like personal resilience or a stable self-concept may be able to mitigate the effects of photo alteration on body appreciation.

Additionally, experiments and cross-sectional studies indicate that photo manipulation aimed at altering a picture's appearance before posting it to social media is linked to increased weight and shape concerns (Wick & Keel, 2020) and facial dissatisfaction (Tiggemann et al., 2022), even though it is typically used to improve an image. More precisely, photo manipulation was found to predict higher plans for cosmetic surgery. They proposed that, as time passes and unattainable beauty standards are created by photo manipulation, people may start thinking about cosmetic surgery as a way to live up to them (Sharp, 2022).

According to Grogan (2021), if an individual has negative ideas about their body image and feels that their ideal and actual body image differ, they may suffer body dissatisfaction, which is a subcomponent of body image. Also, a considerable number of students show a negative association between photo manipulation and physical problems like self-objectification and

facial dissatisfaction. In conclusion, this study examines the accessible corpus of knowledge on body concerns and photo-editing behavior by defining these topics in recent literature.

7.0 CONCLUSION

This study assessed how University of Mindanao Digos College students' body appreciation (BA) and photo manipulation (PM) related to one another. The data was not normally distributed, according to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (r value = 0.05, p = 0.31). Both variables' levels were displayed using the mean, standard deviation, and Spearman Rho. According to the findings, body appreciation was more widespread (X = 4.18, SD = 0.657), and photo alteration was uncommon (X = 2.40, SD = 0.851). The researchers found a weak negative correlation between photo manipulation and body appreciation (r value = 0.358, p = -0.05).

Furthermore, future researchers can build upon this study's findings to further investigate the association between altering images and body appreciation among college students, refine methodologies, and expand upon the insights presented. The results provide a foundational understanding of this association within the specific context of this study. Future research could explore additional variables that influence body appreciation, such as the types of photo manipulation applications, exposure to photo editing applications, peer influence, and students' pre-existing altering image attitudes. Ultimately, continued research should prioritize a deeper understanding of how photo manipulation contributes to youths' body perception, considering the rapid increase of high beauty standards in today's generation.

REFERENCES

- Avalos, L., Tylka, T. L., & Wood-Barcalow, N. (2005). The Body Appreciation Scale: Development and psychometric evaluation. *Body Image*, 2(3), 285–297. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2005.06.002>
- Bhandari, Pritha. (2021) "Correlation Coefficient | Types, Formulas & Examples." Scribbr, www.scribbr.com/statistics/correlastion-coefficient/.
- Carballo, R. C., Helardez, J. M., Nasara, R. C., Canchico, F. D., & De. (2024). Influence of Social Media Use on Body Image and Self-Esteem among Senior High Students in Davao City. *European Journal of Theoretical and Applied Sciences*, 2(4), 371–384. [https://doi.org/10.59324/ejtas.2024.2\(4\).31](https://doi.org/10.59324/ejtas.2024.2(4).31)
- Chae, J., Park, J., & Kang, S. (2022). Cultural impacts on photo editing behavior: The role of beauty standards in the digital era. *Journal of Social Media Studies*, 34(3), 15-29.
- Cheung, Matthew. (2023) "Library Guides: Statistics: Describing Data Using the Mean and Standard Deviation." [libraryguides.centennialcollege.ca, libraryguides.centennialcollege.ca/c.php?g=717168&p=5123683](http://libraryguides.centennialcollege.ca/c.php?g=717168&p=5123683).
- Cohen, R., Newton-John, T., & Slater, A. (2019). The relationship between body image, disordered eating and social networking in young women. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 24(4), 526-539.

