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SELF-DISCLOSURE, SELF-ESTEEM, AND BODY POSITIVITY AMONG INSTAGRAM INFLUENCERS AND USERS

ABSTRACT

Purpose: This paper explores the relationship between self-disclosure, self-esteem, and exposure to body-positive content among Instagram users following influencers. It aims to examine evolving beauty standards and emphasises the impact of social perception on individual self-esteem and identity formation. It considers the emergence of the #bodypositivity movement as a reaction to unrealistic beauty ideals propagated on social media and stresses its role in promoting inclusivity.

Methodology: A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from 218 Instagram users. The study used Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to analyse the data and assess the relationships between the variables.

Results: The results show that the constructs Polarity and Intent have a significant and positive impact on Self-esteem. Self-esteem has a significant and positive relationship with Body-positive content.

Conclusion: This research underscores the importance of body-positive content on social media in challenging traditional beauty standards and promoting inclusivity. Positive self-disclosure emerges as a critical factor in boosting self-esteem and advocating body-positive narratives. The findings suggest that self-esteem is positively influenced when individuals disclose in a positive, intentional, and authentic manner, but too much disclosure or overly personal sharing may harm self-esteem. The study offers valuable insights for influencers, marketers, and researchers into fostering healthier self-perception through social media. Limitations are acknowledged, and recommendations for future research are provided.

Keywords: Self-disclosure, self-esteem, body positivity, Instagram

1. Introduction

Instagram is the preferred social media for users interested in travel, entertainment, fashion (Eggerstedt et al., 2020), and beauty (Koetz, 2019; Duffy & Hund, 2015; Raun & Christensen-Strynø, 2022). Instagram celebrities, e.g., influencers, are the ones with large networks of followers and represent a

trusted source of information for followers (De Veirman et al., 2016); they are labelled as the Instagram famous (Abidin, 2016; Dewey, 2014).

Beauty standards are always important, even if they are not identical in different cultures (Chua & Chang, 2016). Perception of a person's beauty can influence other people's judgments of their

personality (Eggerstedt et al., 2020), resulting in higher salaries (Pilgrim & Bohnet-Joschko, 2019), and presentation of life success (Ando et al., 2021). Even in the educational system, research showed that prettier children enjoyed priority treatment by teachers (Jacobson et al., 2020).

Over time, ethical standards (Abidin, 2016), media responsibility (Khan et al., 2020), and regulation (Grbavac & Grbavac, 2014) on social media have become more pivotal, as the growing importance and role of social media have led to increased use of a variety of tools on social media to enhance ideals of body perfection. Beauty standards, especially those related to the body, are highlighted on Instagram, a platform devoted to the visual presentation of ideal bodies, resulting in the ever-growing use of various tools aimed at creating the impression of perfect bodies, which are, in fact, unrealistic (Cohen et al., 2019; Makarim et al., 2020) and predominantly shaped by digital platforms, e.g., Instagram (Marengo et al., 2018; Cohen et al., 2019). Since such an idealistic approach seems to be stressful for the female population, the key questions refer to the ethics of false presentation or even the need to have only one presentation of female beauty. The #body-positivity movement (Cohen et al., 2019) emerged as a counterpoint to the ideal of body perfection, promoting acceptance and appreciation of imperfection as a unique form of female beauty. The body positivity movement intersects with self-esteem by challenging narrow beauty standards and promoting acceptance of diverse body types, fostering a more inclusive and affirming environment for individuals to develop healthier self-esteem (Orth & Robins, 2014). Self-esteem refers to a person's subjective overall assessment of their own worth and performance, and encompasses a person's beliefs, feelings, and attitudes towards themselves, including their abilities, appearance, and characteristics (Kourakou et al., 2021; Gözütok et al., 2024).

Self-disclosure has been widely studied since the 1970s, both as a personal choice to share private information and as part of parent-child relationships (Tilton-Weaver et al., 2014). According to self-presentation theory (Goffman, 1978), people try to shape how others see them, especially on social media. This is part of a larger process called impression management (Krämer & Winter, 2008). With the rise of the internet and social media, self-disclosure has become increasingly important. Online, self-presentation helps form a social identity, and self-disclosure plays a key role in that process. Often, people's behaviour on social media is driven

by the desire to present themselves in a certain way or by the influence of key online figures.

