

Online Beauty Content as a Predictor of Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance and Self-Esteem among College Students in a University in Quezon City, Philippines

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between online beauty content and cosmetic surgery acceptance, as well as the impact on self-esteem, among 220 college students at a university in Quezon City, Philippines. Employing a descriptive-correlational design and validated instruments, including the Acceptance of Cosmetic Surgery Scale and Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale, the findings revealed that online beauty content significantly and positively predicted cosmetic surgery acceptance across multiple dimensions—information quality, credibility, needs of information, attitude toward information, usefulness, adoption, social influence, and product adoption intention. These results suggest that transparent, credible, and socially endorsed online beauty content increases the likelihood of students considering cosmetic procedures. In contrast, online beauty content did not significantly predict self-esteem, indicating that exposure to digital beauty culture may not directly shape students' self-perceptions. Overall, the study highlights the significant behavioral influence of online beauty content on cosmetic surgery acceptance, while also underscoring the limited role of self-esteem. This finding offers valuable implications for digital media practices and future research on youth well-being.

Keywords: online beauty content, cosmetic surgery acceptance, self-esteem, social media influence, college students

Introduction

Social media has become one of the most influential forces shaping beauty ideals and self-perception. While these platforms allow users to share information, photos, and personal experiences, they also normalize highly edited and filtered images that reinforce narrow standards of beauty (Henriques & Patnaik, 2021; Hogue & Mills, 2019; Jung, 2022). With the rise of online beauty trends, photo enhancement tools, and influencer-driven content, individuals are constantly exposed to unrealistic images of attractiveness. This exposure has been linked to increased body dissatisfaction, lower self-esteem, and greater acceptance of cosmetic enhancement as a means to meet societal standards of beauty (Chen et al., 2019; Hammad & Alqarni, 2021).

Despite global evidence on these associations, a gap remains in understanding how online beauty content explicitly affects the psychosocial well-being and cosmetic surgery acceptance of young adults in the Philippines. International surveys from the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (2019, 2020, 2021) show a steady increase in both surgical and nonsurgical cosmetic procedures; however, few studies have examined the underlying influence of digital content on college students' attitudes and self-esteem. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates perceptions of online beauty content—measured across information quality, credibility, usefulness, adoption, social influence, and product adoption intention—and their relationship with cosmetic surgery acceptance and self-esteem.

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the relationships between college students' perceptions of online beauty content and their acceptance of cosmetic surgery, as well as their self-esteem. Specifically, it aims to (1) examine how different dimensions of online beauty content—including information quality, credibility, usefulness, adoption, social influence, and product adoption intention—are associated with cosmetic surgery acceptance, and (2) determine whether these same dimensions relate to students' self-esteem levels. Drawing on the demographic profiles, social media usage patterns, correlation analyses, and predictive modeling presented in this study, the research provides empirical evidence on which aspects of online beauty content most strongly influence cosmetic surgery acceptance, while also exploring the limited or nonsignificant associations with self-esteem among Filipino college students. Unlike prior international studies, which have primarily explored Western contexts or broadly focused on media influence (Fardouly et al., 2018; Perloff, 2014; Twenge et al., 2020), this research provides context-specific evidence insights for and

from Filipino college students—a population highly engaged with social media yet underrepresented in the existing literature. The outcomes include empirical evidence on how online beauty trends shape health-related decision-making, their influence on psychosocial well-being, and practical educational interventions, mental health support, and awareness programs tailored to young adults (Arnett, 2015; Rosenberg, 1965). By situating findings within both global and local perspectives, the study contributes to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 3: Good HealthWell-Being; SDG 4: Quality Education) and supports the Nursing Agenda for Research Advancement (NURA).

