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Media use and the tendency for cosmetic surgery among young Iranian women: A structural model

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Abstract

Introduction: The present study was conducted to test the structural model of the effects of media use on young Iranian women's tendency toward cosmetic surgery, considering the mediating role of media pattern internalization, beliefs about appearance, and body image concerns.

Materials and Methods: The study design was a descriptive-correlational design performing the structural equation modeling method. In the present study, 325 female students of the University of Isfahan in the 2019-2020 academic year responded to the Media Consumption and Beliefs about Appearance Scales, Body Image Concerns Inventory, Sociocultural Attitudes to Appearance, and Compensatory Tendencies for Beauty and Fitness Questionnaires. Pearson correlation and structural equation modeling with maximum likelihood estimation method were used for data analysis.

Results: The results of structural equation modeling showed that the fit indices of the model are good. Also, the results of the direct effects test using the maximum likelihood estimation method showed that all the direct effects of the model, except the effect of beliefs about appearance on the cosmetic surgery tendency, are significant ($P < 0.01$). Finally, the results of the indirect effects using the parametric bootstrap method showed that all the indirect effects of the model are significant ($P < 0.01$).

Conclusion: In general, the results support the importance of internalization of media patterns and body image concerns in the tendency of Iranian women for cosmetic surgery.

Keywords: Body image, Cosmetic surgery, Mass media, Social cognition

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Introduction

In recent years, Iran has been among the ten countries with the highest cosmetic surgery rates (1). The results of epidemiological studies show that the highest number of referrals for cosmetic surgery in Iran belongs to young and single women aged 20-29 years (2). Studies in a large clinical sample showed that rhinoplasty, facial fat injection, blepharoplasty, facelift, and breast augmentation were the top five cosmetic procedures in Iran (3).

Numerous studies have been conducted on the causes of Iranian women's tendency toward cosmetic procedures (4,5). The motivation of Iranian women for the tendency for cosmetic surgery could be divided into two categories personal and transpersonal. Personal motivations include gaining confidence, change, diversity, and excellence. Transpersonal motivations vary according to the circumstances in which individuals find themselves; such cases may occur under the pressure of family or social currents from a group of friends and the pressure of the workplace, university, media, etc. (6). According to objectification theory, women, seeing the ideal patterns in the media, find a third-person perspective on themselves (self-objectification), which causes dissatisfaction with the body and a different appearance orientation (7). Self-objectification causes a person to have more self-monitoring about his/her appearance and to change him/herself to achieve the presented ideal (8). Finally, to achieve that mental ideal, a person performs operations such as cosmetic surgery and extreme makeup (9).

Festinger suggests social comparison has two main types, comparing assets and abilities and comparing beliefs. The social comparison of assets and abilities creates competition and aims to determine superiority. Social comparison of beliefs, on the other hand, focuses on information. In such a comparison, individuals take the path of discussion and challenge to bridge the opinion gap. In general, in this theory, the social comparison of assets and abilities leads to competition, while the social comparison of beliefs leads to a detailed examination of patterns (10,11).

Current media create a unique context for both types of social comparisons. Media

audiences can compare themselves with many people, including those who are geographically, culturally, and socially distant from them. However, the main problem with social comparisons in the media is that the media only shows part of the picture of people's lives. Especially in social networks, most users use strategies that increase the usefulness of what they offer and share what is most desirable with other users (12). Internalization occurs when one is exposed to the media and their advertisements and accepts their ideal models (13).

Social comparisons in modern digital media are often made regarding physical competence, social skills, social popularity, self-perception (14), and body image (15). The person turns to compensatory behaviors such as cosmetic surgery to control negative emotions and feelings caused by concerns about body image and reduce self-esteem related to appearance (9).

Internalization of media patterns imposes ideal body images on women and influences their beliefs about the importance of appearance (16). Women have two different strategies for dealing with these dysfunctional beliefs. A group of people increase their assets and try to get closer to the ideal patterns of beauty by performing compensatory behaviors (such as diet, intense exercise, makeup, and cosmetic surgery) (9). By comparing their appearance with media patterns, the second group perceives defects and becomes dissatisfied with their body image (17).

Some resist media influences, but some form dysfunctional beliefs that endanger their mental health, and some undergo cosmetic surgery. The critical question is what factors and in what path lead to the tendency of women to have cosmetic surgery?

