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THE IMPACT OF INSTAGRAM CONTENT TOWARDS BODY DISSATISFACTION
AMONG UTAR STUDENTS

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A RESEARCH PROJECT

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Kong Rui Qing

Approval Form

This research paper, attached hereto, entitled The Impact of Instagram Content Towards Body Dissatisfaction among Other Students, prepared and submitted by Kong Rui Qing in the partial requirements for the Bachelor of Corporate Communication (Hons), is hereby accepted.

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Date: 25 April 2024

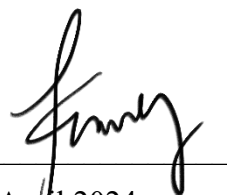
DECLARATION

I declare that the material in this paper is the result of my work and that due acknowledgement has been given in the bibliography and references to all sources, be they printed, electronic or personal.

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ABSTRACT

With the rapid development of technology, students have become increasingly reliant on social media. Instagram has emerged as a prominent platform for young adults to communicate and share various photographs. However, the shared photographs are often altered by the owner to make them look desirable to the public, and this has been contributing to body dissatisfaction among the viewers. This is because the standards, such as flawless skin, extremely slim body size, and white skin tone, are often unachievable. In the long term, upward comparisons affected the viewers' self-esteem, confidence level, emotions, and self-perception. Therefore, this study aimed to assess the impact of Instagram on body dissatisfaction among UTAR students to obtain insight into the students' perceptions of unrealistic beauty standards. This research applied the quantitative research method to collect 100 responses from UTAR students, consisting of 52 male and 48 female students. The results show that the occurrence of body dissatisfaction among male and female students has no significant difference. Still, the unrealistic images on Instagram strongly influence both genders' perception of beauty. Thus, this study underscores the need for awareness in the community to address the effects of Instagram on body image-related issues.

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1) Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter covers the background, research gap, research objectives, research questions, and operational definitions of the final year project.

1.1 Background of the Study

In this era of rapid technological development, smartphones have become the primary medium for receiving information and an entertainment tool for users. This shift strongly impacts how people interact with content and engage in entertainment. Particularly, smartphones have revolutionized not only content but also its influence on people's subconscious thoughts regarding fashion trends and styles.

The latest data published in January 2023 reveals that Malaysia has reached nearly 15.05 million registered Instagram users (Oosga, 2023). This surge in Instagram users has led to the rise of social media influencers with appealing profiles and good appearances among a diverse range of users. These influencers significantly influence users' experiences, especially in establishing fashion trends and beauty standards within the community. While social media serves as an influential tool to alter the mindset of a mass audience within a short period (Hafeez & Zulfiqar, 2023), it also leads Instagram users to engage in comparisons.

It is common for content published by influencers to undergo processes of photo editing or touching up to present idealized beauty standards (Staff, 2022). Whether these influencers are consciously or inadvertently portraying unrealistic beauty standards, it contributes to a range of negative body image concerns, such as body dissatisfaction. According to Pedalino & Camerini (2022) and Biju Thomas & Kotian (2022), idealized images pressure people to achieve the idea of "Perfection" or "Body goals," and those who are unable to meet the criteria tend to withdraw from social interaction. In the long term, individuals labelled as "imperfect" may experience low self-esteem, sadness, lack of confidence, and anxiety.

People become obsessed with established fashion trends and beauty standards because aligning with social expectations is considered a way to be accepted by the public (Envato Elements, n.d.). However, these "perfect" beauty standards often convey that fairness is gorgeous, being skinny is fit, and flawless skin is beauty (Biju Thomas & Kotian, 2022). Consequently, these distorted ideals can heighten feelings of excessive anxiety about appearance and lead to the development of body dissatisfaction.

Indeed, body dissatisfaction has become a common mental issue in many communities today. A real-life example is the American singer and songwriter Billie Eilish, who faced body dysmorphia starting at the age of 12 (Jenner, 2019). A report published by Butterfly (2023) shows that approximately 45% of adolescents in America are dissatisfied with their appearance. This statistic and example serve as a warning to the community to address body image pressure and body dissatisfaction issues.

1.2 Research Gap

In past research, numerous social studies have been conducted to understand social media as an influential factor in changing users' attitudes toward body image issues. However, among the research papers, only a few experts studied the relationship between Instagram usage and body image issues in the Malaysian demographic. Only a study paper from Chua et al. (2023), titled "Social media, traditional media, and other body image influences and disordered eating and cosmetic procedures in Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Hong Kong," evaluated users' behaviour within the Asia zone. Hence, it is essential to conduct research in the Malaysian community itself to understand Instagram's influence on mental health issues, such as body dissatisfaction, among university students.

Moreover, much of the previous research focused only on the female attitude toward social media content and the tendencies of body dissatisfaction. As cited in Zhang et al. (2021),

gender is essential in defining online behaviours, as females are likelier to use Instagram than male users. Also, females tend to compare body image with social media influencers (Hafeez & Zulfqar, 2023). Due to the nature of women's high sensitivity to their appearance, most researchers focus on studying women's behaviour regarding body dissatisfaction influenced by social media. Thus, it is essential to study gender attitudes toward social media content influence and the development of body image distortion.

Furthermore, despite a study conducted in Malaysia on body perception, the study only focused on the gay community (Syazwan & Zhooriyati, 2022). However, gay men lack the sense of masculinity established by traditional society (Sanchez et al., 2009). Therefore, they cannot represent the heterosexual male attitude toward the influence of Instagram content and their opinion on body image. So, there is a research gap that the heterosexual male community has not thoroughly explored in the perception of body dissatisfaction.

Consequently, this research paper will comprehensively explore the occurrences of body dysmorphic disorder among females and males, explicitly assessing the influence of Instagram usage. Also, the target group will be UTAR students, a group not investigated in existing research.

1.3 Research Objectives

In this research, key objectives have been identified:

1. To measure the impact of Instagram content on the occurrence of body dissatisfaction.
2. To study the relationship between social media usage and the reaction of UTAR students toward their body image.

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions are as follows:

1. What is the impact of Instagram content on body dissatisfaction among UTAR students?
2. What is the relationship between social media usage and the reaction of UTAR students toward their body image?

1.5 Operational Definitions

1.5.1 Body Dissatisfaction

In this study, the perception of body dissatisfaction refers to an individual consistently adopting negative thoughts about their appearance and body image. Body dissatisfaction is an internal emotional and cognitive process generally influenced by different external factors, leading an individual to conform to unrealistic beauty standards on social media (National Eating Disorders Collaboration, n.d.).

This study will focus on common body parts that people are most dissatisfied with, such as (Mayo Clinic, n.d.):

- the face (wrinkles, acne, blemishes)
- skin tone
- body size

Additionally, based on Hosseini and Padhy (2023), the term "body dissatisfaction" is often used interchangeably with phrases with similar meanings, including body image misperception, body image distortion, body image disturbance, altered body image, and negative body image.

1.5.2 Signs of Body Dissatisfaction

When individuals become excessively worried about perceived imperfections in their appearance and body image, this obsession can contribute to the development of unhealthy habits. However, this study will only discuss typical symptoms of body dissatisfaction that can be assessed through quantitative research. Following stereotypical behaviours that individuals may experience (National Eating Disorder Collaboration, n.d.):

- Firm belief that valuing appearance is vital to self-worth
- Continuously checking appearance in the mirror
- Attempting to hide perceived flaws with excessive grooming, styling, and makeup
- Frequently comparing themselves on social media
- Consistent negative thinking or talking about body image

Despite many symptoms identified by mental health specialists, many individuals do not recognize the presence of body image distortion issues until the symptoms have become severe. It often takes more than 10 years to reach a point of acknowledgement (Cleveland Clinic, n.d.), which might affect the survey results as respondents may not recognize their behaviour regarding body dissatisfaction issues.

1.5.3 Negative Effects of Body Dissatisfaction

Individuals with constant body misperceptions commonly experience problematic mental health issues that can affect their well-being. Based on Stanborough (2020), individuals extremely fixated on their body image have a higher risk of developing:

- Low self-esteem
- Body dysmorphic disorder (BDD)

This is because media content and advertisement images often portray certain

appearance ideals to the audience, subconsciously changing their mindset. Persuasive types of visual materials can shape societal norms and create a sense of crisis if individuals cannot meet the ideal body image (Better Health Channel, n.d.).

1.5.4 Low Self-esteem

According to the study by Macêdo Uchôa et al. (2020), the results found that the level of self-esteem relates to the tendency of body dissatisfaction, where a lower level of self-esteem is associated with a higher level of body dissatisfaction.

To identify individuals with low self-esteem, some common signs were suggested by Kendra Cherry (2023):

- Lack of confidence
- Negative social comparisons
- Difficulty accepting compliments
- Negative self-perception

These negative impacts often manifest societal perceptions in addressing toxic beauty standards that are unachievable.

1.5.5 Social Media

This study emphasizes the usage of Instagram as the core influential factor affecting the target audience's perspective on body image. Instagram is a free social media platform encouraging users to share pictures with their friends and engage with their peers (Instagram, n.d.). However, Instagram users nowadays spend much time exploring others' profiles and photos and often engage in constant social comparisons (Newport Academy, 2019). This is due to Instagram content posted by peers, influencers, and idols often pursuing unrealistic beauty standards that can encourage users to accept almost unachievable body images (Minoosepehr et al., 2014, as cited in Sulistyono et al., 2022).

1.5.6 Unrealistic Beauty Standards

The media continuously portrays idealized photos of individuals to reinforce the impression that unrealistic body images are desirable. The media is gradually establishing beauty standards that people are supposed to adhere to. Individuals must conform to an unattainable ideal body size to be perceived as beautiful, reflecting societal pressure on people's appearances (Kassir, 2021). Moreover, the negative phenomenon is created due to the large amount of social media content that aggressively shares "dietary tips" and "body goals," educating the public on the mentality that thin is acceptable.

For example, Figure 1.1 shows the unrealistic beauty standards of a female, such as a skinny waist, big breasts, flawless skin, and a fair skin tone, representing the ideal Asian beauty standard among the community. Also, Figure 1.2 portrays a male Instagram influencer with a chiselled body size, which often leads to body image distortion among the male community (Perkins, 2019).

1.5.7 Cultivation Theory

As cited in Perera (2023), cultivation theory is used to investigate the impact of media on viewers' perception of reality. Additionally, this theory is linked to the duration of an individual's exposure to media, as heavy exposure to social media can result in individuals adopting values and beliefs, such as the idea of handsome gentlemen and beautiful women (All About Theories for Communication, n.d.). Consequently, internet users will acquire "beauty standards" distortedly and view reality based on the ideas portrayed on social media.

Furthermore, the continuous presentation of unrealistic beauty standards can contribute to a distorted body image perception, fostering a misconception that only extreme thinness, fair skin tone, and flawless skin are socially acceptable (Aparicio-Martinez et al., 2019; McLean et al., 2018). Hence, it is essential to measure the target audience's time spent on social media and

the perceived beauty standards via the cultivation theory perspective. The adopted beauty standards can directly influence how individuals evaluate themselves and drive them to have body dissatisfaction (McLean et al., 2018).

2) Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter offers insights into the primary findings related to the study's research and the theoretical framework that applies to the study.

2.1 Primary findings

2.1.1 Unrealistic beauty standards

a. Thin Ideal

According to Volonte (2017), the community's view of beauty has been progressively eroded by the established concept of thinness in late-modern Western societies. Likewise, skinny beauty standards have been persistently maintained and expanded, but they have also formed public perceptions and the cultural definition of beauty. The fashion industry's increasing usage of the clothes sizing system has been further criticized by Volonte (2017), who describes it as a type of body shaming that promotes the idea that one must be slim to agree with trendy viewpoints.

As cited in Clay et al. (2005), the content analysis of media revealed that 76% of female characters and actors presented extra slim body sizes that further increased the idealized body images of women as a benchmark for self-evaluation. Also, in many cases, social media influencers play an essential role in establishing beauty standards. Still, the influencers created the trend to promote a slim, toned, or muscular appearance, which is the ideal one (Carrotte et al., 2017). The increased number of social media platform users in the 21st century means active internet users are constantly exposed to information with slim, idealised images. The public has assumed that thinness equals perfection because of the media's role in promoting unattainable beauty standards, which has sparked concern about body image distortion (Aparicio-Martinez et al., 2019). Furthermore, the common belief that "skinny is beautiful"

contributes to unfavourable body views, raising the possibility that teenagers will embrace restricted diet plans to meet social norms (Zhang et al., 2023).

b. Fair skin standards

Asian cultures have historically believed that having light-coloured skin is essential for attaining beauty standards. According to a classic researcher - Eric et al. (2008), this phenomenon emphasizes the cultural significance of skin tone and is influenced by Western concepts and persisting traditional norms. Asian nations have traditionally strongly emphasized white skin as a desirable feature. As an example of the long-lasting impact of this cultural beauty standard, countries such as China, Japan, Korea, and India have long expressed a desire for fair skin (Eric et al., 2008). In addition, the ongoing advertising of fair beauty products on social media reinforces the misleading belief that lighter skin tones are more attractive, prompting customers with darker skin tones to opt for lighter skin tones (Jha, 2016). Moreover, in a research study among adolescents, the result revealed that 78% of males and 63% of females describe prettiness with the idea of “light” and “fair” where the skin tone has become a significant sign in constructing beauty standards (Marway, 2017 & Eric et al., 2008). The research conducted by Mady et al. (2022) found that models with perfect skin conditions are excessively represented as commodities across media platforms and pressure people to conform to unattainable standards. Also, the interviewees stated that the whitening skincare and cosmetics advertising content continuously narratives fair skin as the selling point that can cause the viewers to fall into the unethical marketing trap of the idealised meaning of beauty.