Materials and Methods

Study Design

This study employed a descriptive correlational design to investigate the relationships among perceptions of online beauty content, acceptance of cosmetic surgery, and self-esteem (Grove et al., 2019). A descriptive correlational approach was chosen to describe variables and examine their interrelationships without manipulation or control. Data were collected using a Likert-scale survey instrument, allowing for meaningful statistical interpretation. Correlations were analyzed between participants' perceptions of online beauty content, cosmetic surgery acceptance, and self-esteem.

Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at a university in Quezon City, Philippines, with data collected online via Google Forms during the summer semester of 2022–2023. The population consisted of 4,362 college students.. College students were purposely selected because emerging adulthood is characterized by identity exploration, self-expression, and sensitivity to societal standards of attractiveness (Arnett, 2015). This age group is highly exposed to social media, particularly beauty-related content, influencing body image, self-esteem, and attitudes toward cosmetic procedures (Fardouly et al., 2018; Perloff, 2014; Twenge et al., 2020).

Sample Size

The study's sample size of 220 was determined using G*Power for a chi-square test with an effect size of 0.3, $\alpha = 0.05$, power = 0.95, and 5

degrees of freedom (Faul et al., 2009). The sample was proportionally allocated across seven college departments based on their population, totaling 220 participants. This exceeds the minimum recommended sample size of 100 for quantitative studies (Bullen, 2022). Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representativeness, dividing the population into homogeneous subgroups and selecting participants proportionally (Iliyasu & Etikan, 2021).

The inclusion criteria required participants to be enrolled at Trinity University of Asia, have an active social media account, have access to a device for the survey, and provide electronic consent. Those who withdrew or declined participation were excluded.

Instruments

The researchers used a four-part survey instrument. The first section collected demographics and social media usage, including age, sex, college department, primary platform, and daily usage. The second section assessed perceptions of online beauty content using an adapted survey based on the Extended Information Adoption Model and Phung's (2017) Social Influence Questionnaire, covering eight dimensions: Information Quality, Credibility, Needs, Attitude, Usefulness, Adoption, Social Influence, and Product Adoption Intention, rated on a 4-point Likert scale. Expert validation and a pilot study confirmed excellent reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.971$).

The third section measured cosmetic surgery acceptance using the "Consider" subscale of the ACSS (Henderson-King, 2005), administered on a 7-point Likert scale, with reported reliability ranging from 0.84 to 0.92. The final section assessed self-esteem using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), a 10-item, 4-point Likert scale with reversed scoring for negative items ($\alpha = 0.77$ – 0.88). All sections were adapted and validated for reliability and appropriateness.

Data Collection

The data gathering process began with written permission from the Vice President for Academic Affairs and ethics approval from the university's Ethics Review Committee. Selected participants were contacted via email to obtain consent, after which the survey—hosted on Google Forms and including the study background, objectives, consent statement, and questionnaires—was distributed.

To ensure a representative sample, the researchers collaborated with the University Student Council and local council to identify class

representatives, who then distributed randomly assigned survey invitations to students. Data collection was monitored for completeness, with Google Forms settings configured to restrict submissions to one per participant and to university email addresses only. Completed responses were also emailed back to participants for reference.

Data Analysis

The data analysis proceeded in three stages, corresponding to the study's variables: perception of online beauty content, acceptance of cosmetic surgery, and self-esteem. Normality was first assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test, which indicated non-normal distributions. Consequently, Kendall's Tau-b correlation was used to examine relationships among variables, with online beauty content assessed across eight dimensions: Information Quality, Information Credibility, Needs of Information, Attitude Towards Information, Information Usefulness, Information Adoption, Social Influence, and Product Adoption Intention. Correlation strength followed Schober, Boer, and Schwarte's (2018) guidelines: negligible (0.00–0.05), weak (0.06–0.25), moderate (0.26–0.48), strong (0.49–0.70), and very strong (0.71–1.00). Predictive relationships were evaluated using regression analysis, followed by path analysis to test both direct and indirect effects of online beauty content on cosmetic surgery acceptance, with self-esteem examined as a potential mediator (Byrne, 2016; Field, 2018).