In addition, few studies have examined these variables in the form of a structural model in a sample of young Iranian women. Therefore, the present study aimed to test the structural model of the effect of media use on the tendency for cosmetic surgery, considering the mediating role of internalization of media patterns, dysfunctional beliefs about appearance, and body image concerns in young Iranian women. This model is presented in Figure 1.

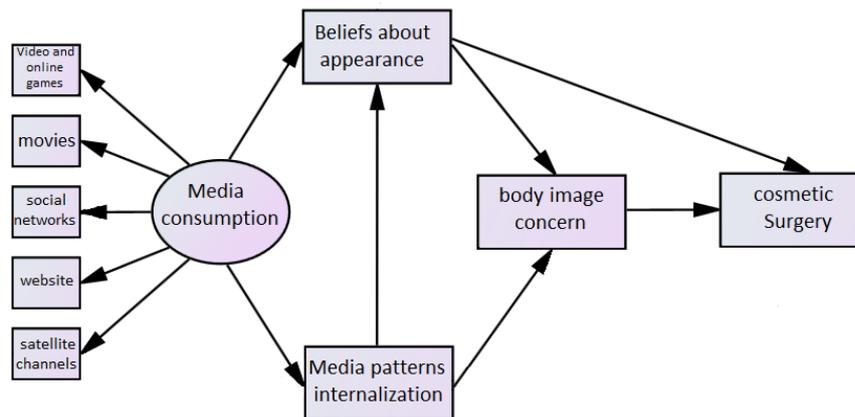


Figure 1. Conceptual model

Materials and Methods

A descriptive and correlational design was adopted. All the female undergraduate students in the 2019-2020 academic year at the University of Isfahan included in the study population. Because the research model consists of 21 parameters, considering 15 samples per parameter (18), the sample size of 330 people was calculated.

A cluster sampling method has been used to select the samples; for this purpose, in the first stage, out of 14 faculties of the University of Isfahan, four faculties of mathematics and statistics, educational sciences and psychology, technology, and engineering, and literature and humanities, were selected using simple random sampling. In the next stage, four classes were randomly selected from each faculty, and research questionnaires were given to 350 female students. Inclusion criteria included informed consent to participate in the research, female gender, and to study at the University of Isfahan. The exclusion criteria included the unwillingness to complete the questionnaires and incomplete questionnaires. Ethical considerations in this study included the confidentiality of the participants' information and responses and obtaining informed consent to participate in the study.

Research instruments

A) Revised Media Consumption Scale: This scale has been compiled and validated by Khanzadeh et al. (9) based on the Media Consumption Scale (19). The scale has 32 items that assess media use in various fields through five media categories, including satellite channels, movies, social networks, Internet websites, and video and online games. The validity of this scale has been confirmed using confirmatory factor analysis, and

Cronbach's alpha has been reported to be 0.75 (9).

B) Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance Questionnaire-third edition (SATAQ-3): SATAQ-3 is one of the most widely used tools for evaluating the internalization of models and pressures of sociocultural beliefs about appearance. This questionnaire is developed by Thompson et al. and consists of 30 items. Exploratory factor analysis by Thompson et al. found four factors: internalization-general, internalization-athlete, Information, and Pressures, with alpha coefficients of 0.96, 0.92, 0.95, and 0.96, respectively (20). In Iran, the validity and reliability of this scale have been reported using the exploratory factor analysis method, including four factors, and the alpha coefficient for the whole scale is 0.77 (21). In this study, the internalization-general subscale was applied to measure the internalization of media patterns.

C) Body Image Concern Inventory (BICI): This inventory was designed by Littleton et al. to assess body image concerns. Respondents rate their agreement with the 19 items on BICI using a 5-point Likert scale. The results of Littleton et al. show the convergent and predictive validity of BICI. The Cronbach's alpha of BICI is also reported to be 0.93 (22). In Iran, the reliability of this list was calculated using the Cronbach's alpha (0.95), and its convergent validity was confirmed (23).

D) Beliefs About Appearance Scale (BAAS): Spangler and Stice have developed BAAS with 20 items to measure dysfunctional beliefs about appearance. This scale measures individuals' beliefs about the importance of physical appearance in interpersonal

relationships, feelings, self-view, and achievement using a 5-point Likert scale. Spangler and Stice indicated the convergent and concurrent validity of this scale. Also, the reliability of BAAS was examined in three independent samples using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, and the results were 0.94, 0.95, and 0.96, respectively (24). In Iran, the reliability and validity of this scale in a sample of cosmetic surgery candidates have been reported as favorable (25).

