

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AS TOOLS FOR ENHANCING PERCEIVED SELF-IMAGE AMONG FEMALE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: PHOTO EDITING PRACTICES FOR MENTAL HEALTH SUSTAINABILITY IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDG)

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: This study aims to examine the relationship between excessive image editing on social media and appearance-related anxiety, assessing the psychological implications of such practices in the context of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

Theoretical Framework: The study explored the role of social media platforms as effective tools for enhancing the perceived self-image of female university students, where photo editing techniques are used to improve personal appearance and increase confidence.

Method: This quantitative study employed a descriptive correlational design to investigate the association between personal image editing practices and social appearance anxiety among 300 female university students from King Faisal University, Al-Ahsa, Saudi Arabia. The participants were final-year students from the Colleges of Arts, Education, and Law, and they were selected through a snowball sampling technique.

Results and Discussion: The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between the degree of personal image editing and the level of social appearance anxiety, suggesting that female students who engage more frequently in photo editing are more likely to experience heightened anxiety about their appearance.

Research Implications: This result reveals a paradox where female university students edit their photos for self-satisfaction, yet this practice may worsen appearance-related insecurities and anxiety.

Originality/Value: This study offers a unique contribution by examining the dual impact of photo editing on self-image satisfaction and appearance-related anxiety among female university students. By highlighting the unintended psychological consequences of such practices, the research provides insights that can inform mental health strategies aimed at fostering healthier self-image practices.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), social media, self-image, image editing, mental health sustainability, university students.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary digital landscape, social media platforms have become indispensable tools for self-expression, particularly among youth. These platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat, offer dynamic spaces where individuals, especially female university students, curate their online personas (Yang *et al.*, 2021). Through the use of image editing and enhancement features, users can present an idealized version of themselves, which has profound implications for their self-image and social interactions. The act of photo editing is no longer a simple cosmetic endeavor; it has evolved into a significant cultural phenomenon that shapes notions of beauty, desirability, and self-worth (Ozimek *et al.*, 2023).

As the reliance on social media for personal validation increases, so do the psychological ramifications of photo enhancement practices (Agrawal & Agrawal, 2021). Many female students perceive that enhancing their images results in a more favorable self-image, potentially fostering a sense of confidence. However, this superficial confidence can often obscure deeper insecurities and anxiety regarding one's appearance. This complex interplay between self-presentation and self-perception is particularly concerning in an era where social media dictates standards of beauty (Lau & Idang, 2022). For female university students, this has profound implications as the combination of photo editing tools and social comparison dynamics has reshaped how self-perception, beauty, and social validation are negotiated online (Mancin *et al.*, 2024).

The pervasive nature of visually driven content on social media heightens social pressures to conform to specific beauty ideals. The prevalence of filters and editing applications allows users to create an idealized and often distorted portrayal of their bodies, which can adversely affect self-esteem. These

unattainable images can lead to a spectrum of body image disorders, including appearance anxiety, eating disorders, and depression.

Studies like (Pedalino & Camerini, 2022; Burnell *et al.*, 2022; Scully *et al.*, 2023; Hao, 2024) have shown that individuals who engage extensively with social media platforms frequently report higher levels of body dissatisfaction, primarily due to the social comparisons they make with peers and celebrities. Such comparisons often exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and insecurity.

As users increasingly engage with these idealized representations, their perceptions of what constitutes a healthy and natural body can become distorted (Felig & Goldenberg, 2024). This distortion not only fosters unhealthy behaviors, such as extreme dieting and cosmetic procedures, but also emphasizes the urgent need for increased awareness and intervention strategies aimed at promoting positive body image and mental well-being. The characteristics of images shared on social media are pivotal in shaping users' self-perceptions, and the dynamic nature of this content necessitates careful evaluation of its implications for individual identity (Mancin *et al.*, 2024).

Furthermore, the appearance-related content significantly influences women's body image and satisfaction. The manipulation and curation of images on social media reveal unique insights into specific concerns surrounding appearance, particularly among diverse groups. This cyclical relationship highlights the complexities of digital self-representation. Photo editing behaviors encompass a variety of practices, from simple filters to advanced editing tools that allow users to customize features such as skin tone, blemishes, and facial contours.

Exposure to objectifying media has been associated with prolonged engagement in image editing behaviors. Women are often found to invest more time in enhancing their images after encountering objectifying content compared to those exposed to more natural imagery. Profiles that prominently feature edited images are linked to negative changes in perceived attractiveness and overall mood, further complicating the relationship between social media use, body image, and emotional well-being (Lee & Lee, 2021).