Results and Discussions

Table 1 shows that most respondents were young adults aged 18–21 years (80.0%) and female (67.7%), consistent with Philippine and international evidence that women in emerging adulthood are the heaviest social media users and most vulnerable to appearance-based pressures (Canonigo, Uy, & Culajara, 2024; Fardouly et al., 2018; Veldhuis et al., 2020). Nursing students made up the largest group (38.2%), reflecting findings that health sciences students often display heightened body awareness yet remain influenced by beauty ideals (Carinio, 2018; Lozada, Fernandez, & Santos, 2023). Facebook (34.1%), Instagram (29.5%), and TikTok (21.4%) emerged as the most used platforms, aligning with national trends that Filipinos are among the world's most active social media consumers (Kemp, 2024). Notably, nearly one-third (29.1%) reported daily use of more than five hours, echoing local evidence that prolonged exposure to social media amplifies body image dissatisfaction and affects psychosocial well-being (Carinio,

2018; Davao City Study, 2024). Taken together, these demographics confirm that the study sample represents a population highly exposed to beauty-related content and therefore well-suited for examining its links to cosmetic surgery acceptance and self-esteem.

Table 1
Frequency and Percentage Profile of College Student participants (n=220)

Profile	f	%
Age		
18-21 years old	176	80.0
22-25 years old	40	18.2
26-29 years old	4	1.8
Sex		
Female	149	67.7
Male	71	32.3
College Department		
College of Nursing	84	38.2
College of Arts, Sciences and Education	33	15.0
College of Business Management and Accountancy	32	14.5
College of Medical Technology	26	11.8
College of Hospitality and Tourism Management	20	9.1
College of Allied Health Sciences	15	6.8
College of Engineering and Information Sciences	10	4.5
Primary Social Media Platform Used		
Facebook	75	34.1
Instagram	65	29.5
TikTok	47	21.4
YouTube	19	8.6
Twitter	14	6.4
Daily Time Spent on Social Media		
More than 5 hours per day	64	29.1
4.5-5 hours per day	16	7.3
3.5-4 hours per day	38	17.3
2.5-3 hours per day	54	24.5
1-2 hours per day	40	18.2
Less than 1 hour per day	8	3.6

Table 2 shows that students moderately agreed that online beauty content is credible/useful ($M = 2.93$), strongly endorsed cosmetic surgery acceptance ($M = 3.90$), and reported only moderate self-esteem ($M = 2.75$). This pattern echoes international and local evidence suggesting that the media more reliably shape outward attitudes than core self-concepts. Specifically, past work indicates that exposure to idealized beauty content normalizes cosmetic procedures and raises acceptance (Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 2005; Liew et al., 2021), whereas global self-esteem is often more stable and less directly affected by short-term media exposure (Orth & Robins, 2014; Valkenburg, Meier, & Vossen, 2017). Philippine studies similarly show that appearance-specific constructs — body image, appearance comparison, and platform-specific trends (e.g., TikTok filters and outfit content) — are the proximal outcomes of heavy social-media use and better predictors of well-being than global self-esteem (Carinio, 2018; Canonigo, Uy, & Culajara, 2024; Lozada et al., 2023; Davao City Study, 2024). Where prior findings disagree (some studies report stronger self-esteem effects), heterogeneity in samples, platforms, and mediator selection likely explains inconsistencies; by reporting distinct means for perceptions, acceptance, and self-esteem, our results reconcile these differences by showing a clear dissociation: online beauty content is associated with elevated readiness to consider cosmetic procedures but not with equivalent declines in global self-esteem.

Table 2
Mean and Interpretation of Perceptions on Online Beauty Content, Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance, and Self-Esteem of College Student participants (n=220)

Variable	Mean Score	Interpretation
Perceptions on Online Beauty Content	2.93	Agree
Acceptance of Cosmetic Surgery	3.90	Strongly Agree
Levels of Self-Esteem	2.75	Agree

Note: 1.00–1.80 = Strongly Disagree; 1.81–2.60 = Disagree; 2.61–3.40 = Agree; 3.41–4.20 = Strongly Agree; 4.21–5.00 = Very Strongly Agree.