Furthermore, the stereotyped thoughts on skin tone have appeared as the issue of pretty privileges, that fair-skinned individuals can attain advantages in terms of partner attractiveness (Marway, 2017). Hence, this unhealthy culture has changed the societal norm in perceiving the ideal appearance of a person, forcing people to obsess over skin whitening skin care and leaving

the viewers to view their image negatively (Krones et al., 2005 as cited in Garcia, 2019).

c. Flawless skin

While the perfect skin idea has significantly been promoted as a core beauty standard, the researcher also found that Instagram has been overwhelmed by the “filters world,” as users are highly obsessed with using filters for attractiveness (Garcia, 2019) or covering up their imperfect skin condition. Moreover, Eric et al. (2008) research findings show that skincare advertisements in this era greatly emphasize the idea that “good skin” should have the criteria of smooth, pore-less, bright, and beautiful. In contrast, social media's “bad skin” condition refers to wrinkles, dark and ugly. As such, portrayals of perfect skin in social media can cause people with acne issues to have significantly lower self-esteem (Gallitano & Berson, 2018).

2.1.2 Perfectionism

The dimension of perfectionism can predict a higher tendency for body dissatisfaction because the individual will extra worry about their appearance every minute, which will cause them to experience excessive anxiety (Foroughi et al., 2019 as cited in Sulistyono et al., 2022). Perfectionism is structured with two main factors which are adaptive (e.g., establishing personal guidelines required to be followed) and maladaptive (e.g., overly worried about imperfections) (Sulistyo et al., 2022). Adaptive perfectionism is consistently associated with body image issues (Wada & Tiggemann, 2013, cited in Sulistyono et al., 2022). Indeed, individuals with perfectionism are often preoccupied with their appearance, resulting in excessive levels of anxiety (Sulistyo et al., 2022). According to Jiotsa et al (2021), individuals constantly observing their appearance are much more likely to be influenced by appearance-related content on Instagram, triggering a higher level of body shame.

Moreover, perfectionists have a higher chance of body image dissatisfaction because they fear judgment or negative evaluation from the community (Mady et al., 2023). Hence,

perfectionists will always struggle with beauty standards to ensure they match social expectations, although those beauty standards are usually unrealistic. Consequently, they can predict more severe symptoms of body dysmorphic disorder (Foroughi et al., 2019 as cited in Sulistyono et al., 2022).

2.1.3 Effect of body dissatisfaction

a. Low self-esteem

Kendra Cherry (2023) defines low self-esteem as an individual with a poor sense of self-value that feelings of belonging might cause. This phenomenon is attributed to the constant change in fashion and beauty standards over time, and the perception of body image can be altered via external influence factors such as media (Tort-Nasarre et al., 2021).

Previous research suggested that body image is a component of self-esteem (O'Dea, 2012); hence, it became essential for internet users to confirm the current beauty trends to ensure they are accepted by the community (Thomas & Kotian, 2022). The need for acceptance within the community pressures individuals to align with the expectations and ultimately contributes to the distortion of body image (Sharif-Nia et al., 2024). Moreover, unrealistic beauty standards can also lead to negative self-perception of body images if the individual cannot meet the perfect standards, which can cause low self-esteem and self-confidence, as suggested by a classical researcher, Pop (2016). In the study of Pop (2016) and Macedo Uchoa et al. (2020), the researchers' experiment also shows a negative correlation between body image distortion level and self-esteem, where the higher the body dissatisfaction, the lower the individual's self-esteem. This study strongly confirms that body image dissatisfaction will influence self-esteem and lead to abnormal behaviours such as lack of confidence, unfavourable social comparisons, inability to accept compliments, and negative self-perception (Kendra Cherry, 2023). Moreover, Agyapong et al. (2020) cited that women tend to view

themselves as fat and diet to meet the ideal weight standard compared to men. The nature of body weight dissatisfaction is often found different among genders, as the “underweight” standard is identified as perfect for women, but males view it negatively.

Regardless of the trend of body image dissatisfaction, the assumption that people who are dissatisfied with their bodies have lower self-esteem was validated. The researchers noticed that low self-esteem in females has a greater connection with body image dissatisfaction in comparison to boys. This outcome reflects investigations on the connection between body satisfaction and self-esteem, which indicates a strong positive correlation between female body image satisfaction and self-esteem. However, the relationship between body image distortion and self-esteem level could also be reversed; low self-esteem individuals may lead them to view their body image negatively. A society adapted to the obsessive attitude of consistently achieving idealized beauty standards typically reflects that people with low self-esteem feel worthlessness, contributing to body dissatisfaction (Furnham, 2002).

2.1.4 Body dissatisfaction and social media influences

With the increase in the utilization of social media among young adults, there is a simultaneous increase in the desire for perfect bodies among internet users. According to Aparicio-Martinez et al. (2019), the researchers concluded that the most dangerous and influential social media was Instagram based on the user’s attitude toward caring for their posts’ viewers, likes, and comments. Moreover, Garcia (2019) also cited that the Royal Society for Public Health in the UK identified Instagram as the most detrimental social media platform people consistently use to compare their body image against the unrealistic, excessively edited, and filtered versions of reality.

This is due to the constant stream of flawless body images that can overload the viewers’ subconscious and promote the community’s belief that success in appearance is determined by

the concept of “what is beautiful is good” (Pop, 2016). Moreover, Pop (2016) also suggested that prolonged exposure to the idealized body image can amplify insecurities about physical attractiveness among the youth.

Social media can negatively shape consumers’ perception of body images, so people may feel anxious as they are highly engaged in social comparisons on their appearance (Tylka and Sabik 2010 as cited in Zhang et al. 2021). This generation has been exposed to many forms of beauty pageants, bodybuilding contests, or pop and celebrity beauty contests on mainstream media that promote the concept of beauty ought to be judged and compared, leading the youths to establish a competitive mindset on beauty standards (Garcia, 2019). As a result, the accumulation of these ideas of beauty can contribute to problems like body dissatisfaction. As referenced in Clay et al. (2005), an American survey of 500 teenage girls found that the idealized beauty standards on social media heavily influenced 70% of the respondents. This can also explain how media content quickly impacts young adulthood. Moreover, as quoted by Zhang et al. (2021), teenage girls are prone to upload more selfies or “outfit-of-the-day” images on social media platforms to prove their beauty is aligned with the standards. This is because Instagram can alter people's thoughts on the aesthetic viewpoint of beauty standards, encouraging viewers to apply makeup or skincare products to become the most attractive person in the group. Therefore, Instagram is a public competition platform that challenges others’ beauty (Seligson, 2016, as cited in Garcia, 2019).

Additionally, Garcia (2019) cited that those unrealistic beauty messages surround the community's daily lives and can be seen everywhere on social media; thus, it is not surprising that the statement “In US people spent more money on beauty procedures than education needs and social services” is introduced.

2.1.5 Social comparison

Many studies suggested that social media comparisons also influence an individual's self-esteem regarding body image. A classic author Vogel et al. (2014) cited that people intrinsically desire to compare themselves with peers as this presents a few social functions, including self-enhancement, fulfilling affiliation rules, self-evaluation, decision-making, gaining inspiration, and moderating emotions and mental health. Also, social comparison can be differentiated into 2 categories. An upward social comparison is where people compare with individuals with desirable characteristics. In contrast, a downward social comparison refers to an individual compared with others who adopt negative characteristics. Despite upward social comparison being defined as a beneficial attitude that could be able to inspire an individual to improve themselves to become the desire-self, throughout the research, the outcome more often provides the view that upward social comparisons will lead people to evaluate themselves negatively (Wills, 1981 & Wood, 1989 cited in Vogel et al., 2014). Additionally, Fardouly et al. (2014), as an experienced researcher, pointed out that according to sociocultural conceptions, body dissatisfaction can happen when an individual consistently compares their physical appearance to others. A classic study conducted by Tiggemann and Slater (2004) supported the hypothesis that higher social media usage positively correlates with an increased probability of individuals experiencing body image concerns.

Moreover, Instagram has become a source of social comparative information platform that may lead to upward social comparisons, as it provides a public space for users to perform their best version of themselves (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011 as cited in Vogel et al., 2014). In this case, the images uploaded to Instagram are typically viewed as “perfect” and resonate with the viewers' feelings for an upward comparison because this platform focuses on images that can be edited to the best version of self-image and overall representativeness that promotes a

higher level of bias. Certainly, as emphasized by Lewallen and Behm-Morawitz (2016) and Kim and Lee (2011), content displaying distinct body shapes and beauty ideals significantly impacts upward social comparisons on Instagram. This phenomenon is especially noticeable among individuals with active social networks, as receiving "likes" functions is a means of social approval. In this case, users may compare themselves with others who appear to represent society's beauty standards, which is closely connected to the desire for positive social approval via accumulating "likes."

2.2 Theoretical framework

2.2.1 Cultivation theory

In this digital era, the use of social media has become an essential living need that allows people to connect with society. Furthermore, Lai et al. (2015), conclude that different media can play the same role in shaping the viewers' perception of the real world. Hence, cultivation theory not only emphasizes the effects of television but also draws attention to the role of other media platforms in changing individuals' beliefs.

As cited in Rahmawati (2023) cultivation theory refers to the role of media in forming the viewers' values, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions via the presented content. Also, the idea of cultivation is a part of the sociocultural theory that comprises 3 significant components: media entities, the generation of messages, and the impact of interconnected messages on viewers. The basic principle of cultivation theory argues that the main trends propagated by media entities can reflect peoples' perceptions of reality to a greater extent as the viewers consume a large amount of media content (Shrum, 2017).

Also, the relationship between the duration viewers spent engaging in media content and their altered beliefs in beauty standards is the core reason that leads them to arise of the feeling of body dissatisfaction. The researchers examined the female body presentation in 150

popular video games in the United States across different platforms to understand the female presentation on various levels of photorealism. They found that the female characters are commonly presented in perfect bodies such as tiny waists, hips, and chest size. Meanwhile, this practice has eventually conformed to the thin ideals, prompting the issue of body dissatisfaction along with the rising popularity of these misrepresented body standards of video games (Martins et al., 2009 as cited in Lai et al., 2015). Many media messages convey reality inaccurately, such as character presentation, images, and real-life stories that will mislead the public's thoughts. This is because the content on Instagram and other leading social media platforms is always perceived as accurate; therefore, whatever is presented online can subconsciously alter people's perceptions. Besides that, people are eager to share those idealized images to support their beliefs on social media which can shape people's opinions and lead to judgements (Nevzat, 2018).

The research outcome of Lai et al. (2015) stated that a few studies suggested that different ages, races, or genders will affect individual differences in forming social reality. Indeed, females have a higher tendency to reduce self-esteem after long-term media exposure; however, white males' self-esteem will increase in the same phenomenon. This is because highly visual social networking sites like Instagram undermine adult users' ability to develop unhealthy body-related beliefs and disseminate biased content that can numb people's views and expose users to more people who share them (Stein et al., 2019 & Nevzat, 2018).

3) Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Chapter overview

This chapter will discover the research methodology, such as research design, target sample, survey instrument design, research variables, research procedure,

3.2 Type of research

The study will utilize a quantitative research design, allowing data collection and establishing a measurable relationship between variables. The quantitative research design is selected due to the well-established research methods and strategies utilized in quantitative research for data collection and analysis, as evidenced by previous studies. Consequently, this research design is expected to yield highly valid and reliable results (Libarkin & Kurdziel, 2002).

Moreover, according to Apuke (2017), the quantitative research method can be differentiated into 4 core categories: correlational research, experimental research, survey research, and casual-comparative research. Meanwhile, this study will emphasize the use of survey research as the framework of the study, as this method can yield a large amount of feedback from the targeted population (Glasow, 2005). Furthermore, the survey research design offers a visualization of collected data. It allows for comprehensive data analysis via charts or graphs to establish the relationships between social media use and its impact on body dissatisfaction among UTAR students (Gaille, 2020).