This study aims to explore the intricate relationship between personal photo editing on social media and appearance-related anxiety among female

university students. By delving into this dynamic, the study seeks to uncover how digital self-representation influences mental health and self-esteem. Understanding these relationships is essential for developing targeted interventions that promote healthier self-image practices and contribute to sustainability in mental health (Franchina & Lo Coco, 2018). The significance of this study lies in its exploration of a pressing issue in today's digital age-the relationship between social media photo editing and appearance-related anxiety among female university students. With the increasing reliance on social media for self-expression and validation, particularly among young women, it becomes crucial to understand how these platforms influence mental health and self-perception (McLean *et al.* 2015; Chukwuere & Chukwuere, 2017; Wagani & Gaur, 2024). This study provides valuable insights into how digital self-representation through photo editing practices can contribute to or alleviate mental health challenges, such as anxiety about physical appearance. By focusing on female university students, the study addresses a demographic that is particularly vulnerable to the pressures of social comparison and idealized body image standards propagated by social media. Furthermore, the findings of this study could contribute to the development of educational programs and psychological interventions aimed at promoting healthier social media practices. These programs can foster greater awareness of the potential mental health risks associated with excessive photo editing, while also encouraging the adoption of positive self-image practices, thus contributing to the sustainability of mental well-being in the digital age.

Study question: To what extent does personal photo editing on social media platforms influence appearance-related anxiety among female university students, and how does this relationship affect their perceived self-image in order to promote sustainability in mental health?

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The ubiquitous presence of image editing applications has transformed the way young women engage with their physical appearance, allowing for the modification of facial and body features through filters and specialized

software. Wolfe and Yakabovits (2024) emphasized that as these tools become integrated into mobile phone technology, the frequency of encountering altered images on social media increases. Consequently, young women often feel pressured to enhance their own photos, which can negatively affect their mood and perceived physical appearance. This relentless pursuit of an idealized version of oneself, driven by social media culture, contributes to the internalization of unrealistic beauty standards and has significant psychological repercussions, including appearance-related anxiety and decreased self-esteem.

Furthermore, social media allows for selective self-presentation, a process wherein users strategically choose, edit, and share photographs that align with societal standards of beauty. Fox and Vendemia (2016) revealed that these behaviors, particularly among women, reinforce existing sociocultural pressures related to body image. The act of editing photos before sharing them online serves not only as a method of enhancing physical attributes but also as a means of navigating the complex social hierarchies and comparisons that exist within digital spaces. These comparisons, both upward and downward, can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy, particularly when individuals are confronted with the curated images of peers or celebrities who embody idealized beauty norms.

The psychological effects of engaging with edited images extend beyond the immediate emotional impact. Studies by McComb *et al.* (2021) suggest that even when disclaimers are attached to edited photos, signaling that an image has been manipulated, young women still experience a decline in body satisfaction, mood, and self-confidence after exposure to such content. This indicates that while disclaimers may raise awareness about the authenticity of digital images, they do little to mitigate the damaging effects of comparison. The persistent engagement with these idealized and unattainable standards fosters a cyclical process of dissatisfaction, wherein young women increasingly rely on photo editing to align their self-presentation with the societal ideals they see online.

Fardouly and Holland (2018) highlight the inherent complexity of social media interactions, suggesting that the digital environments in which young

women operate are not just spaces for communication but also for constant comparison and validation. The fact that disclaimers attached to idealized images have little effect on body dissatisfaction underscores the depth of social media's influence on self-perception. The immersive nature of these platforms means that young women's mental health and body image are consistently shaped by the standards portrayed and reinforced by their peers, influencers, and the media.

This study seeks to inform policies and programs that encourage responsible use of social media and promote mental health sustainability among young women. By addressing the implications of photo editing on mental well-being, the study aims to equip future generations with the necessary tools to navigate the complexities of digital self-representation, fostering resilience and self-acceptance in an image-driven society. The relationship between photo editing and mental health sustainability among female university students is not merely a superficial concern. It speaks to deeper issues related to self-worth, identity, and societal pressures. This study seeks to explore how photo editing practices on social media contribute to appearance-related anxiety and, by extension, how they impact the overall mental health of young women. Understanding the nuances of this relationship is essential for creating interventions that promote a healthier and more sustainable approach to self-image in digital spaces, ensuring that female students can navigate these platforms without compromising their mental well-being.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The current study employs a **quantitative research approach**, which is suited to examining relationships between variables. The objective is to explore the correlational relationship between excessive photo editing on social media platforms and appearance-related anxiety among female university students. The study is designed to quantify these behaviors and psychological factors, using measures to collect and analyze numerical data, ensuring statistical

reliability and validity. The study adopts a **descriptive correlational design**, a method that is effective for exploring associations between naturally occurring variables. In this study, the descriptive analytical aspect allows for documentation of social media photo editing practices and appearance-related anxiety levels among participants. The correlational approach, in turn, is utilized to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between these two variables, assessing whether higher levels of photo editing behaviors correlate with increased appearance-related anxiety.