Recent research findings reveal that increased social media usage and social media influencers are not damaging young women's image and self-esteem (Eagan, 2022). Also, LoweCalverley and Grieve (2021) found that individuals who viewed influencer posts experienced greater negative mood and body dissatisfaction compared to those who did not. Similarly, exposure to such content does not increase exercise behaviour but is associated with worsened mood and greater body dissatisfaction (Prichard et al., 2020). Prior studies have examined self-esteem and body positivity separately, but there is limited empirical research on how these constructs interact with self-disclosure in the context of social media (Vogel et al., 2014; Robinson, 2021). This study addresses this gap by examining how the authenticity and intentionality of self-disclosure impact self-esteem, and how self-esteem, in turn, influences engagement with body-positive content. The main objective is to understand these interrelationships in the Instagram environment, where idealised and digitally altered images are prevalent (Tiggemann & McGill, 2004; Thompson, 2018). By focusing on social media influences rather than historical beauty practices, this research contributes to a clearer understanding of how digital self-presentation affects psychological well-being and perceptions of beauty in contemporary youth culture.

Based on the background, the central research questions were reformulated into the following objectives: to examine how the different dimensions of self-disclosure on Instagram (e.g., amount, polarity, accuracy, and intent) affect users' self-esteem, to analyse how self-esteem affects users' engagement with body-positive content on Instagram, to explore the relationship between self-disclosure, self-esteem, and body positivity in the context of Instagram use, to investigate how Instagram, as a visually driven and socially influential platform, influences users' self-perception and body image, and to study how psychological and behavioural mechanisms related to self-disclosure and self-esteem interact in shaping body image perceptions on social media.

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

2.1 Self-disclosure and self-esteem

Self-disclosure on social media involves sharing personal information through various forms of on-

line communication, including posts, comments, stories, and videos. It is characterised by the degree and depth of personal information an individual chooses to reveal to others (Sprecher et al., 2013). On platforms like Instagram, self-disclosure is particularly prominent, often reflecting individuals' emotions, experiences, and internal states as part of their broader digital identity.

This study adopts Wheeless and Grotz's (1976) framework for measuring self-disclosure, which includes four key dimensions: 1) Amount and depth, which refers to how much personal information is shared and the intimacy level of that content, 2) Polarity (valence), which involves the emotional tone or valence of disclosure, particularly the tendency to present oneself positively, 3) Accuracy, which measures how truthful or honest individuals perceive their self-disclosures to be, and 4) Intent, which reflects the level of awareness and purpose behind one's self-disclosure on social media (Jacobson et al., 2020; Lai & Yang, 2015). These dimensions allow for a nuanced understanding of how individuals manage and present their identities and self-presentation on social media.

Prior research supports the significance of self-disclosure in digital environments. For example, Lai and Yang (2015) found a positive correlation between self-disclosure and interpersonal popularity on micro-blogging platforms. Jacobson et al. (2020) noted that the visibility of users' self-disclosure also benefits marketers, suggesting that sharing personal content can create value in both social and commercial contexts. Furthermore, Zhao et al. (2016) linked the usefulness of content, alongside perceived value and user identification, to increased self-disclosure. This aligns with earlier findings in organisational research, where Sussman and Siegal (2003) highlighted usefulness as a critical factor influencing the acceptance of information or advice.

According to recent findings, valence and honesty in self-disclosure are positively associated with psychological well-being, while the quantity of disclosure is not significantly related (Chu et al., 2022). Thus, the quality and intentionality of self-disclosure, rather than its frequency, drive positive psychosocial outcomes. These findings also confirm the multidimensionality of self-disclosure, aligning with Wheeless's framework used in this study (Wheeless & Grotz, 1976). On the other hand, intimate self-disclosure among social media influencers enhances parasocial relationships and purchase intentions when there is self-congruence between influencers and their followers. This indicates

that authenticity and relatability in self-disclosure strengthen social bonds and persuasive effects, elements also critical to self-esteem and body-positivity processes (Koay et al., 2023). Haywood et al. (2025) provide evidence from adolescent samples showing that authenticity, trustworthiness, and self-disclosure about mental health are perceived as key factors in making influencers credible and helpful in mental health interventions. Adolescent audiences interpret influencer self-disclosure as both a source of relatability and therapeutic modelling, reinforcing the social validation pathway theorised by Chu et al. (2022).