As a result, an online survey will be implemented to assess the consumption of Instagram along with the responses of UTAR students to the distortion of their body image.

3.3 Sampling choice

The targeted sampling audience will be the UTAR students using social media as their

primary platform for social interaction. The specialized sample approach is aligned with the specific focus of the study on UTAR students and their involvement with Instagram. By narrowing the demographic settings, the research will also gain relevant information regarding the consumption of Instagram by UTAR students and its potential influence and effects on body dissatisfaction.

Since this research focuses explicitly on the UTAR students' perception of their body image after prolonged exposure to idealized beauty standards, probability sampling – simple random sampling will be suitable for selecting the sampling model. It requires choosing specific criteria such as “UTAR students” and “Instagram users” to attain accurate responses from the survey. However, the population members will be randomly selected to attend the survey questionnaire ((Fleetwood, (2023) & McCombes, (2023)).

3.4 Survey Instrument Design

The survey instrument design is adapted from the validated questionnaire that other authors established, and its reliability and precision are highly trustworthy. In section A, the survey collects demographic information from respondents to ensure their suitability for the research objective, targeting UTAR students who actively use Instagram.

Furthermore, section B will focus on research objective 1, which aims to assess the impact of using Instagram on the body dissatisfaction issue among UTAR students. In Part 1, the questionnaire consists of a 5-point Likert Scale for the participants to choose the most suitable answer based on the question.

Additionally, section C will focus on research objective 2, which aims to obtain insights into the students' reactions to using Instagram and their state of body dissatisfaction. This section also includes a 5-point Likert Scale, which allows the respondents to express their responses based on their perceptions and experiences.

3.5 Measurement

The questionnaire will be transformed into graphical representations to streamline the responses' analysis and produce an extensive understanding of how UTAR students behave regarding concerns related to body dissatisfaction. There will be a minimum of 100 responses to this survey questionnaire from UTAR students, ensuring the dataset can generate trustworthy insights for the study.

3.6 Procedure

Due to the broad reach of UTAR students, the survey questionnaire will be created and distributed online using Google Forms. This strategy aims to effectively engage many attendees (Salmons, 2023), enabling a more comprehensive and inclusive data-gathering procedure to capture a wide range of viewpoints on student body dissatisfaction. The survey questionnaire will also be distributed by sharing it on Instagram, targeting UTAR Instagram users to access it. While this research only focuses on the uses of Instagram as the main influential factor that will alter the students' perception of body dissatisfaction, the survey questionnaire will not be distributed via other social media platforms to ensure a clear focus on the target audiences.

3.7 Pilot Test

A small group of UTAR students will be selected to test the participants and the survey design before the full-scale implementation to ensure that the survey instrument design aligns with the research objectives. The preliminary test is essential for gaining insight into any challenges that might arise during the data collection process. Consequently, the survey questionnaire will be revised to establish a strong connection between the survey and the study, avoiding collecting inaccurate information that may hinder accurate interpretation (Dovetail Editorial Team, 2023). Adopting this comprehensive method guarantees that all relevant questions and variables related to the body dissatisfaction issues of young adults are

appropriately examined.

3.8 Research Validity

The survey questionnaires used for this study were adapted from earlier validated research instruments used in similar settings. More precisely, the segment evaluating the levels of self-esteem among people was influenced by Rosenberg's (1965) Self-Esteem Scale (RSS). The Rosenberg scale is a well-established validated instrument developed explicitly for evaluating self-esteem, containing both favourable and unfavourable emotions regarding oneself. Adopting this comprehensive technique is essential to guarantee that all key issues and aspects associated with body dissatisfaction are examined. O'Dea (2012) discovered that previous research has indicated a correlation between self-esteem and body dissatisfaction. Therefore, it is crucial to evaluate the self-esteem levels of the participants.

The survey questionnaire is also called the State Self-Esteem Scale (SESS). This scale assesses the fluctuations in self-esteem, providing insights into temporary changes in self-worth in this survey. The SESS has been adopted by many researchers with more than 2300 citations. This strong level of recognition emphasises its importance as a valuable instrument for assessing fluctuations in self-esteem. Researchers from numerous fields have adopted the SESS, proving its value and reliability in capturing changes in people's self-worth.

Additionally, to measure the respondents' perception of self-body image, the questionnaire is adapted from the Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ) to assess the individuals' appearance evaluation and appearance orientation (Brown et al., 1990). This questionnaire was developed in 1990, translated into different languages for research, and validated by various countries, showcasing the high level of validity of the survey questions to attain body image-related information (Fernandez et al., 2022).

Moreover, a survey questionnaire was applied to assess the level of social media usage

and its relationship with body dissatisfaction in terms of social comparisons. This questionnaire was adapted from the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-3 (SATAQ-3), effectively measuring an individual's conformity to societal beauty standards (Calogero et al., 2004).

Also, the survey questionnaire was adapted from the Upward Physical Appearance Comparison Scale-3 (UPACS), which measures the upward appearance comparisons of UTAR students about online content (O'Brien, 2009). In this section, the adapted questions remain the key constructs and items from the original UPACS, ensuring the result is relevant to the research area.

3.9 Research Reliability

The survey results are reliable as pilot testing is carried out to assess the accuracy and clarity of the survey questionnaire on the research subject. Given the results of the pilot testing, changes and enhancements were carried out to improve the survey instrument. These changes contributed to the reliability of the survey findings, guaranteeing that the information gathered was accurate and applicable. By prioritizing survey instrument validation through pilot testing, the study we conducted reveals its commitment to producing research findings that are reliable and in empirical data (Shakespeare, 2023).

Moreover, this survey questionnaire has undergone ethical review and has been approved by the UTAR Scientific and Ethical Review Committee (SERC). The approval reference number is U/SERC/78-244/2024, indicating that the survey questionnaire fulfils the study's ethical guidelines, standards, and safeguards. The ethical clearance of the authorities is significant and highlights the research's outcome reliability.

4) Chapter 4: Finding and Analysis

4.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter will comprehensively analyse the 100 responses gathered through the survey questionnaires.

4.2 Survey Analysis

There were 3 sections in the survey, including demographical questions, self-esteem assessment, multidimensional body-self relationship questions (MBRSQ), and sociocultural attitudes toward appearance (SATAQ). All the questions are designed on a Likert scale to obtain an in-depth understanding of the research objectives. The scale indications are strongly agreed, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree to ensure consistency in participants' responses. Moreover, the analysis of data will be represented in charts and graphs to visualize the outcome of the survey. All data will be evaluated based on the 100 responses collected in the study.

4.2.1 Demographic Profiles

This section will analyse the participants' demographical information, including the field of study, age group, gender, type of Instagram content that appeals the most, and the frequency of participants engaging with fashion and beauty content. This section aims to obtain the respondents' foundational understanding of their profiles on Instagram usage.

4.2.1.1 Field of study

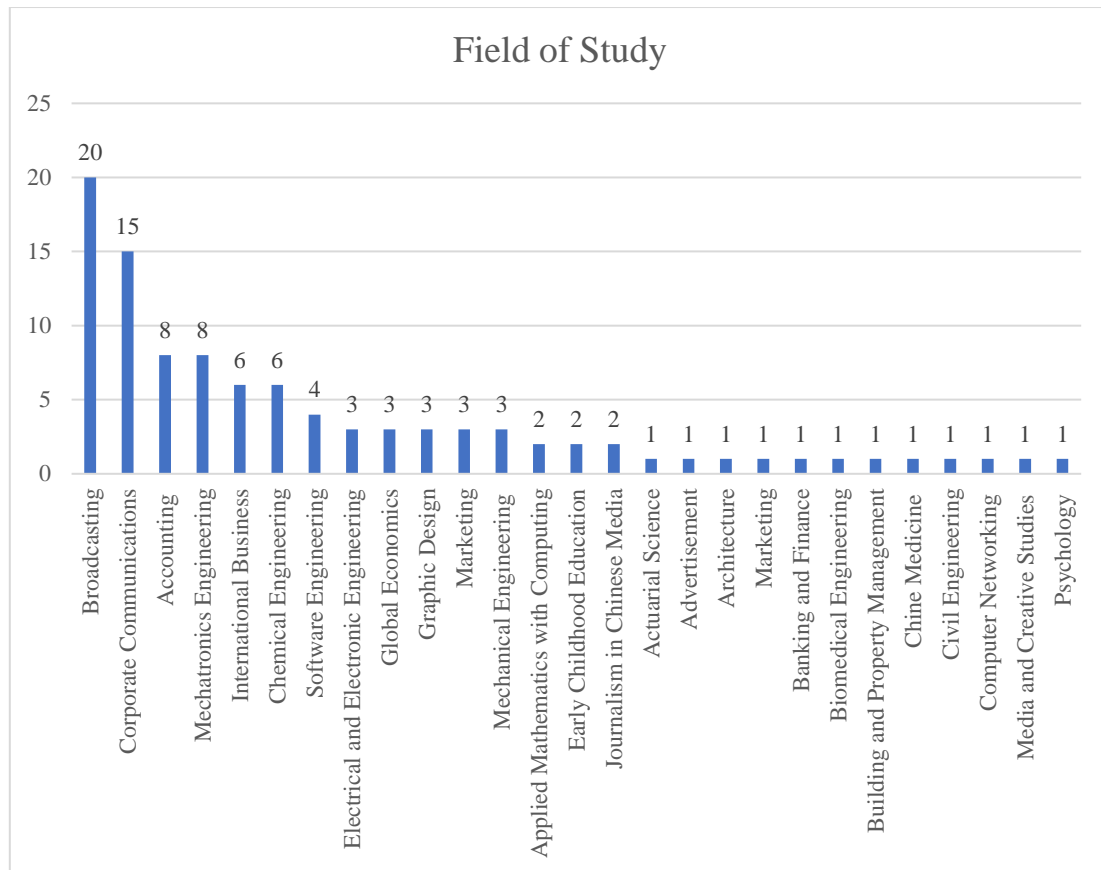


Figure 4. 1: Field of study Distribution of 100 Respondents

Based on the graph above, Broadcasting students formed the largest group in the survey questionnaire, comprising 20% of the total respondents. Corporate Communications students were the second largest group that responded to the survey questionnaire, constituting 15% of the respondents. Moreover, Accounting and Mechatronics Engineering students each contributed 8 respondents, accounting for 8% of the total respondents. The International Business and Chemical Engineering students also contributed 6 responses each (6%) to the survey questionnaire. Subsequently, Software Engineering students accounted for 4% of the survey. Besides that, Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Global Economics, Graphic Design, Marketing, and Mechanical Engineering contributed each contributed 3 respondents, comprising 3% of the total respondents. Followed by Applied Mathematics with Computing,

Early Childhood Education, and Journalism in Chinese Media students collectively provided 6 responses, accounting for 6% of the survey. Lastly, in courses such as Actuarial Science, Advertisement, Architecture, Marketing, Banking and Finance, Biomedical Engineering, Building Property Management, Chinese Medicine, Civil Engineering, Computer Networking, Media and Creative Studies, and Psychology courses, students had only 1 response each, which comprised 12% of the survey.

The survey is not limited to the UTAR campus; hence, students from the Sungai Long campus and students from the Kampar campus are included in the survey. This approach ensures more comprehensive research of UTAR students' attitudes toward body dissatisfaction across different campuses.

4.2.1.2 Age Group

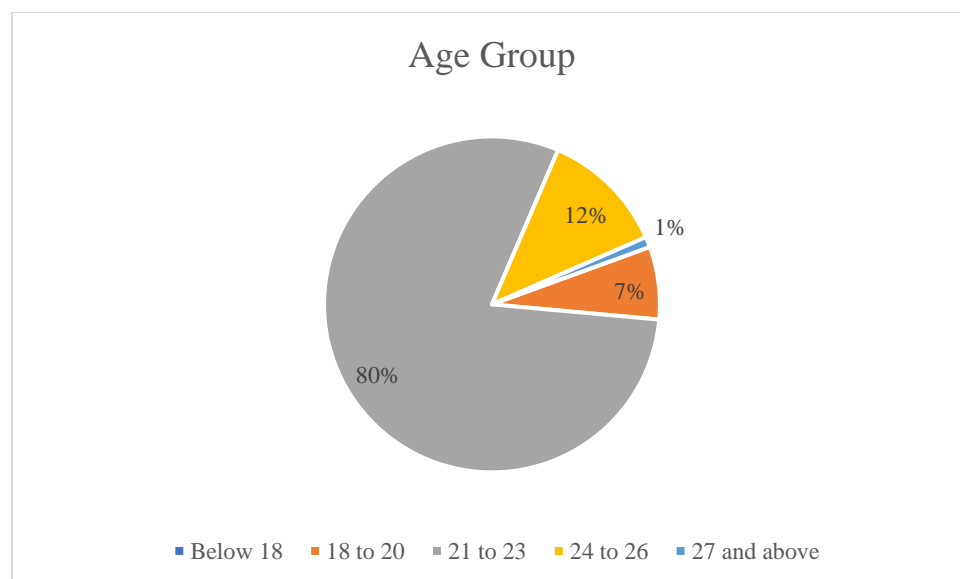


Figure 4. 2: Age Distribution of 100 Respondents

A total of 100 participants responded to the survey questionnaire, and none of the respondents were below 18 years old. While the survey is aimed at UTAR students, the most significant proportion of the age groups is 21 to 23 years old, which accounts for 80% of the

100 respondents. The following age groups are 24 to 26 years old and comprise 12% of the population. The third highest age group among the 100 respondents included those between 18 and 20 at 7%. Last, only 1% of respondents were 27 years old or older.