3.2 SAMPLING

The study involved a sample of 300 female university students from King Faisal University in Al-Ahsa, Saudi Arabia, equally distributed across three faculties: Arts, Education, and Law, with each faculty contributing 100 participants to ensure balanced representation. All participants were selected from the final year of their studies, as this group may experience heightened appearance-related pressures due to their proximity to graduation and increased exposure to professional environments. Additionally, final-year students are more likely to engage in social media practices related to self-presentation and photo editing, making them an ideal demographic for investigating the study questions. The researchers reached a group of female students directly, utilizing a snowball sampling technique. This approach involved initially identifying and selecting a small group of participants who met the study criteria. Each participant was then encouraged to invite other female students they knew who also engaged in photo editing practices on social media. This method facilitated the identification of participants who may not have been easily accessible through traditional sampling methods, ensuring a more targeted focus on those using social media for self-presentation.

3.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure the protection and well-being of all participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the Deanship

of Scientific Research at King Faisal University to conduct the study. Informed consent was secured from each participant before their involvement in the research, ensuring they were fully aware of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. Confidentiality was strictly maintained by anonymizing data and securely storing it to prevent unauthorized access. Additionally, participants were informed that their involvement was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study whenever they wished. Resources for mental health support were also provided to participants, should the study evoke any discomfort related to appearance-related issues.

3.4 STUDY TOOLS

For the study tools, the Personal Photo Editing Scale and the Social Appearance Anxiety Scale were utilized. However, it is important to note that these scales were either developed or modified to fit the specific context of the current study, its variables, and the unique characteristics of the environment and the female university students participating in the research. The adaptation of these scales was necessary to ensure that they accurately reflected the psychological and behavioral dynamics of the participants. This included fine-tuning the wording and content of the items to capture the cultural and social nuances that influence how female university students in this particular environment engage with photo editing and experience appearance anxiety. The goal was to create a measurement tool that not only maintained the psychometric robustness of the original scales but also provided relevant and valid insights into this specific Participants. The Personal Photo Editing Scale was tailored to focus on the motivations and practices related to excessive photo editing on social media, ensuring that the questions aligned with the current digital habits of female university students. Similarly, the Social Appearance Anxiety Scale was adjusted to capture the specific forms of social comparison, body dissatisfaction, and appearance-related pressures prevalent among female university students in the study's setting. These modifications underscore the importance of contextualizing research

instruments, especially when dealing with sensitive psychological phenomena like appearance anxiety. By doing so, the study ensures that the tools are not only reliable but also resonate with the lived experiences of female university students, providing richer data for analysis and interpretation.

Personal Photo Editing Scale: This study utilized the Personal Photo Editing Scale developed by Pham *et al.* (2022) to evaluate the editing practices of participants concerning their personal photos. The scale includes positively worded items designed to capture the nuances of photo editing behaviors among female university students. To assess the construct validity of the scale for this research, correlation coefficients between individual items and the overall score were computed using a pilot sample of 55 women who were not part of the main study. The correlation coefficients ranged from approximately 0.62 to 0.75, suggesting a solid relationship between individual items and the overall construct being measured. Regarding reliability, the internal consistency of the Personal Photo Editing Scale was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a value of about 0.81. This indicates that the scale is sufficiently reliable for measuring photo editing behaviors within the context of this research.