Building on this foundation, this study proposes that higher levels of meaningful self-disclosure on Instagram may be associated with increased self-esteem. This assumption is grounded in the idea that engaging actively and authentically on social media platforms can enhance self-confidence through greater opportunities for self-expression, social validation, and identity exploration. Users who frequently post, interact, and reflect on their experiences may, over time, develop a more positive self-image and higher perceived self-worth.

Based on the above theoretical considerations, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1a: Amount and depth are positively related to perceived self-esteem.

H1b: Polarity is positively related to perceived self-esteem.

H1c: Accuracy is positively related to perceived self-esteem.

H1d: Intent is positively related to perceived self-esteem.

2.2 Self-esteem and body positivity

Low self-esteem affects more than 50% of teenagers, often driven by unrealistic beauty standards that idealise traits such as thinness, long eyelashes, smooth skin, and light complexion (Dara, 2018). These rigid beauty standards can contribute to negative self-perception, especially among adolescents navigating identity development in a visually focused digital environment like Instagram.

One of the most widely used tools for measuring self-esteem is Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), developed by Rosenberg (1965), recently used for correlations between self-esteem and online behaviour (Cohen et al., 2021). This scale is grounded in a two-dimensional model that evaluates both self-worth and self-competence. For ex-

ample, Miller et al. (2010) applied this framework in educational contexts, while Kielkiewicz et al. (2020) used a self-esteem-positive vs. self-esteem-negative framework to explore the influence of spirituality on self-esteem. These findings reinforce the multi-dimensional nature of self-esteem and its susceptibility to a range of social and psychological factors. Over time, the RSES has demonstrated strong cross-cultural validity and has been successfully adapted and translated for use in various countries and demographic groups, including children and adults in Greece (Kourakou et al., 2021), Turkey (Gözütok et al., 2024), and other contexts (Monteiro et al., 2022).

Another closely related concept is body image, which refers to an individual's subjective perception of their own body, often shaped by societal and media ideals. This perception frequently emphasises thinness or a "perfect" weight as the standard (Mills et al., 2017; Samosir, 2015). Distorted body image has been linked to negative mental health outcomes, including depression and eating disorders (O'Keeffe et al., 2011).

In response to these issues, the body positivity movement emerged, originally rooted in the Fat Acceptance movement of the late 1960s and later formalised through platforms like *bodypositive.org* in the 1990s (Chrisler, 2015). Since 2012, the movement has promoted the belief that everyone—regardless of body size, shape, race, gender, or ability—deserves to feel positively about their

body (Lazuka et al., 2020). As outlined by Cohen et al. (2021), the core goals of body positivity include challenging socially constructed ideals, promoting acceptance of all body types, and fostering self-confidence without judgment.

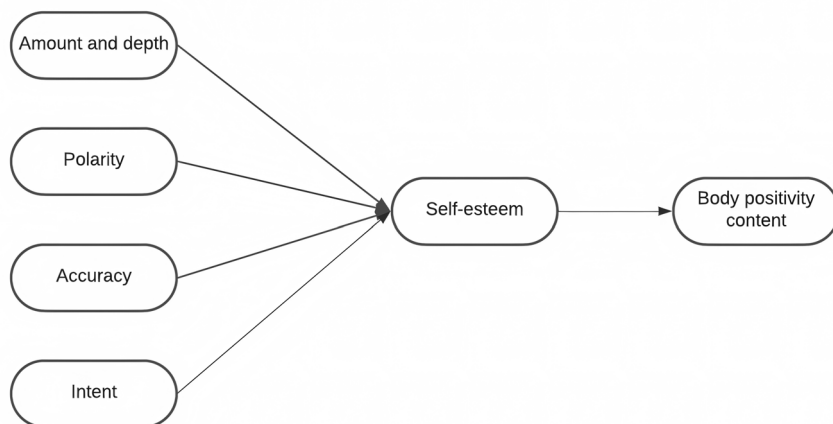
Social media, particularly Instagram, has become a central space for promoting body-positive messages. Prior research shows that engagement with body-positive content can positively influence self-esteem by fostering a sense of inclusion and self-acceptance (Spears & Singh, 2004; Zhao et al., 2016). Users who interact with such content may find reassurance, inspiration, or community, which can enhance their satisfaction with their own body image and their overall sense of self-worth. Bi and Zhang (2023) demonstrated that *parasocial relationships* and *influencer credibility* mediate followers' purchase intentions, while *self-esteem* moderates these effects. Lower self-esteem increases reliance on influencer cues, reflecting the psychological compensatory processes that may also manifest in body image dynamics.