4.2.1.3 Gender

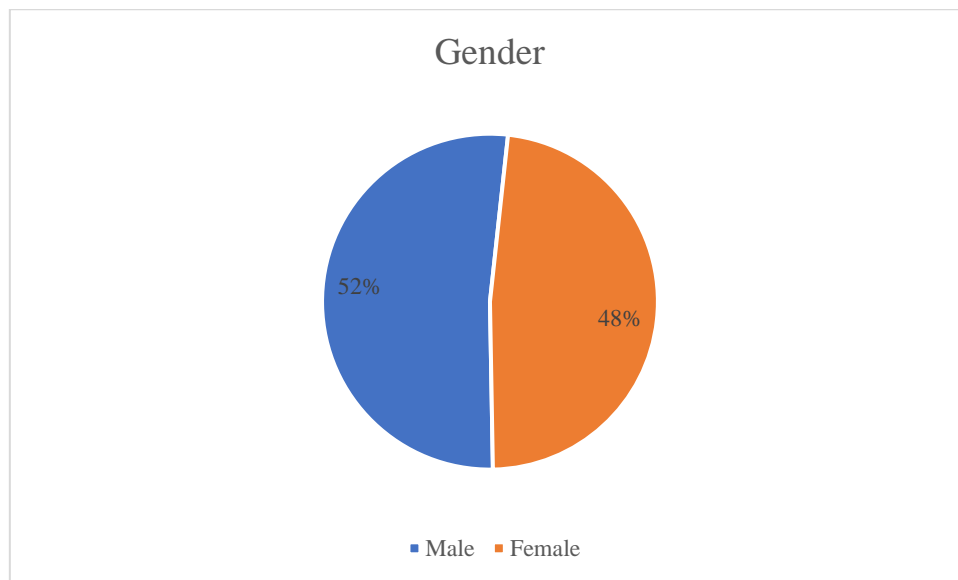


Figure 4. 3: Gender Distribution of 100 Respondents

Source: Developed survey questionnaire for the research

This survey questionnaire aims to obtain insight into both genders' self-perspectives regarding body image and the usage of Instagram. Both genders nearly received a similar amount of feedback, while male respondents occupied 52% of the total amount, and female respondents were capped at 48%.

4.2.1.4 The type of content appeals the most to the students

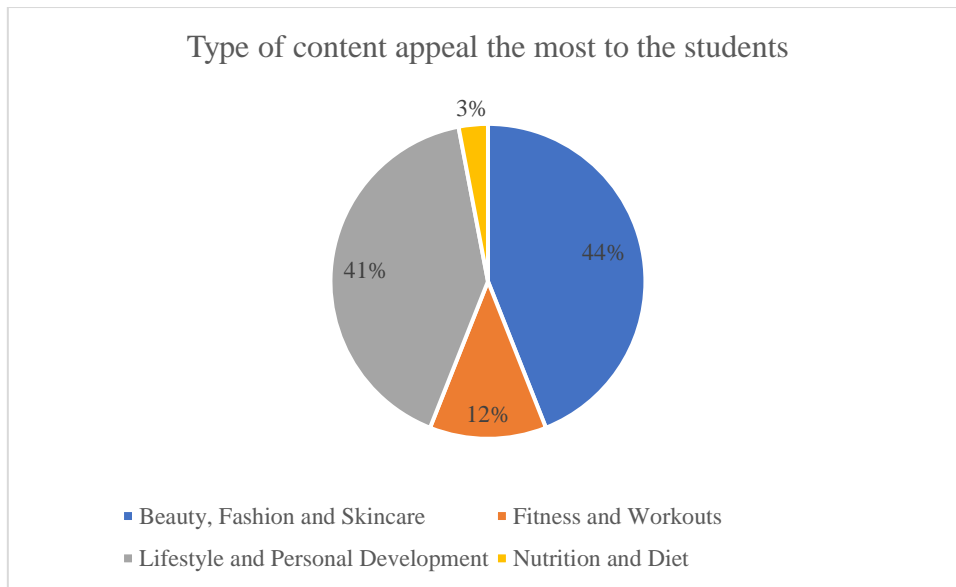


Figure 4. 4: Content Appeal Distribution of 100 Respondents

Source: Developed survey questionnaire for the research

According to the collected data, the pie chart illustrates that the most significant proportion of students, constituting 44%, appeal the most to Beauty, Fashion, and Skincare content. Moreover, 41% of respondents chose lifestyle and personal development as their favourite content on social media. This is followed by 12% of respondents opting to view fitness and workout content the most while using social media. Also, the option of nutrition and diet obtained the slightest interest, with only 3% of students indicating it as their preferred content.

4.2.1.5 How often do you engage with Instagram content about fashion and beauty?

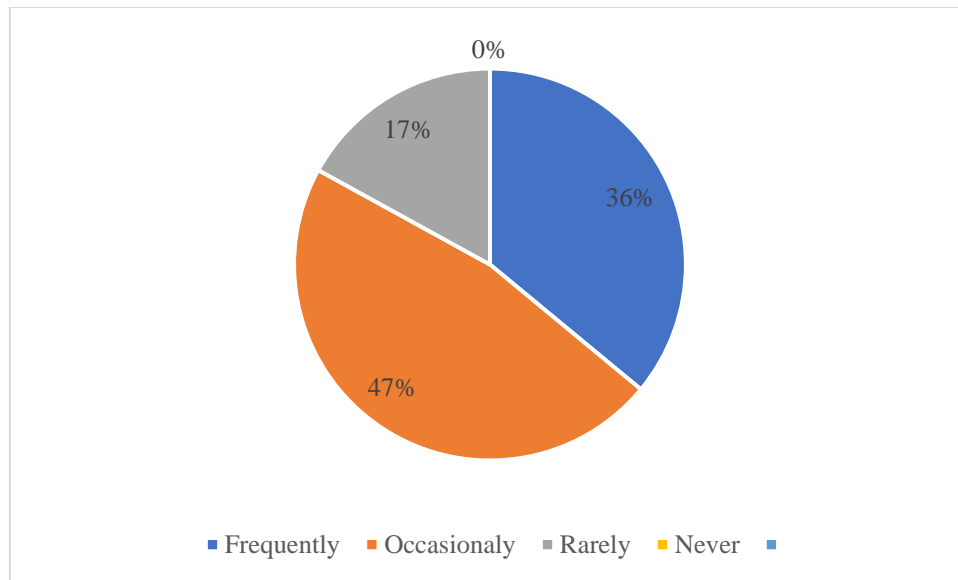


Figure 4. 5: The distribution of frequency of students engaging with fashion and beauty content

This question aimed to assess the frequency of students engaging with beauty and fashion content and how it will affect their attitudes toward body dissatisfaction. From the data obtained, most students claimed that they engaged in fashion and beauty content occasionally, at 47%. Moreover, 36% of students chose the “frequently” option for this question, and 17% chose the “rarely” option. However, none of the students declared they had never viewed fashion and beauty content.

4.2.2 Impact of Instagram Content on Body Dissatisfaction

In this section, the respondents are required to answer the question based on the 5-point Likert scale at strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree.

4.2.2.1 My self-esteem is affected when I lose friends or followers on Instagram.

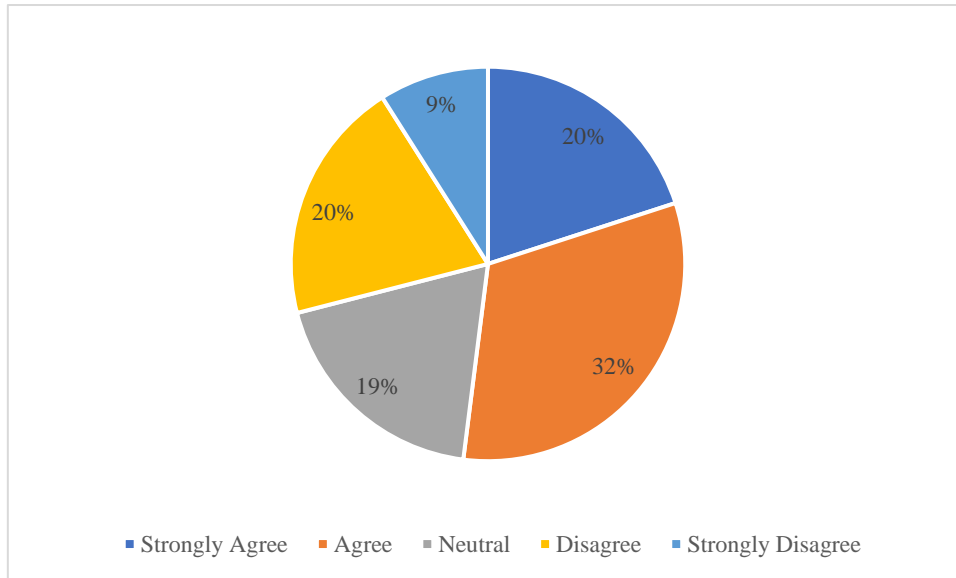


Figure 4. 6: The respondent's agreement with losing followers on Instagram and its effect on Self-esteem

This question is designed to evaluate the students' responses to self-esteem after losing followers on Instagram. According to the pie chart reading, 52% of respondents indicated that losing followers on Instagram would affect their self-esteem. While 20% of respondents chose "strongly agree" and 32% chose "agree" with the question. Interestingly, these findings revealed a gender difference, with 23% of male students and 29% of female students expressing concerns about the impact of losing followers on their self-esteem.

However, 19% of students held a neutral attitude towards the loss of followers on social media accounts. Moreover, 20% of respondents disagreed with the statement that losing followers will affect their self-esteem. Also, the lowest number of respondents chose "strongly disagree" based on the question, acquiring only 9%.

4.2.2.2 I am not satisfied with my appearance when comparing it to the standards and ideals on Instagram.

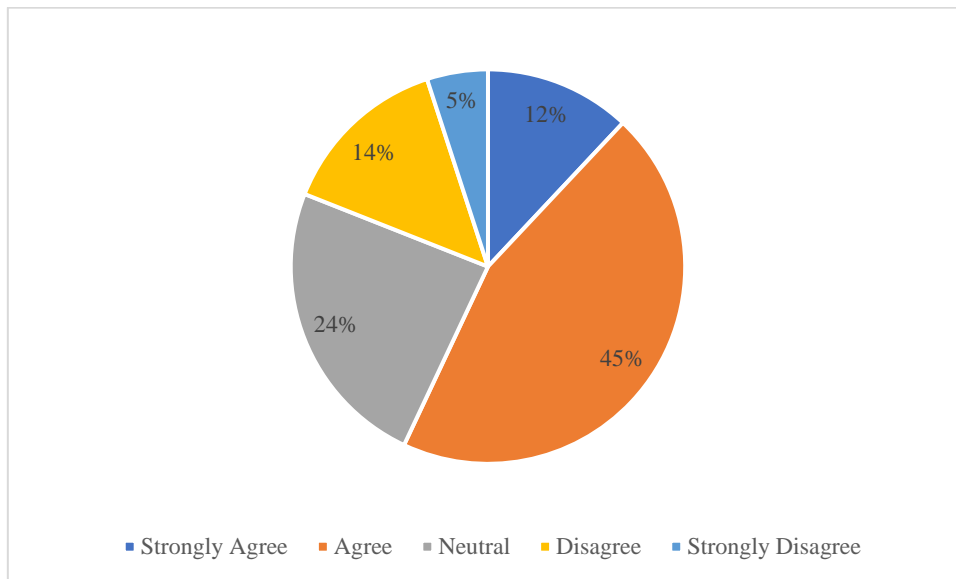


Figure 4. 7: The distribution of respondents' agreement with the statement of dissatisfaction towards their appearance compared with the standards online.