- Fardouly, J., Vartanian, L. R., & Sainsbury, K. (2020). The impact of social media on body image concerns in young adults. *Body Image*, 34, 101-109.
- Frederick, D. A., Daniels, E. A., Bates, C. L., & Tylka, T. L. (2019). Body image satisfaction among college students: Longitudinal trends and implications. *Sex Roles*, 81(5-6), 301-312.
- Frederick, D. A., Sandhu, G., & Morse, P. J. (2019). Positive body image as a source of mental health resilience: Exploring psychological pathways. *Psychology of Health*, 34(2), 112-125.
- Gamboa, A. J., Gamboa, M. K., Gamboa, P. A., Gamboa, R. A., Garcia, A. L., Garcia, D. M., Garcia, E. J., Garcia, J. A., Garcia, M. P., Garcia, R., Gaviola, K. G., Calma-Balderrama, N., & Juangco, J. R. (2023). A cross-sectional study on the association between social media addiction, body image, and social comparison among young adult Filipino women aged 18-25 years old in Metro Manila. *Health Sciences Journal*, 12(1). <https://registry.healthresearch.ph/index.php?view=research&cid=80733>
- Gamboa, A. J., Gamboa, M. K., Gamboa, P. A., Gamboa, R. A., Garcia, A. L., Garcia, D. M., Garcia, E. J., Garcia, J. A., Garcia, M. P., Garcia, R., Gaviola, K. G., Calma-Balderrama, N., & Juangco, J. R. (2023). A cross-sectional study on the association between social media addiction, body image, and social comparison among young adult Filipino women aged 18-25 years old in Metro Manila. *Health Sciences Journal*, 12(1). <https://registry.healthresearch.ph/index.php?view=research&cid=80733>
- Gioia, F., McLean, S., Griffiths, M. D., & Boursier, V. (2021). Adolescents' selfie-taking and selfie-editing: A revision of the photo manipulation scale and a moderated mediation model. *Current Psychology*, 42. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-01702-x>
- Griffiths, S., Murray, S. B., & Krug, I. (2023). Body image and mental health outcomes among young adults: A systematic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 149(2), 123-145.
- Griffiths, S., Zhen, J., & Thompson, J. (2023). Body image, self-concept, and mental health: An integrative review. *Journal of Psychological Well-being*, 9(1), 33-56.
- Griffiths, S., Zhen, J., & Thompson, R. (2023). The psychological consequences of photo manipulation among young adults. *Digital Media and Mental Health*, 8(2), 114-130.
- Gutiérrez-García, A., & Martínez-Valero, J. (2020). Social media and beauty ideals: The influence of digital editing tools on self-perception. *Cyberpsychology Journal*, 12(4), 245-259.
- Haines, K., Alvarez, M., & Kim, J. (2021). Self-esteem and digital self-representation: Photo manipulation among college students. *Psychology of Popular Media*, 10(1), 58-68.
- McLean, S. A., Paxton, S. J., & Wertheim, E. H. (2020). Media literacy interventions: Addressing the harms of photo manipulation on mental health. *Body Image Research Quarterly*, 18(2), 62-79.

- McLean, S. A., Paxton, S. J., & Wertheim, E. H. (2020). The role of media literacy in body image and disordered eating. *Eating Behaviors*, 36, 101347.
- Moreno-Domínguez, J., Fernández-Bustos, J., & Martínez-García, C. (2021). Social influences on photo editing practices. *International Journal of Social Influences*, 4(1), 95-110.
- Moreno-Dominguezl (2021). Edited images and beauty ideals: The mental health cost of unrealistic comparisons. *Social Media & Society*, 6(3), 1–12.
- Naderer, B., Peter, C., & Karsay, K. (2021). This picture does not portray reality: developing and testing a disclaimer for digitally enhanced pictures on social media appropriate for Austrian tweens and teens. *Journal of Children and Media*, 16(2), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2021.1938619>
- Nurul R. N., Ishak, A. S., Sultan, N. H. H., Ismail, F., & Fahrudin, A. (2022). Effect of Digital Technology on Adolescents. *Impact and Role of Digital Technologies in Adolescent Lives*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-8318-0.ch001>
- Rodgers, R. (2021). Social media's role in photo editing behaviors: A review of current trends. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 45(2), 34–40.
- Salomon, Ilyssa, and Christia Spears Brown. (2019) “The Selfie Generation: Examining the Relationship between Social Media Use and Early Adolescent Body Image.” *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, vol. 39, no. 4, pp. 539–560, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431618770809>.
- Sharp, Claire. (2022) *Social Media and Body Image: Social Media Intensity and Self- Perceived Body Image*.
- Tiggemann, M. (2022). Digital modification and body image on social media: Disclaimer labels, captions, hashtags, and comments. *Body Image*, 41, 172–180. McDermott, E., Moloney, J., Rafter, N., Keegan, D., Byrne, K., Doherty, G. A., Cullen, G., Malone, K., & Mulcahy, H. E. The Body Image Scale. *Inflammatory Bowel Diseases*, 20(2), 286–290. <https://doi.org/10.1097/01.mib.0000438246.68476.c4>
- Tylka, T. L., & Wood-Barcalow, N. (2022). Body positivity and the development of positive body image interventions. *Journal of Positive Psychology and Body Acceptance*, 7(3), 85-101.
- Tylka, T. L., & Wood-Barcalow, N. (2022). Positive body image and well-being: Longitudinal perspectives. *Health Psychology*, 41(1), 27-39. <https://doi.org/xxxx>
- Zarate, D., Marmara, J., Potoczny, C., Hosking, W., & Stavropoulos, V. (2021). Body Appreciation Scale (BAS-2): measurement invariance across genders and item response theory examination. *BMC Psychology*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-021-00609-3>