Social Appearance Anxiety Scale: The Social Appearance Anxiety Scale, created by Veale *et al.* (2022), was employed to assess levels of appearance-related anxiety among participants. This scale consists of ten items categorized into two dimensions: avoidance (six items) and threat monitoring (four items), all framed positively. To evaluate the construct validity of the Social Appearance Anxiety Scale within this study, correlation coefficients were calculated for each item in relation to the total score and the respective dimensions. Utilizing a pilot sample of 55 women, the correlation coefficients with the overall scale ranged from 0.57 to 0.79, while those related to their respective dimensions varied from 0.48 to 0.77. Regarding reliability, the internal consistency reliability for the Social Appearance Anxiety Scale in this study was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, resulting in a reliability estimate of approximately 0.85 for the total scale. These findings indicate that the scale is appropriate for examining the constructs related to social appearance anxiety among female university students.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The Photo Editing Behavior Scale and the Social Appearance Anxiety Scale were utilized to quantify participants' engagement with photo editing and their anxiety concerning their appearance, respectively. The quantitative data collected were analyzed using appropriate statistical methods, including Pearson's correlation coefficient, which provided insights into the strength and significance of the relationship between the two main variables: photo editing practices and appearance-related anxiety. Based on the correlational results, an analytical description of the study variables was presented, delving into the interpretation of the relationship between photo editing and its anticipated psychological effects on the participating female university students. This analysis highlighted how excessive photo editing practices could lead to increased appearance-related anxiety, suggesting that students might engage in these behaviors as a means of coping with insecurities about their self-image. The study explored the implications of these findings in the context of social media's influence on self-perception. It considered how the pressure to conform to idealized beauty standards, often exacerbated by digital enhancements, may lead to a cycle of dissatisfaction and anxiety among students. By critically examining the psychological impacts of photo editing, this research contributes to a broader understanding of the mental health challenges faced by contemporary youth, ultimately informing future interventions aimed at promoting mental health sustainability in the face of increasing social media use.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the following section of this study, the results are presented, highlighting the correlational quantitative relationships between photo-editing practices and the participants' levels of satisfaction with their appearance, as well as the impact on their social image. The significance of these findings will be explored through in-depth interpretation and discussion.

Expanding on this, the results provide key insights into how the frequent use of photo-editing tools correlates with self-perception and appearance-related anxiety. By analyzing these quantitative relationships, we can better understand the psychological and social implications of these behaviors. Specifically, the study examines the extent to which photo-editing practices are linked to an individual's satisfaction with their physical appearance and the perception of how they are viewed by others within their social circles.

This discussion also considers the broader implications of these findings within the context of existing research on social media usage and body image concerns. The analysis aims to not only quantify the relationships but also interpret the psychological mechanisms at play, offering explanations for how excessive photo-editing may lead to heightened appearance anxiety, social comparison, and potential dissatisfaction with one's real-life appearance. These findings contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role social media plays in shaping self-image and mental well-being, especially among university-aged females who are at a critical stage of self-development and social identity formation. Table 1 presents the quantitative results.

Table1

Correlation between Personal Photo Editing Dimensions and Social Appearance Anxiety Dimensions

Personal Photo Editing Dimensions		Social Appearance Anxiety Dimensions	Pearson's r	p-value	Significance (p < 0.05)	Interpretation
Facial modification (eyes, nose, jaw)	feature (eyes, nose, jaw)	Avoidance	0.68	0.001	Significant	Strong correlation
		Threat monitoring	0.72	0.000	Highly significant	Very strong correlation
		Avoidance	0.55	0.003	Significant	Moderate correlation
Skin tone alteration		Threat monitoring	0.62	0.002	Significant	Strong correlation
Body (thinner, muscular)	reshaping (heavier, muscular)	Avoidance	0.70	0.000	Highly significant	Very strong correlation
		Threat monitoring	0.75	0.000	Highly significant	Very strong correlation
Removal of unwanted features (acne, scars, wrinkles)		Avoidance	0.65	0.001	Significant	Strong correlation
		Threat monitoring	0.67	0.001	Significant	Strong correlation
Body part adjustments (legs, arms, stomach)		Avoidance	0.60	0.002	Significant	Moderate correlation

Personal Photo Editing Dimensions	Social Appearance Anxiety Dimensions	Pearson's r	p-value	Significance (p < 0.05)	Interpretation
	Threat monitoring	0.69	0.000	Highly significant	Strong correlation

The quantitative results in Table 1 present the correlation between **personal photo editing practices** and **social appearance anxiety** dimensions. Key findings reveal several notable patterns, as discussed below:

Facial feature modification exhibited the strongest positive correlation with both the avoidance ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.05$) and threat monitoring ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.001$) dimensions of social appearance anxiety. This suggests that participants who frequently modify their facial features (such as eyes, nose, or jawline) tend to experience higher levels of avoidance and are more vigilant toward perceived social judgments, indicating a deep concern about how their physical appearance is perceived.