This question aims to measure the students' satisfaction level towards their body image compared with online standards. More than half of the respondents were dissatisfied with their appearance compared to the beauty standards portrayed online. The data reveals that 12% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement, while 45% of students agreed. Among the 57% of respondents who agreed with the statement, 33 were female students, and 24% were male students, which shows a minor gender difference in body dissatisfaction.

The pie chart shows that 24% of respondents still have a neutral attitude while comparing their appearance with unrealistic beauty ideals on social media. Additionally, 14% of respondents disagreed with the statement, while 5% strongly disagreed with their dissatisfaction with their appearance compared to online images.

4.2.2.3 I feel pressured to conform to certain body ideals or trends on Instagram, which sometimes affects my self-esteem.

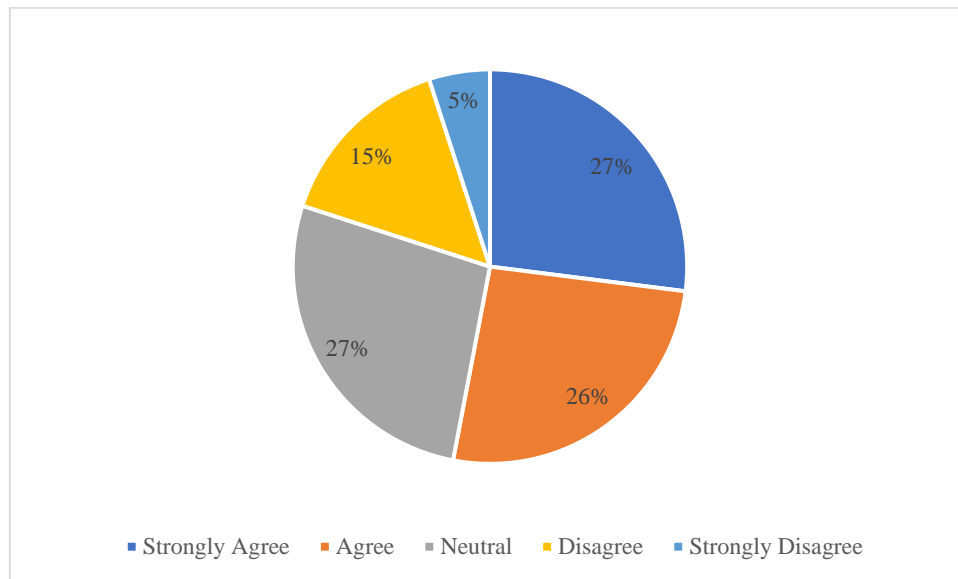


Figure 4. 8: The distribution of respondents' feelings of pressure to confirm the beauty standards or trends on Instagram

This question examines the respondent's stressed feelings about pursuing the beauty ideal and trends on Instagram. Most students feel pressure to conform to certain beauty ideals portrayed on Instagram. 27% of the respondents claimed to “strongly agree” that they think high tension following the beauty trends on Instagram. Aside from that, 26% of the students also claimed that they agreed with the feeling of stress about following the beauty ideals on social media, which sometimes affects their self-esteem. There is also a minor difference in the male and female choices, with 24 respondents identifying as male and 29 as female.

In comparison, 27% of students chose a neutral attitude toward the pressure to keep up to date with the Instagram fashion trend. In contrast, some respondents disagreed with being pressured to follow Instagram fashion. 15% of students declared that they “disagree” with the statement, and the remaining 5% claimed to “strongly disagree” with the question.

4.2.2.4 My self-esteem fluctuates based on the types of body images and content I view on Instagram.

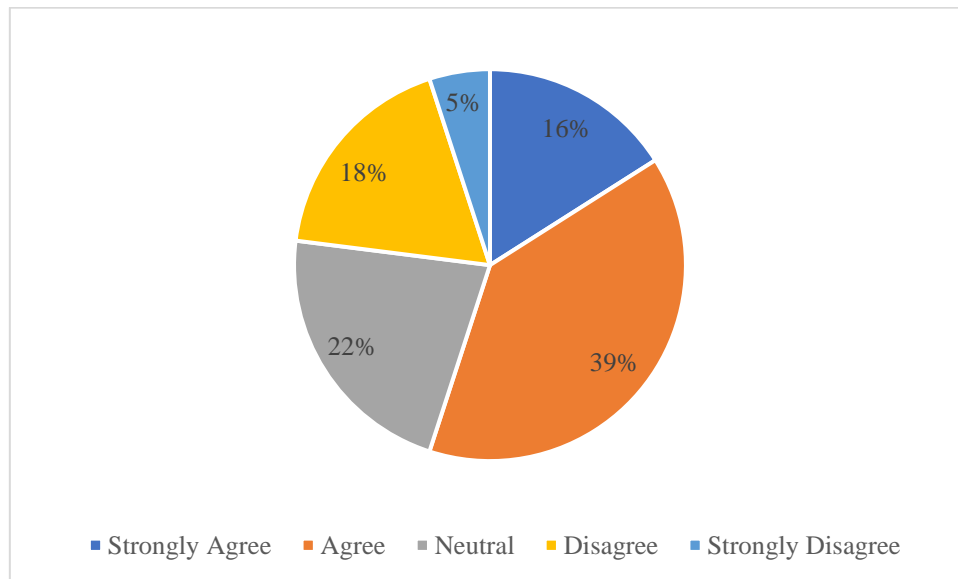


Figure 4. 9: The distribution of respondents' agreement regarding their self-esteem fluctuations after viewing images on Instagram

This question is designed to understand the impact of beauty images on students' self-esteem. According to the collected data, 16% of the students strongly agreed that their self-esteem constantly fluctuates due to the influence of beauty images on social media. Moreover, 39% of respondents agreed with the statement, contributing to the majority of the community. At the same time, there are 28 female and 25 male respondents in this proportion.

Also, students who chose the “neutral” option accounted for 22%. In contrast, 18% and 5% of respondents declared that they disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement, as they felt that there was no significant impact on their self-esteem.

4.2.2.5 I believe my body is unable to measure up to the idealized beauty standards on Instagram.

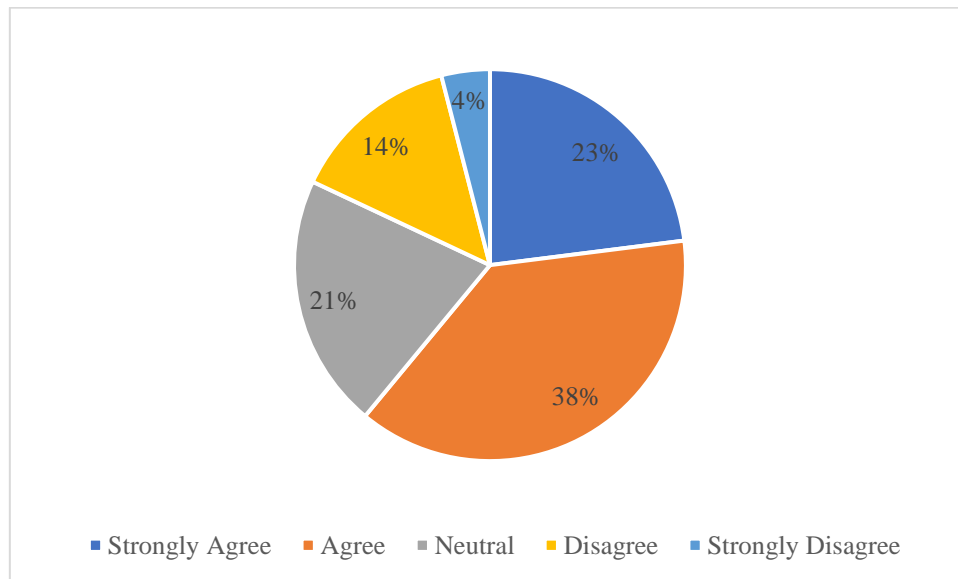


Figure 4. 10: The distribution of the respondents' opinions towards self-image compared with the beauty standards on Instagram.

This question is targeted to investigate the respondents' opinions on their self-image compared with the beauty standards on Instagram. The pie chart reading indicated that most respondents had a negative attitude towards their body image compared to the beauty ideals on Instagram. While 23% strongly agreed that their body image cannot reach the beauty standards on Instagram. Also, the students who chose the "agree" option acquired the most significant proportion among the 100 respondents at 38%. The 61% of the agreement statement indicated 27 male respondents and 34 female students, which shows that the UTAR students were generally dissatisfied with their appearance compared to the images online.

On the other hand, 14% of respondents disagreed with the question, and 4% strongly disagreed. Lastly, 21% of respondents are choosing neutral for this question.

4.2.2.6 I feel my body is unaccepted and unappreciated by others based on the images I see on Instagram.

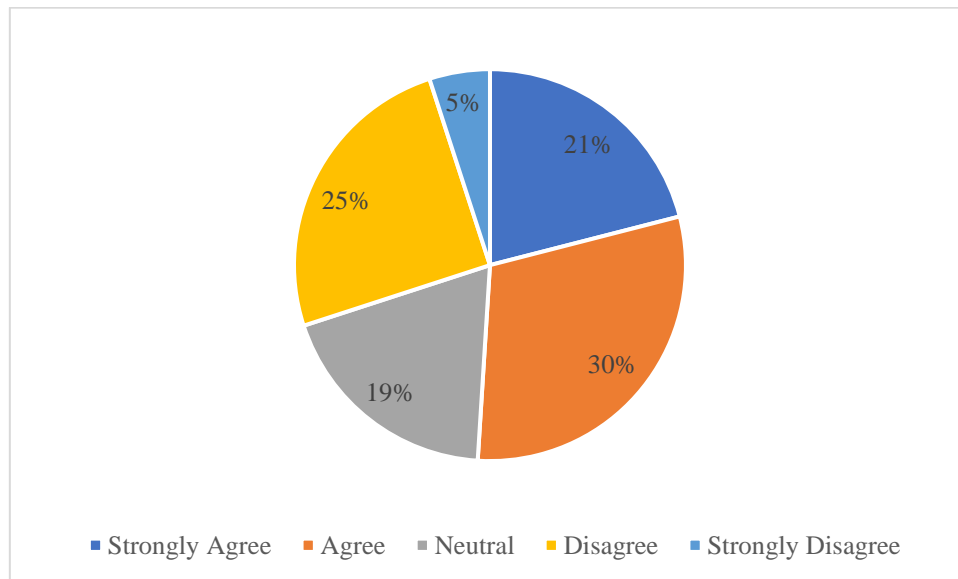


Figure 4. 11: The distribution of students who feel that their body is unaccepted and unappreciated by others

This questionnaire is created to understand how individuals perceive their bodies when they encounter images on Instagram and assess their feelings of rejection and lack of appreciation from others. There were 11 female respondents, and 10 male students made up 21% of those strongly agreed with the statement. Also, 14% of female and 15% of male respondents agreed with this question.

Nevertheless, the pie chart indicated that 19% of students were neutral towards the public perception of their body image. Next, 25% of respondents disagreed, and 5% strongly disagreed with the statement.

4.2.2.7 I frequently compare my body to the images and content on Instagram.

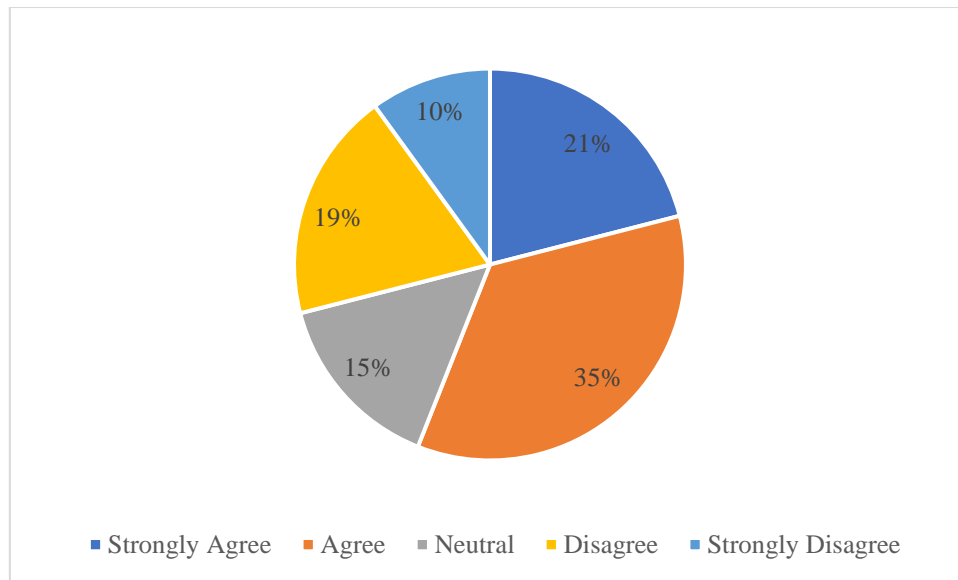


Figure 4. 12: The distribution of the students on comparing itself with the Instagram images

This questionnaire is designed to obtain insight into the students' frequency of comparing body images to images and content on Instagram. The students were chosen for the "strongly agree" option at 21% and the "agree" option at 35%. These two options were found to be 30% female and 26% male, which indicated that females have a slightly higher tendency to compare their body shape with others, resulting in dissatisfaction.