E) Compensatory Tendencies and Behaviors for Beauty and Fitness Questionnaires (CTBBFQ): CTBBFQ has been developed by Khanzadeh et al. to measure the tendencies and the extent of compensatory behaviors by which a person tries to cover, hide or fix imaginary or real defects in his/her appearance, and reach the ideal face or body. CTBBFQ assesses three dimensions of the tendency for cosmetic surgery, the tendency to use cosmetics, and efforts to achieve fitness using 27 items on a 5-point Likert scale. Khanzadeh et al. studied two separate samples, and the Cronbach's alpha of these dimensions ranged from 0.82 to 0.90. These results confirmed the construct and convergence validity of CTBBFQ (9). In this study, the

tendency to cosmetic surgery subscale was used.

After collecting the data, the Pearson correlation coefficient was used to examine the correlation between the variables. Also, the structural equation modeling was applied with maximum likelihood estimation to test the conceptual model of the research. Finally, to evaluate the significance of all types of effects in the model, the Monte Carlo method (parametric bootstrap) was used. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 24) and AMOS (Version 24).

Results

After removing 25 distorted questionnaires, the number of samples reached 325 female students (mean age 20.64 ± 1.94 years). In term of marital status, 292 cases (89.8%) were single and 33 cases (10.2%) were married. Descriptive statistics and Pearson Bivariate correlation between the observed variables of the model are presented in Table 1.

As the results of Table 1 show, all the model variables, except for the use of Internet websites, are related to young Iranian women's tendency for cosmetic surgery.

Table 1. Bivariate correlation and descriptive statistics for research variables

Observed variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1-Video and online game	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2-Movies	0.296**	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3-Social networks	0.300**	0.305**	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
4-websites	0.262**	0.421**	0.526**	1	-	-	-	-	-
5-Satellite channels	0.285**	0.379**	0.332**	0.399**	1	-	-	-	-
6-Media patterns internalization	0.208**	0.205**	0.115*	0.145**	0.336**	1	-	-	-
7-Beliefs about appearance	0.178**	0.207**	0.197**	0.120*	0.189**	0.319**	1	-	-
8-Body image concern	0.229**	0.206**	0.238**	0.131*	0.263**	0.584**	0.539**	1	-
9-Cosmetic surgery tendency	0.225**	0.172**	0.182**	0.086	0.217**	0.427**	0.337**	0.580**	1
Mean	11.88	7.57	26.05	14.47	10.14	16.29	62.64	49.44	14.19
Standard Deviation (SD)	3.99	2.57	7.53	3.71	4.42	7.13	15.69	16.47	6.14

* $P < 0.05$, ** $P < 0.01$

AMOS software output regarding the multivariate normality index for the research model (with a value of -0.006 and a critical ratio of -0.004) suggests that the normality of the distribution of variables was confirmed as the most critical assumption of the present study.

In the next step, the conceptual model of the research (Figure 1) was tested by structural

equation modeling and the maximum likelihood estimation method. Table 2 shows the fit indices for the model.

As the results in Table 2 show, the Relative χ^2 (χ^2/df), GFI, TLI, and CFI indicate a good fit, and the rest of the indices indicate an acceptable fit for the research model.

Table 2. Size of fit indices for the model, with acceptable range of fit indices

Fit indices	Good fit	Acceptable fit	Values obtained in the model
χ^2	insignificant P-value ($P > 0.05$)	insignificant P-value ($P > 0.01$)	45.634
df			23
P-value			0.003
Relative χ^2 (χ^2/df)	$\chi^2/df < 2$	$2 \leq \chi^2/df < 5$	1.984
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	$0.95 \leq GFI$	$0.90 \leq GFI < 0.95$	0.970
Adjusted GFI (AGFI)	$0.95 \leq AGFI$	$0.90 \leq AGFI < 0.95$	0.942
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	$0.95 \leq NFI$	$0.90 \leq NFI < 0.95$	0.941
Tucker Lewis index (TLI)	$0.95 \leq TLI$	$0.90 \leq TLI < 0.95$	0.952
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	$0.95 \leq CFI$	$0.90 \leq CFI < 0.95$	0.969
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	$RMSEA < 0.05$	$0.05 \leq RMSEA < 0.08$	0.055
Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)	$SRMR < 0.05$	$0.05 \leq SRMR < 0.08$	0.050

Figure 2 also shows the estimated parameters of the model. Figure 2 shows that all path coefficients (direct effects), except for the direct effect of beliefs about appearance on the

tendency for cosmetic surgery, are significant ($P < 0.01$).