Table 3 shows that online beauty content is significantly correlated with cosmetic surgery acceptance ($p < .001$), but not with self-esteem ($p = .462$). Similarly, cosmetic surgery acceptance and self-esteem are not significantly correlated ($p = .173$). These results suggest that exposure to beauty-related online content primarily influences Filipino students’ acceptance of cosmetic procedures, but does not substantially alter their global self-esteem, nor is self-esteem strongly tied to their attitudes toward

cosmetic surgery. One possible cultural explanation lies in the Philippines’ collectivist orientation and its colonial history: beauty ideals such as fair skin, mestiza features, and Western facial traits remain socially valorized due to both colonial influences and globalization (Mendoza & Palaganas, 2023; “Who’s Defining Filipino Beauty?”, 2025). Such standards may drive acceptance of cosmetic surgery through social approval and interfamilial or peer expectations, rather than through internalized feelings of inadequacy. Psychologically, global self-esteem tends to be stable and buffered by familial, communal, and religious values in collectivist settings (Grimm, Church, Katigbak, & Reyes, 1999; “Culture and spontaneous self-concept among Filipino college students,” 2002), which may insulate it from appearance-focused media pressure. These findings align with prior research linking social media to cosmetic surgery attitudes (Walker et al., 2019; Fardouly et al., 2018) and contrast with the literature that reports a consistent undermining of self-esteem (Huang, 2017). In the Philippine context, recent evidence suggests that media exposure is more closely tied to appearance dissatisfaction or cosmetic intention than to broader self-esteem (Tadena et al., 2020; Canonigo et al., 2024), indicating that future research should examine mediators sensitive to appearance ideal internalization and social norms.

Table 3
Correlation Matrix of Online Beauty Content, Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance, and Self-Esteem of College Student Res (n = 220)

	Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance (p-value)	Decision Correlation	Self-Esteem (p-value)	Decision No Significant Correlation
Online Beauty Content	< .001	Significant Correlation	0.462	
Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance			0.173	

Note: The alpha level is set at 0.05.

Table 4 shows that online beauty content significantly predicted cosmetic surgery acceptance among college students, whereas self-esteem did not. This finding corroborates international evidence that social media and image-based platforms exert a powerful influence on attitudes toward cosmetic procedures (Fogel & King, 2014; Mingoia et al., 2019) and is

consistent with global data showing increased demand for aesthetic interventions (International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, 2023). In the Philippine context, recent studies similarly emphasize how digital beauty advertising and influencer-driven media shape cosmetic ideals and normalize beauty-related decisions (Canonigo, Uy, & Culajara, 2024; Lozada et al., 2023). However, the non-significant role of self-esteem contrasts with earlier work suggesting that body dissatisfaction and internalization of beauty standards mediate media effects (Perloff, 2021). This divergence may be due to differences in measurement, as global self-esteem scales capture broad self-concept but overlook appearance-specific vulnerabilities that are more sensitive to beauty pressures. Taken together, the results suggest that clear, credible, and socially endorsed online beauty content directly influences cosmetic surgery acceptance without substantially affecting global self-esteem, thereby refining existing models of media influence within the Filipino context.

Table 4
Regression Analysis of Online Beauty Content and Self-Esteem Predicting Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance among College Students (n = 220)

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	Decision
Online Beauty Content	0.52	0.08	0.48	6.50	< .001	Significant Predictor
Self-Esteem	0.09	0.10	0.07	0.91	0.362	Not Significant

Model Summary: R = 0.49, R² = 0.24, Adjusted R² = 0.23, F(2, 217) = 34.35, p < .001
Note. Alpha level set at 0.05. Predictors with p < .05 are considered significant; those with p ≥ .05 are not significant.