However, the chart indicated that only 15% of the respondents have a neutral attitude towards this issue. Moreover, 19% of the students picked the "disagree" option, while 10% picked the "strongly disagree" option. The disagreement proportion comprised 16% male and 13% female students.

4.2.2.8 I often edit and filter my photographs before posting them on Instagram to fit specific beauty standards.

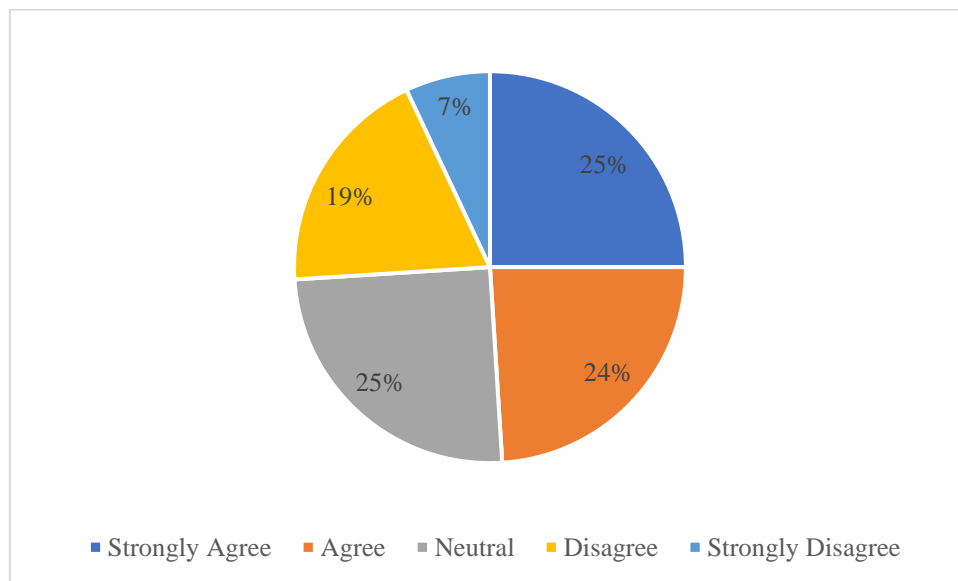


Figure 4. 13 Distribution of the respondents' agreement towards the photo editing behaviour

Source: Developed survey questionnaire for the research

This question investigates the students' photo editing behaviour before posting them on their social media accounts. According to the data obtained from the survey, 25% of students strongly agreed, and 24% agreed with the question. The majority are female students (28 responses) who will more frequently edit their pictures than male students (21 responses).

However, the students who neither do so are 25%, which has no significant discrepancy with those chosen for “disagree” and “strongly disagree” at 26%.

4.2.3 Students' reaction towards Instagram content

In this section, the respondents are required to answer the question based on the 5-point Likert scale at strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree that best matches their opinion.

4.2.3.1 Instagram content portrays an unrealistic and unattainable standard of beauty.

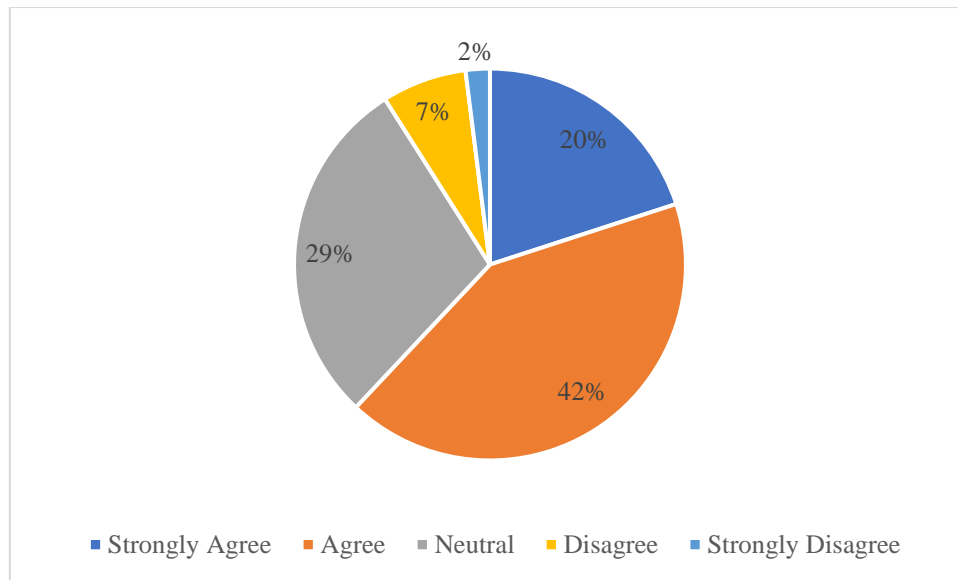


Figure 4. 14: The distribution of respondents' agreement with the statement

This question focused on obtaining the respondents' opinions on whether Instagram content presents an unrealistic and unattainable standard of beauty. From the pie chart analytics, students claimed that the "strongly agree" stand had reached 20%. Also, the number of respondents chosen to "agree" has increased significantly to 42%, constituting this question's largest population. There, 29% of students are neutral towards this issue. Moreover, 7% and 2% of students were not sensitive towards the unrealistic beauty standards on Instagram as they were opting for "disagree" and "strongly disagree" in this question.

4.2.3.2 Instagram content fosters an unhealthy and negative environment for body image issues.

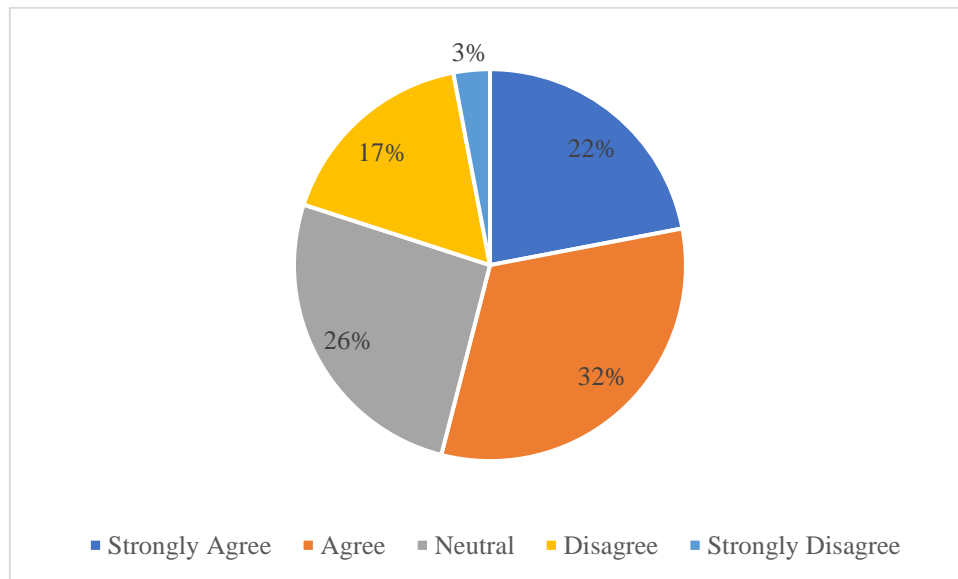


Figure 4. 15: The distribution of the students' thoughts on Instagram content will create an unhealthy environment for body image problem

This question examined the students' perceptions towards Instagram content, which can foster an unhealthy and negative environment for body image issues. 54% of students chose the option of "strongly agree" (22%) and "agree" (32%) to this statement, which emphasized that the dominant population believe Instagram images are creating an unhealthy and damaging platform for body image issues. However, 26% of students did not have either positive or negative attitudes towards Instagram and the toxic environment for body image issues. Furthermore, 17% of the students voted to disagree, and 3% of them voted strongly disagreed.

4.2.3.3 Instagram content influences my perceptions and attitudes towards beauty and appearance.

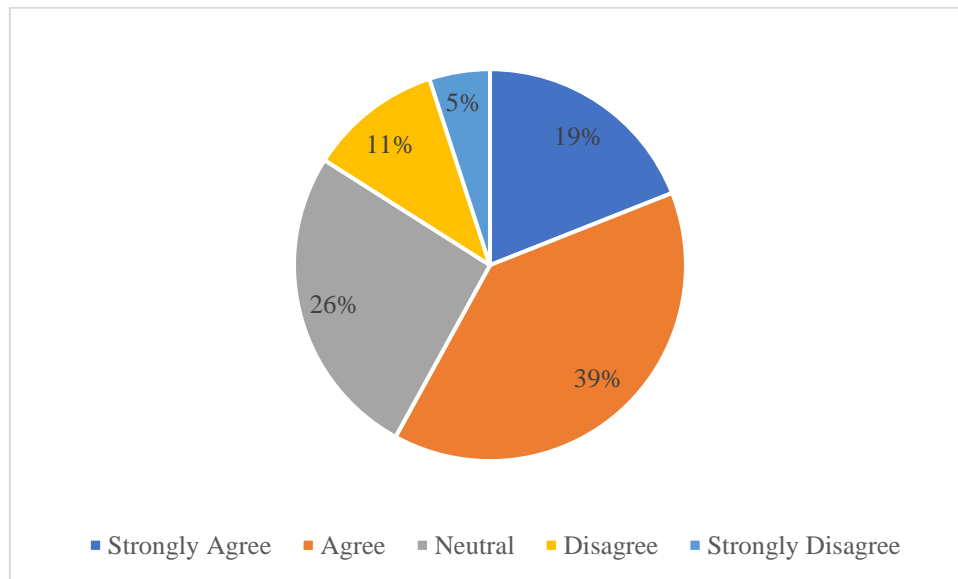


Figure 4. 16: The distribution of Instagram in influencing students' beauty perceptions

Source: Developed survey questionnaire for the research

This question is developed to understand the tendency of Instagram to influence the students' perceptions of beauty and appearance. The leading group of respondents picked "agree" regarding the question, while only 19% of students picked "strongly agree". In both agreement selections, 32% of students were female and 26% were male.

Moreover, 26% of students have no significant thoughts on their beauty perception about Instagram pictures. Even so, only 11% and 5% of students disagreed and strongly disagreed with the question, as they have beauty standards that will not easily change because of the trend.

4.2.3.4 I would like my body to look like the models on Instagram.

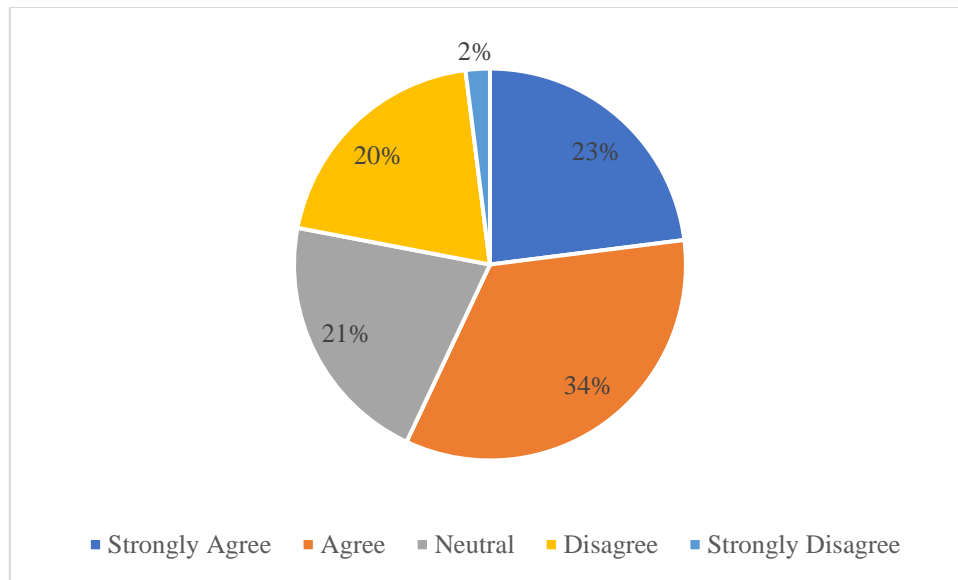


Figure 4. 17: The distribution of students who wish to improve their body image to match Instagram beauty standards

The objective of this question is to obtain insights into the students' perceptions of the tendency they want to alter their body image to match the Instagram model standard. Throughout the survey, the data obtained showed that 23% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement and wished to improve their body image to fit the public beauty standards. It contained 13 male respondents and 10 female respondents. Moreover, 16 male and 18 female students comprised 34% of the "agree" option.