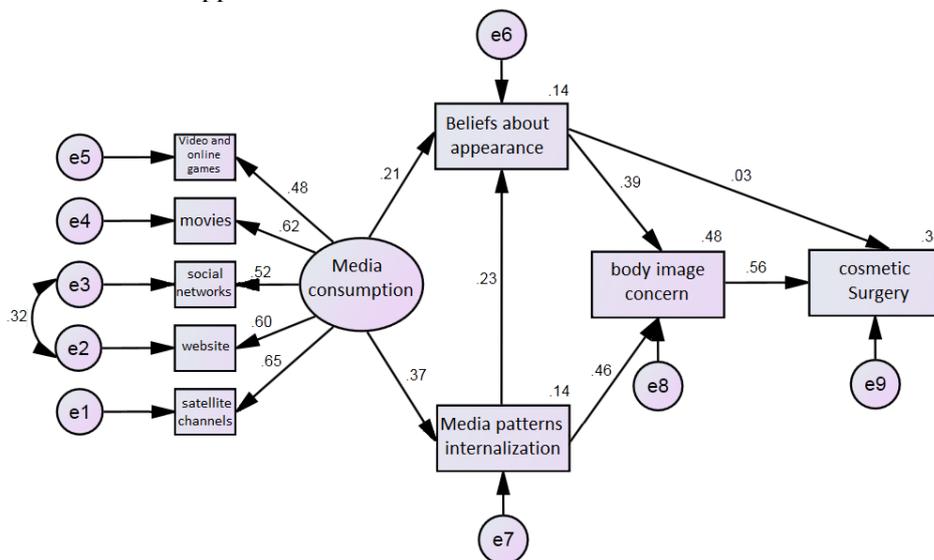


Figure 2. Estimated parameters for the research model

Table 3 shows the standard coefficients of total, direct, and indirect effects of the model variables and their significance using the Monte Carlo (parametric bootstrap) method with 1000 re-sampling. Table 3 shows that all direct, indirect, and total effects, except the direct effect of beliefs about appearance on the tendency to cosmetic surgery, are

significant ($P < 0.01$). The significance of the indirect effects of the model shows that the internalization of media patterns, dysfunctional beliefs about appearance, and body image concerns can mediate the relationship between media use and the tendency to cosmetic surgery in Iranian women.

Table 3. Standard coefficients and significance of direct, indirect and, total effects of the model

	Standardized direct effects		Standardized indirect effects		Standardized total effects	
	Size	P	Size	P	Size	P
Media consumption on:						
Media patterns internalization	0.381	0.003	---	---	0.381	0.003
Beliefs about appearance	0.217	0.002	0.090	0.001	0.307	0.003
Body image concern	---	---	0.295	0.003	0.295	0.003
Cosmetic surgery tendency	---	---	0.178	0.003	0.178	0.003
Media patterns internalization on:						
Beliefs about appearance	0.236	0.002	---	---	0.236	0.002
Body image concern	0.457	0.002	0.093	0.002	0.550	0.002
Cosmetic surgery tendency	---	---	0.321	0.002	0.321	0.002

Beliefs about appearance on:						
Body image concern	0.393	0.002	---	---	0.393	0.002
Cosmetic surgery tendency	0.032	0.522	0.224	0.001	0.256	0.002
Body image concern on:						
Cosmetic surgery tendency	0.570	0.002	---	---	0.570	0.002

Discussion

The purpose of designing this conceptual model was to identify the most important variables affecting the tendency of young Iranian women toward cosmetic surgery.