Body reshaping (i.e., altering one's appearance to appear thinner, heavier, or more muscular) was found to have a very strong correlation with both **avoidance** ($r = 0.70$, $p < 0.001$) and **threat monitoring** ($r = 0.75$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that excessive body image modifications are closely linked with heightened anxiety about being evaluated by others and a tendency to avoid social situations where one's appearance might be scrutinized.

Removal of unwanted features (such as acne, scars, wrinkles) also showed a significant positive correlation with **avoidance** ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.05$) and **threat monitoring** ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that participants who frequently engage in such edits are more likely to feel discomfort about their appearance in social contexts and monitor others' reactions more intensely.

Skin tone alterations were moderately but significantly correlated with avoidance ($r = 0.55$, $p < 0.05$) and threat monitoring ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.05$), reflecting a notable concern with social appearance, though not as strongly as body reshaping or facial modifications.

Body part adjustments (such as editing the legs, arms, or stomach) were also strongly associated with both dimensions of social appearance anxiety, particularly with threat monitoring ($r = 0.69$, $p < 0.001$), reinforcing the idea

that students who edit such body parts are hyper-aware of how others might perceive their edited and unedited images.

These findings underscore the significant relationship between excessive photo editing practices on social media and heightened levels of social appearance anxiety among female university students. The positive correlations across all dimensions, particularly in the context of body reshaping and facial modifications, suggest that students who actively manipulate their digital appearance are more likely to feel insecure about their real-life appearance, leading to social avoidance and heightened monitoring of others' opinions.

The high correlations with the threat monitoring dimension suggest that female students who engage in excessive photo editing are particularly sensitive to perceived social evaluations and may develop negative self-perceptions as a result of frequent upward comparisons with edited images of others on social media. This further emphasizes how digital self-presentation can exacerbate anxieties tied to social comparison.

The findings align with prior literature that links photo manipulation with reduced self-esteem and body satisfaction. Students who edit their photos may create a hyper-realistic self-image that is difficult or impossible to achieve in reality, reinforcing a feedback loop of anxiety and discontent with their actual appearance (Sharma, 2024). These results suggest the necessity for further interventions aimed at promoting digital literacy, self-acceptance, and awareness of the mental health impacts of excessive photo editing practices on social media (Papapanou *et al.*, 2023). The strong positive correlations between personal photo editing and social appearance anxiety indicate that digital manipulation, though superficially empowering, may have profound and adverse psychological effects. Educators, mental health professionals, and social media platforms should collaborate on strategies to mitigate these impacts, fostering healthier relationships with self-image in the digital age (Arabyat, 2023).

In light of these results, it can be observed that social media platforms have become influential agents in shaping the self-perception and identity formation of young women, particularly university students. These platforms often serve as mirrors, reflecting a curated version of reality where images and

personas are carefully constructed and presented to the world. This process of image modification is deeply intertwined with philosophical and psychological constructs, highlighting the struggle for self-acceptance, identity, and the pursuit of societal validation. Social media platforms, such as Instagram and Snapchat, have embedded themselves into the daily routines of university students, particularly women, who are often more exposed to societal beauty standards. For many young women, these platforms represent more than just spaces for connection; they are virtual arenas where beauty, success, and self-worth are constantly displayed and compared (Liao *et al.*, 2023). The female university students who participated in this study are subject to the omnipresent social expectations perpetuated by these platforms. These expectations are often unrealistic, setting the stage for feelings of inadequacy when their appearance does not align with the heavily edited and idealized images they encounter online (Di Gesto *et al.*, 2023).

The psychological impact of these platforms is significant, particularly for women who are still in the process of solidifying their self-concept. In their formative years, students may seek validation and identity through external approval. Social media platforms serve as a space where the performance of identity can be modified, adjusted, and judged, making them powerful tools for reinforcing societal norms related to appearance. A key philosophical issue raised in this context is the concept of self-satisfaction and self-acceptance in the face of socially constructed ideals of beauty. The participants in this study, like many other female university students, seem to turn to photo editing as a means to fulfill what they perceive as societal demands for perfection. On a surface level, the act of editing may seem empowering, giving them control over how they are perceived. However, this empowerment is often short-lived. The satisfaction derived from presenting an edited image does not equate to true self-acceptance; rather, it perpetuates a cycle of conditional self-worth—the idea that they are only "enough" when they meet the elusive standards set by society.