Table 5 shows that online beauty content significantly and positively predicts cosmetic surgery acceptance ($\beta = 0.48$, $p < .001$), while its relationship with self-esteem is not significant. Self-esteem likewise does not correlate with cosmetic surgery acceptance, indicating that the influence of online beauty content operates directly on students' willingness to consider cosmetic procedures. This suggests that exposure to beauty-focused media primarily affects appearance-related attitudes rather than broader measures of self-worth. Psychologically, global self-esteem tends to be relatively stable and buffered by internalized personal and social values, making it less susceptible to short-term media influences. In contrast, attitudes toward cosmetic surgery are more flexible and closely tied to perceived social benefits and aesthetic ideals. Culturally, Filipino students may interpret beauty content through collective norms and family or peer expectations,

reflecting a society where social approval and relational considerations strongly shape appearance-related decisions (Mendoza & Palaganas, 2023; Grimm et al., 1999). The results align with international evidence that social media exposure increases openness to cosmetic procedures (Fogel & King, 2014; Mingoia et al., 2019) and reflect global trends of rising demand for aesthetic interventions (International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, 2023). Philippine studies further support these findings, showing that influencer-driven campaigns and digital advertising normalize cosmetic ideals and encourage engagement in appearance-enhancing practices (Canonigo, Uy, & Culajara, 2024; Lozada et al., 2023). Overall, these findings suggest that online beauty content has a direct behavioral impact on cosmetic surgery acceptance, without substantially altering global self-esteem, highlighting the importance of considering cultural and psychosocial factors when examining the influence of media on appearance-related attitudes.

Table 5
Path Coefficients of Online Beauty Content, Self-Esteem, and Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance of College Students (n = 220)

Pathway	Standardized β	SE	t-value	p-value	Decision
Online Beauty Content → Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance	0.48	0.08	6.00	< .001	Significant
Online Beauty Content → Self-Esteem	0.05	0.06	0.83	0.407	Not Significant
Self-Esteem → Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance	0.06	0.07	0.86	0.392	Not Significant
Indirect Effect (Online Beauty Content → Self- Esteem → Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance)	0.003			0.401	Not Significant
Total Effect (Online Beauty Content → Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance)	0.483			< .001	Significant

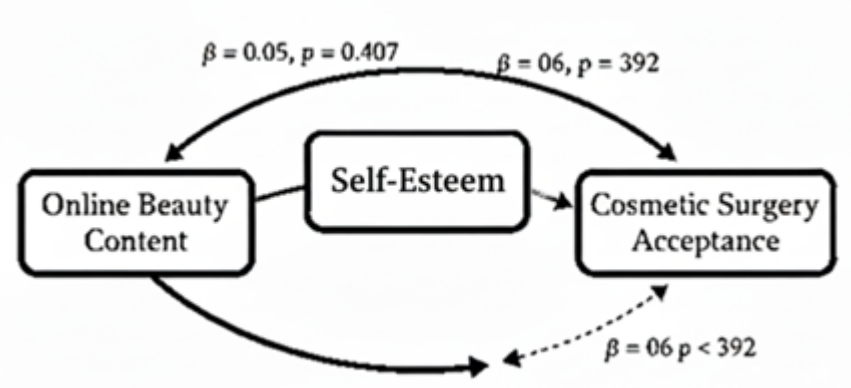
Note. Alpha level set at 0.05.

Figure 1 illustrates the predictive pathways between online beauty content, self-esteem, and acceptance of cosmetic surgery. The results indicate that online beauty content has a significant predictive value for cosmetic

surgery acceptance, but does not significantly impact self-esteem. Self-esteem likewise does not predict cosmetic surgery acceptance, indicating that the hypothesized mediating role is unsupported. These findings suggest that for Filipino college students, exposure to beauty-focused digital content directly shapes attitudes toward cosmetic procedures without substantially affecting broader self-worth.