Nevertheless, 21% of the students were irresolute about changing their perception to improve their body image or maintain their current look. Also, 12 females and 8 males were chosen to "disagree" with this question as they would like to preserve their appearance rather than alter it to match the public expectation. Aside from that, only 2 females strongly disagreed with the statement that becoming the original version of themselves is the best version of self.

4.2.3.5 I often seek validation or approval for my appearance based on like counts and comments on Instagram.

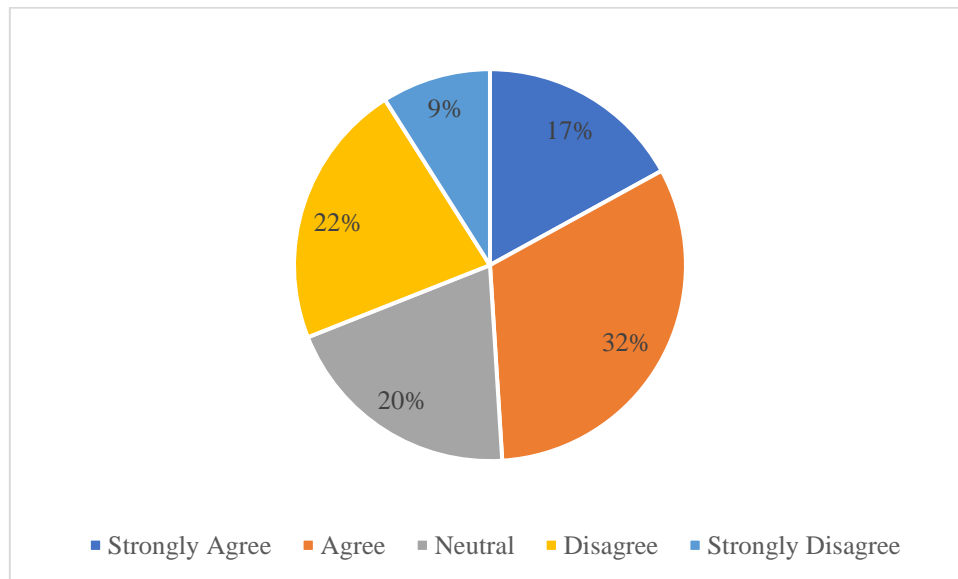


Figure 4. 18: The distribution of students' wishes to receive likes and comments for approval of appearance

This questionnaire is aimed to examine the student's behaviour towards the relationship between their appearance and likes or comments received on Instagram. This question only received 49% of students agreeing with the statement, while 17% strongly agreed and 32% agreed. Moreover, 20% of the students nominated “neutral” as the likes and comments have neither benefits nor no effect on their perception of appearance. Also, 22% of students disagreed, and 9% strongly disagreed with the question.

4.2.3.6 Exposure to Instagram content makes me wish I could change aspects of my physical appearance.

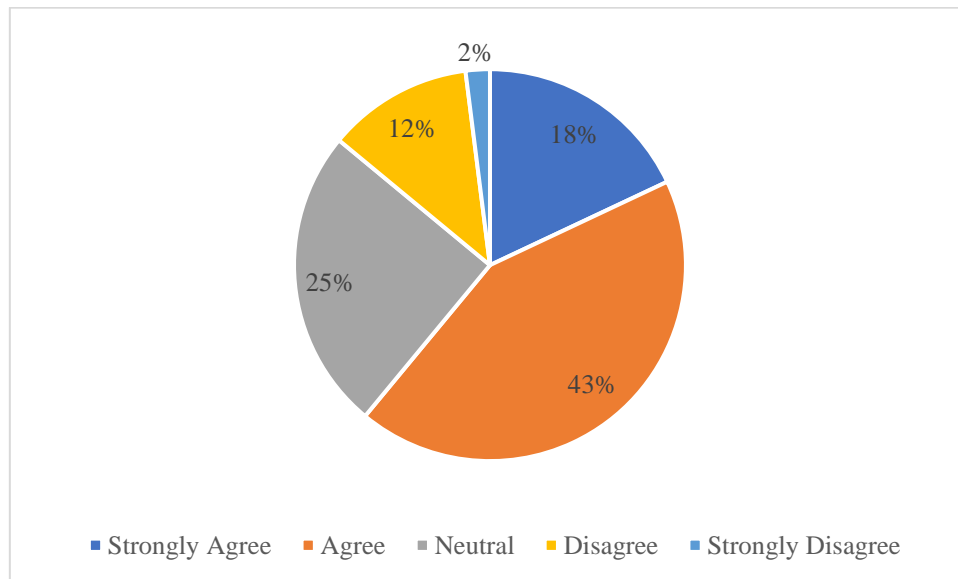


Figure 4. 19: The distribution of the students wishes to change their appearance

This question aimed to understand the students' opinions on changing aspects of their physical appearance after exposure to Instagram beauty ideals. Most students wanted to change their appearance due to the influence of Instagram beauty standards. This is because 18% of students picked the “strongly agree” statement, and “43% of students picked “agree” to showcase their willingness to alter their appearance. Yet, 24% of students still have a neutral attitude when encountering beauty images on social media. Besides that, 12% of students chosen “disagree” to this question while 2% chosen for “strongly disagree”.

4.2.3.7 I often avoid engaging in online activities because I feel my physical appearance does not match the standards portrayed on Instagram

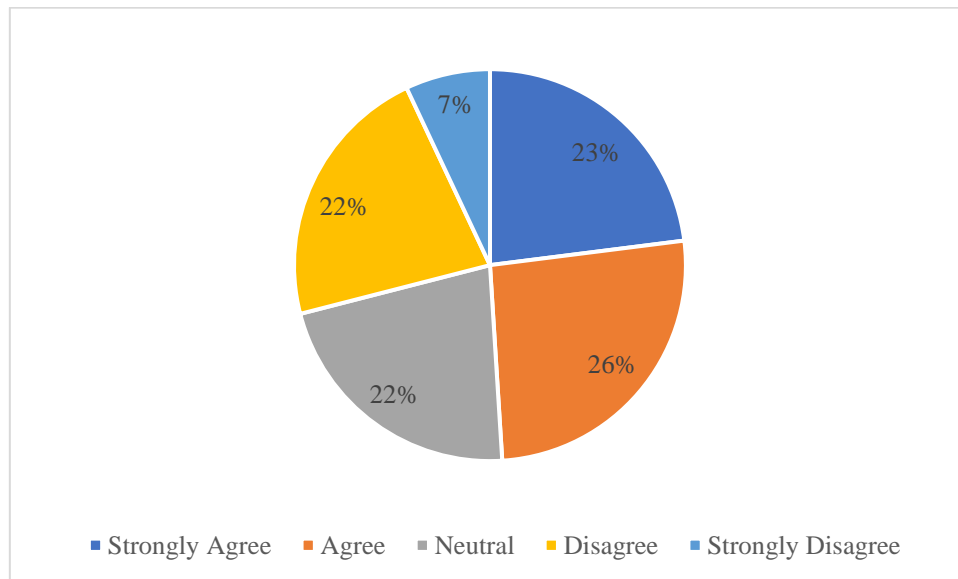


Figure 4. 20: The distribution of the students who tend to avoid engaging in online activities

This question seeks in-depth insight into the students' reaction to engaging in online activities if they felt dissatisfied with their body image. However, this question obtained minor differences in data from answers. 23% of students agreed strongly, and 26% agreed with the claim as they often feel uncomfortable uploading photos on social media. Moreover, 22% of students expressed a neutral attitude towards this issue. Nevertheless, 22% of respondents disagreed with the statement, with an additional 7% expressing strong disagreement.

4.3 Summary of Collected Survey

In short, 100 UTAR students attended the survey questionnaire. The female and male students have no significant differences in their attitude towards self-esteem and body image after viewing images on Instagram, as shown in the data.

5) Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter will review the collected data from the survey and provide relevant discussions, limitations, recommendations, and conclusions for the research. The discussion will define if this research's objectives are achieved and if the research questions are answered throughout the survey.

5.2 Result overview

Throughout the data collection process, 100 students attended the survey questionnaire, with 52 male and 48 female students from Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman. Also, the students are active Instagram users who engage with fashion and beauty content online. The analysis in Chapter 4 also presented that students generally have a negative attitude toward their body image (Survey Questionnaire: Section B) after exposing to unrealistic beauty standards. Also, the respondents agreed that Instagram is an unpleasant environment that presents unrealistic beauty standards (Survey Questionnaire: Section C).

5.3 Discussion

From the collected data, the UTAR students mostly appeal to lifestyle and personal development content, while this content will indirectly influence individuals' perceptions of beauty ideals. This genre of content often promotes certain body ideals, healthy lifestyles, and self-development that will slowly contribute to the negative feelings on a person's body image. Despite this, sometimes people may seek personal development content with positive intentions; exposure to the perfect ideal of living style may inadvertently affect an individual, leading to body dissatisfaction. Also, the idea of a perfect standard of living injects the mindset of "perfection" into the UTAR students. In contrast, this can lead the students to keep pursuing

the ideal self to achieve an idealized version of themselves and create an environment for them to make upward comparisons with others. This is where the types of content also change an individual's perception. Moreover, the comparison attitude has already become the community culture that fosters a stronger negative feeling toward one's appearance. Aligning with the research cited by Sai et al. (2018), the researchers found that individuals who spend more time on social media tend to have negative moods and be more anxious about their body image.

5.3.1 What is the impact of Instagram content on body dissatisfaction among UTAR students?

The students presented a 46% negative attitude when they lost followers on their Instagram page. As cited in Kose and Dogan (2019), Andreassen (2015) found that social media users with a negative self-perception will tend to judge their success through social media's likes and followers, where the users can become more reliant on external validation. This is because netizens established the mindset that good-looking or likeable people would obtain more followers on social media. This context is supported by the research founded by Kose and Roberts (2017), who cited that beauty is associated with the ability to obtain others' support. Aside from that, Seekis et al. (2020) and Stapleton et al. (2017) conducted research that found body dissatisfaction and self-validation activities on social media are positive correlations where the individuals will seek validation not only from likes and comments but also the number of followers on their social media account. Thus, followers have become an essential factor influencing their self-esteem and how they value their body image.

Other than that, UTAR students show lower self-esteem when they constantly compare their appearance with the images promoted on Instagram. Indeed, social media content is often unreal and altered to fulfil the social expectations of beauty standards. Nevertheless, the students will easily fall into the social media trap, resulting in low self-esteem when looking at

others' images. Chang's (2019) research findings stated that celebrity or peer images would harm the individual's tendency to body dissatisfaction and reduce the viewers' self-esteem. Thus, constant exposure to the "perfect" type of celebrity content and peer influences on social media harmed the UTAR students' self-esteem when they continuously pursued to meet the social media expectations of beauty ideals.

Moreover, fashion trends change quickly, often influenced by community bias, technology, and societal change. In this era, people keep pursuing the idea of "thin, flawless skin and whiteness", which could create the public interest to follow the trend as the individuals desire acceptance from the community. Also, the idealized standards like being underweight, having flawless skin and having extremely white skin tone are sometimes unachievable and unrealistic for the students. Fashion influencers often promote these unrealistic beauty standards to the users, creating a sense of inadequacy and dissatisfaction among young adults who cannot conform to the beauty ideals. Aside from that, the continuity of exposure to extreme beauty can exacerbate feelings of self-doubt and low self-esteem that may lead to excessive exercise, eating disorders, and obsession with cosmetic procedures to fulfil the idea of beauty (Panjra & Tiwari, 2021). This is because, according to the research, when students meet beauty standards, they can have more followers on their Instagram accounts, which is a way for them to seek public approval (appearance), which closely affects their self-esteem.

According to the theory of social comparisons, 2 major types of comparisons will affect students' self-esteem – upward and downward social comparisons. This is when students upward compare with people who have superior appearance and slimmer body sizes, causing them to feel inadequate and low self-esteem ((Marsh & Parker, (1984) as cited in Vogel et al., (2014)). This is because upward comparison can result in an individual pursuing the idealized body image promoted online, which can generate feelings of envy and frustration (Schmuck et al., 2019). Although upward comparisons can become a catalyst and motivation for personal

growth, individuals often perceive it differently and may experience negative emotions. In contrast, when the individual perceives images with a poorer appearance, downward comparisons occur, leading to a positive self-perception. In this situation, the individuals will feel better about themselves. However, the impact of downward comparisons may be short and not address the underlying insecurities about their appearance. Thus, students' self-esteem constantly fluctuates based on the type of content they view on Instagram, which will neither resonate with the feeling of upward or downward comparisons. Still, social media consists of different content that promotes the idealized beauty that people cannot escape from viewing, which is the core factor leading to body dissatisfaction among young adults.