The belief among the students that satisfaction with their appearance can be achieved through photo editing is inherently flawed. From a philosophical perspective, this suggests a reliance on external validation to

secure a sense of worth, rather than cultivating internal self-worth. The practice of photo editing might provide momentary relief or satisfaction, but in truth, it only serves to reinforce feelings of inadequacy. This is because the students are creating and perpetuating an idealized version of themselves that they can never fully live up to in their unedited, everyday realities. The deeper issue lies in the assumption that altering the external image can fill the internal void. Existentialist philosophy might argue that the constant pursuit of an idealized self-image represents an evasion of one's authentic self, and the refusal to accept one's inherent imperfections leads to a state of alienation (Fioravanti *et al.*, 2024). These students, rather than finding solace in self-expression, become entrapped in a cycle of image distortion that distances them further from self-acceptance and genuine satisfaction.

Individuals evaluate themselves based on comparisons with others. Female university students, in this case, are not only comparing themselves to their peers but also to idealized and highly curated online representations of beauty. As they scroll through endless streams of seemingly flawless images, the discrepancies between their real selves and these edited images can become glaring, leading to heightened feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction (Gupta *et al.*, 2023). These students are aware that their edited images do not reflect their true selves, yet they are trapped by the validation these images receive. The likes, comments, and affirmations from others on social media act as external reinforcements, further motivating them to alter their appearance in pursuit of continued approval. Philosophically, this can be seen as a form of dependency on external sources of identity formation, which weakens the individual's capacity for intrinsic self-valuation.

Social media platforms promote a paradoxical relationship with beauty: the more one strives for perfection through photo editing, the more elusive and unattainable that perfection becomes. Female students may perceive that by engaging in extensive photo editing, they are taking steps toward embodying societal ideals of beauty. Yet, the act of editing underscores their belief that their natural, unedited selves are insufficient. This internalized self-criticism fosters a sense of disembodiment—where the individual becomes disconnected

from their physical reality in favor of the edited, artificial image they present online.

Another philosophical issue that arises is the temporality of satisfaction derived from edited images. The satisfaction these students may feel when posting a carefully edited image is fleeting. As soon as they are exposed to more idealized representations or see their unedited selves in real life, the dissatisfaction reemerges. This transient nature of satisfaction points to a deeper existential crisis, where fulfillment is constantly postponed to the next act of editing, the next upload, the next round of validation. In the long term, the gap between the students' edited and real selves widens, fostering a sense of failure and inadequacy. The momentary satisfaction of producing an ideal image becomes increasingly difficult to sustain, leading to greater anxiety, lower self-esteem, and the potential for mental health issues, including anxiety disorders and depression.

5 CONCLUSION

This study investigated the relationship between excessive photo editing on social media and social appearance anxiety among female university students. The findings indicate a significant positive correlation between the degree of photo editing practices and levels of social appearance anxiety. The results highlight the psychological impact of social media on body image perceptions, revealing that female students often engage in photo editing as a means to enhance their self-image. However, this practice may paradoxically exacerbate feelings of anxiety and dissatisfaction regarding their physical appearance.

The implications of these findings are twofold. First, they underscore the need for greater awareness among female university students about the potential negative effects of social media photo editing on their mental health and self-esteem. Second, the study emphasizes the importance of fostering an environment that promotes body positivity and realistic standards of beauty, which could mitigate the adverse effects of social comparison and appearance-related pressures. The psychological implications of excessive photo editing

among female university students extend far beyond simple aesthetic adjustments. The philosophical discourse surrounding self-image, identity, and societal expectations reveals a deeper crisis of self-worth, driven by the need for external validation and the desire to meet unrealistic standards of beauty. This study highlights the urgent need to address the psychological toll of these practices and to foster an environment where students can cultivate self-acceptance and resilience in the face of social pressures. Only by encouraging a more holistic and compassionate view of self can we begin to break the cycle of anxiety and dissatisfaction perpetuated by social media.

6 LIMITATIONS

Despite the valuable insights provided by this study, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample size of 300 female university students from specific faculties limits the generalizability of the findings to a broader population, suggesting future studies should involve more diverse samples across universities and disciplines. Second, the cross-sectional design restricts the ability to establish causality between photo editing practices and social appearance anxiety, with longitudinal research being necessary to clarify the direction of the relationship. Third, the use of self-reported data may introduce bias, as participants could underreport or over report their behaviors and anxieties, and incorporating objective measures could improve data validity. Fourth, the cultural context of the participants likely influenced how they interacted with social media, and cross-cultural studies could offer deeper insights. Finally, potential confounding variables such as personality traits, body image history, and peer pressure were not controlled, which may have impacted the results. Thus, while the study sheds light on the link between photo editing and appearance anxiety, further research is needed to address these limitations and build on the findings.

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