There are studies which support the positive effect of media use on the internalization of media patterns (13,15) and dysfunctional beliefs about appearance (26,27). Media researchers believe that people's beliefs, attitudes, and patterns may change as a result of exposure to the media, as individuals are freed from mere dependence on their inner attitudes and schemas in the face of information provided by the media and replace media attitudes as collective attitudes (28). Thus, at first, the individual becomes skeptical of the beliefs they have received through culture, religion, family, and peer groups, and over time lose their attachment to them; then, under the pressure of messages coming from the media, they accept the presented beauty patterns (29). In line with the results of the present study, Ward et al. measured the internalization levels of thinness patterns in Jewish women with the online questionnaire method. They found that the use of media and its internalization increases the beliefs related to the appearance and dissatisfaction with the appearance. However, this research found that religion has a protective role in the internalization of media patterns (30).

The present study showed the effect of the internalization of media patterns and dysfunctional beliefs about appearance on body image concerns. The results about the positive effect of media internalization on body image concerns are consistent with other studies (14,31). Also, the results related to the positive effect of dysfunctional beliefs about appearance on body image concern in this study are consistent with another research (32).

The mass media is the main cause of concern about body shape and physical attractiveness in today's consumer culture (33). The increasing number of messages about the importance of beauty and attractiveness produced and sent by the media cause the

internalization of these patterns and change the criteria of beauty and appearance attractiveness in society, which have changed people's beliefs about appearance and beauty. These beliefs about appearance are reinforced daily by verbal and non-verbal messages reflected in advertisements, movies, news, television programs, and other forms of media. This, in turn, can make people self-monitor their body image. When a person monitors his/her appearance based on such messages, he/she becomes aware of the distance between his/her true self and the internalized ideal patterns. Therefore, understanding this distance leads to concerns about his/her body image (34).

Dissatisfaction with body image is related to negative beliefs about body size and shape and the sheer difference between the ideal body and the real body (35). To deeply understand the concept of body image concern, one must examine the individual's dysfunctional beliefs and the feelings associated with them (31). Highlighting the importance of physical attractiveness in a person's mind can make his/her develop dysfunctional beliefs about his/her appearance and compare media patterns about beauty with his/her appearance. The perception that he/she is far from these patterns always worries the person about the deformity of his/her body. Thus, internalizing media patterns and dysfunctional beliefs about appearance leads to body image concerns. Compared to the present research, the results of the research by Cataldo et al. showed that the users of websites related to the beauty industry, most of whom are women under the age of 25, experience dysfunctional thoughts after seeing the content of these platforms, and following these thoughts, engage in unhealthy behaviors such as worrying about body image, eating disorders, extreme exercise and improper use of supplements (36).

Finally, the results confirmed the effect of dysfunctional beliefs about appearance and body image concerns on the tendency for cosmetic surgery. Our results about the positive effect of dysfunctional beliefs about appearance on the tendency for cosmetic

surgery are consistent with previous studies (37,38). The positive effect of body image anxiety on the tendency for cosmetic surgery is also supported by previous studies (9,39). According to the cognitive-behavioral theory, when any belief is developed in an individual, the behaviors and emotions related to that belief would also form (40); therefore, dysfunctional beliefs about appearance lead to compensatory behaviors related to appearance, such as the tendency for cosmetic surgery. Also, people with dysfunctional beliefs about appearance focus on improving their physical characteristics to overcome their low self-esteem and engage in compensatory behaviors to change their defects and imperfections (41,42). Ching and Xu studied 314 Chinese teenage girls and found the results like our findings in another culture. The results of this study also showed that internalized appearance ideals lead to concern about appearance, which leads to these teenagers' insistence on cosmetic surgery (43).

Our study population was limited to the female students of the University of Isfahan, thus making it harder to generalize the results. Moreover, self-reporting tools and a descriptive cross-sectional design can limit causal conclusions. Therefore, this model should be tested in other statistical communities. To reach more robust causal conclusions in this field, researchers are encouraged to use other research tools, such as

interviews and observations, and different research designs, such as experimental and longitudinal designs.

Conclusions

Overall, the results suggested that body image concern is the most important variable affecting the tendency for cosmetic surgery in young Iranian women. The most important variable affecting body image concern is the internalization of media patterns. These results can have several theoretical and practical implications. For example, the results show that if media use leads to the internalization of media patterns, it can significantly affect body image concerns and, consequently, the tendency for cosmetic surgery. Therefore, mere exposure to the media is not decisive in this regard. Accordingly, it is suggested that in addition to creating a widespread culture of media use as well as managing the production of media content to provide logical and realistic patterns of appearance, by identifying media internalization mechanisms, preventive interventions should be implemented to reduce the body image concern, and consequently the tendency for cosmetic surgery in the community.

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