Psychologically, global self-esteem tends to be stable and resistant to short-term media influences. In contrast, attitudes toward cosmetic surgery are more malleable, shaped by immediate perceptions of social approval, attractiveness, and aesthetic benefits. Culturally, Filipino students may interpret beauty content through collectivist norms, valuing peer and familial expectations over internalized personal inadequacy (Mendoza & Palaganas, 2023; Grimm et al., 1999). Such social and relational considerations can drive acceptance of cosmetic procedures without eroding self-esteem. These patterns align with Philippine research showing that social media heightens appearance concerns but does not consistently affect self-worth (Canonigo, Uy, & Culajara, 2024; Lozada et al., 2023), while diverging from international studies reporting stronger indirect effects through self-esteem (Nabi & Keblusek, 2014; Swami et al., 2009). Overall, the findings highlight a direct behavioral impact of online beauty content in the Philippine context and suggest that future models incorporate culturally grounded psychological factors—such as appearance comparison, body dissatisfaction, and social approval—better to explain the acceptance of cosmetic surgery among Filipino youth.

Figure 1
Path Analysis Model Showing the Predictive Relationship of Online Beauty Content, Self-Esteem, And Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance



Limitation

This study investigated the relationship between perceptions of online beauty content, acceptance of cosmetic surgery, and self-esteem among college students at a university in Quezon City, Philippines, employing a descriptive correlational design and survey questionnaires. The scope was limited to cosmetic surgery and beauty-related online content, excluding other surgical procedures or digital media. Although participants with prior cosmetic surgery or facial enhancements were included to ensure diversity, the findings remain specific to beauty-related cosmetic procedures and may not generalize to other contexts.

Several limitations warrant consideration. First, the reliance on self-report surveys may have introduced response biases such as social desirability and recall bias. To mitigate this, anonymity and confidentiality were emphasized, and the survey was administered online to minimize the influence of peers or researchers. Second, the cross-sectional design limits causal inference, as it captures associations at a single point in time. Longitudinal or experimental studies would be needed to establish temporal or causal relationships. Third, sampling was restricted to a single university, which may limit the generalizability to other institutions or populations. Broader, multi-site studies could address this concern. Fourth, the study relied on convenience and stratified sampling, which, while ensuring proportional representation, may not eliminate selection bias. Fifth, the adapted instruments—though validated and reliable—were initially developed in different cultural contexts, which may affect how Filipino students interpreted certain items. Lastly, unmeasured factors such as body dissatisfaction, peer comparison, and cultural beauty norms may also influence cosmetic surgery acceptance, but were not captured in this study.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study develops and tests a path analysis model to examine how online beauty content predicts cosmetic surgery acceptance and self-esteem among college students in Quezon City. The findings show that while online beauty content directly predicts acceptance of cosmetic surgery, it does not significantly influence self-esteem, nor does self-esteem mediate this relationship. This suggests that the behavioral effects of digital beauty culture—shaping students' attitudes toward cosmetic procedures—are more pronounced than its psychological effects on global self-worth. By clarifying these dynamics, the study contributes to ongoing debates on media influence

and highlights the need for locally grounded predictors, such as appearance comparison and body dissatisfaction, to explain cosmetic surgery acceptance in the Philippine context more effectively.

These results carry important implications for practice and research. For students, critical engagement with beauty-related content and the cultivation of healthy coping strategies, such as body positivity and self-reflection, can help reduce the pressures of unrealistic standards. For academic institutions, integrating media literacy and body image education into student wellness programs, particularly within nursing and allied health curricula, can strengthen resilience against external beauty pressures. Health professionals, including nurses and counselors, may also incorporate social media influence into psychosocial assessments and preventive interventions. Future research should broaden the scope to multiple institutions, adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to establish causality, and incorporate appearance-specific constructs to refine theoretical models. Through such efforts, both education and health systems can better address the influence of digital beauty culture on youth well-being and decision-making.

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