Similarly, 61% of the UTAR students believe their body image is incomparable with the beauty ideals on Instagram. This is because curated photographs with heavy filters and editing efforts present people with perfect impressions unattainable to the average individual. These idealized features distort reality and create a sense of crisis and self-doubt when students compare themselves to unrealistic beauty standards. Additionally, the content on social media continually undergoes many selection processes to present only the most visually appealing images. This can distort the students' reality of beauty, and they will feel discouraged from being confident as they are not matched to Instagram's beauty ideals.

Nevertheless, 51% of UTAR students are not confident about their body image as they feel that their body is not accepted and appreciated by others compared with the idealized beauty. This is because beauty standards nowadays are becoming homogeneous, where only the people who fulfil the criterion of beauty will be viewed as handsome or beautiful (Raaziya, 2023). This stereotyped perception of beauty suggests that only individuals who conform to the rigid models are deemed attractive, extending the community favouring a narrow range of physical appearances. Hence, the individual who goes beyond the standard may have, as it is also typically reflected in the likes, comments, and followers received on their social media

accounts.

Besides that, 49% of UTAR students will edit and filter their photographs before posting them to fit the Instagram beauty standards, such as thin face, long leg ratio, big eyes, heavy makeup, and pore-less skin. This phenomenon can be explained using the concept of selective self-presentation proposed by the study conducted by Fox and Vendemia (2016), where Instagram users will pick and edit their selfies before posting them on social media that may exist under the sociocultural pressures on body image. Hollenbaugh (2021) cited that the idea of audiences surrounds the core discussion of self-presentation, as Instagram users will prioritize the audiences' perceptions of their images. Thus, they will tend to present their perfect version by editing their photographs to obtain public approval. Nevertheless, fear of judgment also strongly influences UTAR students' behaviour in modifying their photographs. Also, according to Stephenson (2023), the core factor of individuals worried about being judged is fear of not being accepted by the community. Hence, UTAR students will have a higher tendency to edit and alter their photographs before posting them on social media. Moreover, pseudo-self-presentation can also explain this phenomenon where it refers to the users using different techniques to make their photographs look perfect and comparable with the Instagram celebrities because it is popular or never use such way to make them feel satisfied (Nasir et al., 2021).

5.3.2 What is the relationship between social media usage and the reaction of UTAR students toward their body image?

A complicated and multifaceted relationship exists between students' opinions of Instagram and body dissatisfaction. At the same time, Instagram might worsen some students' beliefs about body dissatisfaction. In this study, 62% of UTAR students defined that Instagram content portrays unrealistic and unattainable beauty standards, and 54% of UTAR students

deemed that Instagram content can promote an unhealthy environment for body image issues. Instagram in the 21st century has been dominated by idealized photography posted by social media influencers and key opinion leaders, which can lead to body image misperceptions among UTAR students (Pedalino & Camerini, 2022). Most UTAR students have negative attitudes toward curated Instagram photography, as it can cause many issues, such as eroding students' self-esteem, self-doubt, eating disorders, depression, and many more hidden issues that can destroy a person's life (Alfonso-Fuertes et al., 2023). Although UTAR students can recognize unhealthy content, such as unrealistic beauty concepts on social media, which fosters an unfavourable environment for their mental health growth, they are still unable to avoid this kind of content that will influence their perception of the body when they undergo a long period of exposure to it. Thus, a positive correlation exists between the usage of Instagram and the occurrence of body dissatisfaction among UTAR students.

Moreover, 58% of UTAR students declared that Instagram content can influence their body perceptions, leading to body dissatisfaction. The self-perception theory of communication introduces that the type of information an individual perceives can shape them in their understanding of social reality (Nasir et al., 2021). Also, this theory explains that people will define other's perceptions of them in the same way they evaluate others (Bem, 1967, as cited in Nasir et al., 2021). The perception shaping also begins with the selection process, where the communication medium will have a different impact on the individuals' self-perceptions. In this study, UTAR students use Instagram frequently, and it is the platform that contains the most unrealistic beauty standards (Solomon, 2022). Thus, UTAR students have a high level of beauty standards to evaluate others. At the same time, they will apply that mindset to themselves to become favourable among the community.

Besides that, 57% of the UTAR students wanted to change their body shape to look like the models on Instagram. This statistic underscores the ability of Instagram to alter the viewers'

perceptions of beauty and self-image. The public's desire to conform to unrealistic standards portrays the societal pressure on humans to achieve ideals, often fostering body dissatisfaction. In the worst case, the individuals might develop body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) that not only affects their mental health but also a series of health issues such as eating disorder, schizophrenia, social anxiety disorder, depression, trichotillomania disorder, and excoriation disorder (Perkins, 2019). Furthermore, Instagram content promotes the concept of being “perfect,” shaping the students into a perfectionist attitude toward their beauty standards, which is also a catalyst to pressure the students to pursue a better body shape. Similarly, 61% of UTAR students would like to change their appearance due to the exposure of Instagram. Some students do not urge a perfect appearance under public pressure, but they still obsess over their appearance and taking steps to improve their physical attributes. This issue is also associated with young adults nowadays who are obsessing about becoming online celebrities as it presents a form of prestige that can often receive free branded items and free vacation trips (Parisi, 2023). Social media unintentionally promotes the “pretty privilege” to young adults and drives them to accept unrealistic beauty and gain more opportunities and endorsements with pretty faces. Hence, the students will keep seeking different alternatives to change their appearance, either using filtering applications, beauty cosmetics, or excessive diet habits to fulfil the online user’s expectation.

Aside from that, UTAR students (49%) also claimed that the number of likes and comments on Instagram are essential factors that will affect their confidence level in their appearance. This is a way for them to seek validation from the public on their appearance, which will directly impact the students’ self-esteem and self-perception. According to Reid (2023), validation is a part of the human need for social connections, as when a person feels good about their appearance, they want others to notice it and compliment them, which is a form of approval.

In this study, 49% of students tend to avoid engaging in social media activities because they feel vulnerable in their appearance. Indeed, the social stigma and stereotypes of society towards appearance, such as fair skin tone, flawless skin and thin, has become a rule “must” follow on social media. If social media users cannot meet the desired appearance of the public, they will tend to receive nasty comments and cyberbullying, which discourages students from engaging in social media activities (Merdan, 2023). Also, the anonymity of social media provides the chance for people to cyberbully others without facing immediate punishment, which increases the people's likelihood of bullying those who are perceived as “ugly” (Kao, 2021).

5.4 Limitations of the study

Throughout this study, certain limitations that can affect the research outcome have been found. These limitations include the number of sample sizes. Indeed, UTAR has more than 21,000 from both the Kampar and Sungai Long campuses. Thus, the 100 respondents could not represent all UTAR students' perceptions of body dissatisfaction and social media usage. As a result, the research findings may lack an in-depth understanding of all UTAR students' attitudes on the research topic.

Moreover, the methodology used for the research was a survey questionnaire, where the respondents could not express their thoughts other than the options provided to them. Thus, the survey results could not obtain more information about students' perceptions of the discussion topic. This can also hinder the exploration of other motivations and attitudes that can resonate with the student's thoughts.

5.5 Recommendations for future research

A few recommendations could be made for future research to improve the research further and understand the students' behaviour of body dissatisfaction and social media usage.

The following are the aspects that could be improved:

- The same research could be conducted using a different research method, such as conducting a focus group discussion to obtain in-depth information that could not be explored through the close-ended survey. This can improve the research quality and outcome.
- The following research can collect more responses from UTAR students from different faculty to enhance the robustness and generalizability of the findings. Reaching out to a diverse range of student's backgrounds can capture a more representative sample that could reflect the demographical factor influencing the research outcome.
- The research can explore other social media platforms, such as TikTok and RED (小红书), which is also a trendy platform among young adults to engage with each other with photographs.
- The researchers can also focus on the male students' attitudes. Previous research found that male students are less sensitive to body image concerns. However, current research found that male and female students have no significantly different attitudes towards the issue. Thus, it is essential to understand that generation Z male students' thoughts towards body dissatisfaction.

5.6 Conclusion

Research question 1: What is the impact of Instagram content on body dissatisfaction among UTAR students? It was found that Instagram presenting unrealistic beauty standards negatively impacts the students' well-being, especially their self-esteem. Also, the students are dissatisfied with their appearance after viewing the images on social media. Besides that, research question 2: What is the relationship between social media usage and the reaction of UTAR students toward their body image? The result found that the UTAR students negatively

view social media on excessively presenting unrealistic beauty images.

In a nutshell, this research assessed social media usage and the occurrence of body dissatisfaction among UTAR students and found no significant differences between male and female students. Individuals nowadays are more concerned about their physical attribution to the public in the age of pervasive social media. Aligning with the cultivation theory, social media plays an essential role in building users' beauty perceptions, and UTAR students are influenced by the altered images promoted online. This will encourage them to agree on those altered beauties and follow the trend of changing themselves to fulfil the community's expectations. However, students who are unable to confirm unrealistic beauty ideals are more likely to experience body dissatisfaction issues. The high expectations of beauty the community establishes can also lower the students' self-esteem and fear of judgment. As a result, they will attempt to change their appearance through beauty cosmetics, excessive photoshop, and unhealthy diet plans to meet the standards.

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7) Appendices

The impact of Instagram content towards body dissatisfaction among UTAR students.

PERSONAL DATA PROTECTIONS STATEMENT

Please be informed that accordance with Personal Data Protection Act 2010 (“PDPA”) came into force on 15 November 2013, therefore Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (“UTAR”) is hereby bound to make notice and require consent in relation to collection, recording. Usage and retention of personal data.

Acknowledgment of Notice

- I have been notified by you and that I hereby understood, consented, and agreed per UTAR above notice.
- I disagree, my personal data will not be processed.

Dear UTAR students,

I am Kong Rui Qing, a final year student from University Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR), and I am currently conducting my Final Year Project (FYP) in the Bachelor of Corporate Communications (HONS) course.

You are invited to attend this research survey questionnaire. This research aims to understand the impact of Instagram content on body dissatisfaction among UTAR students.

The researcher will ensure that all the participants' information and responses will be kept private and confidential.

The researcher would like to express great appreciation for your time and effort in participating in the survey questionnaire.

1. I agree to participate in this survey.
 - Yes

Section A: Demographic Information

Please tick the box that applies.

1. Full Name:
2. Field of Study:
3. Age:
 - Below 18
 - 18 to 20
 - 21 to 23
 - 24 to 26
 - 27 and above
4. Gender:
 - Male
 - Female
5. What Instagram content types appeal to you the most?

- Beauty, Fashion and Skincare
 - Fitness and Workouts
 - Lifestyle and Personal Development
 - Nutrition and Diet
6. How often do you engage with Instagram content about fashion and beauty?
- Frequently
 - Occasionally
 - Rarely
 - Never

Section B: Impact of Instagram Content on Body Dissatisfaction

Please read each statement carefully and indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with it based on your experiences with Instagram content over the past year by selecting the most relevant option: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

Part 1: This part will include the questions related to self-esteem assessment

1. My self-esteem is affected when I lose friends or followers on Instagram.
2. I am not satisfied with my appearance when comparing it to the standards and ideals on Instagram.
3. I feel pressured to conform to certain body ideals or trends on Instagram, which sometimes affects my self-esteem.
4. My self-esteem fluctuates based on the types of body images and content I view on Instagram.

Part 2: This part will include the questions related to the Multidimensional Body-Self Relation Questions (MBRSQ)

1. I believe my body is unable to measure up to the idealized beauty standards on Instagram.
2. I feel my body is unaccepted and unappreciated by others based on the images I see on Instagram.
3. I frequently compare my body to the images and content on Instagram.
4. I often edit and filter my photographs before posting them on Instagram to fit certain beauty standards.

Section C: Students reaction towards Instagram content

Please read each statement carefully and indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with it based on your experiences with Instagram content over the past year by selecting the most relevant option: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

Part 1: This part includes the questions related to Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance (SATAQ)

1. Instagram content portrays an unrealistic and unattainable standard of beauty.
2. Instagram content fosters an unhealthy and negative environment for body image issues.
3. Instagram content influences my perceptions and attitudes towards beauty and appearance.

4. I would like my body to look like the models on Instagram.
5. I often seek validation or approval for my appearance based on like counts and comments on Instagram.
6. Exposure to Instagram content makes me wish I could change aspects of my physical appearance.
7. I often avoid engaging in online activities because I feel my physical appearance doesn't match the standards portrayed on Instagram.