Based on the reviewed literature and the observed relationship between social media use, self-esteem, and body image, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Self-esteem is positively related to body-positive content.

Based on the hypotheses developed above, the conceptual model of the study is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Conceptual model of the study



Source: Authors

3. Methodology

To test the formulated hypotheses, an empirical study was conducted using survey methodology. A self-administered structured questionnaire served as the measuring instrument. The relevant literature was used in the construction of the measurement instrument, whereby the questions were tailored to the requirements of this study. The questions in the questionnaire are mainly of a structured type, and the funnel principle was used, starting with general questions about the amount of use of social networks and knowledge of the body positivity movement, and ending with questions to measure the perception of the individual's emotional state and to collect socio-demographic data. The questionnaire is divided into four groups and follows the funnel principle. A 5-point Likert scale was utilised, with response options ranging from 1 ("not important at all/strongly disagree") to 5 ("very important/strongly agree"). The participants rated their level of agreement with the questionnaire items. The construct of self-disclosure is observed through the four key dimensions—Amount and depth, Polarity, Accuracy, and Intent—developed by Wheelless and Grotz (1976) and later used by Lai and Yang (2015) and Jacobson et al. (2020) for social media self-disclosure surveys. Self-esteem was examined based on the adopted Rosenberg (1965) scale. Spears and Singh (2004) developed a body positivity construct related to fashion influencers, which was adopted for this survey in the context of beauty body positivity.

The survey was conducted as a Google online survey, exclusively on social networks, from March to June 2022. The sample was obtained through non-probability convenience sampling via Instagram. This approach was chosen due to the targeted nature of the research, i.e., active Instagram users familiar with body positivity discourse. In a screening question, respondents were asked whether they had an active Instagram account. Following the correction of inaccuracies and the exclusion of missing data, a total of 218 fully completed questionnaires were obtained and included in the subsequent analysis.

The collected data were analysed using PLS-SEM as it effectively identifies relationships between theoretical constructs in small samples and facilitates the analysis of complex models with numerous manifest variables and theoretical constructs. Furthermore, as a non-parametric method, PLS-SEM does not impose any special requirements on the distribution of the manifest variables. The choice of PLS-SEM over CB-SEM is justified by both the characteristics of the data and the research objec-

tives. PLS-SEM is particularly suitable for studies with relatively small to medium sample sizes, complex models with multiple constructs and indicators, and data that may not conform to multivariate normality (Hair et al., 2019). Unlike CB-SEM, which emphasises theory testing and requires larger samples, PLS-SEM is prediction-oriented and allows robust estimation in exploratory contexts such as the present study. The adequacy of the sample size was assessed following the "10 times rule" (Barclay et al., 1995), which recommends a minimum of ten observations per indicator or per maximum structural path pointing to a construct. In our model, the largest number of paths is four, suggesting a minimum of 40 cases, which our sample of 218 comfortably exceeds. A post-hoc power analysis using G*Power also confirmed that the study achieved sufficient statistical power ($\beta > 0.80$) to detect medium effect sizes. Participation was voluntary and uncompensated. To reduce potential nonresponse bias, incomplete responses were excluded, and comparisons between early and late respondents revealed no significant differences.

Out of a total of 218 respondents, 79.82% were women, and 20.18% were men. Most of the respondents (51.38%) belonged to the 18–25 age group. Other respondents were in the age groups 14–18 (2.75%), 26–35 (11.93%), 36–45 (10.09%), 46–55 (19.27%), 56–65 (2.75%), and 66 and over (1.38%). The most represented level of education was graduate study (40.37% of respondents). The remaining respondents were distributed as follows: elementary school (1.83%), postgraduate studies (MSc, MBA, PhD) (5.96%), undergraduate studies and higher professional education (33.49%), and high school (18.35%). In terms of employment status, most respondents were students and full-time employees, accounting for 44.95% and 43.12% of the respondents, respectively.

4. Results

All variables were checked for outliers, and none were found. A two-step analytical approach was used to test the hypotheses. In the first step, the reliability, internal consistency, and convergent validity of the measurement scales were evaluated. In the second step, the research model was evaluated.

4.1 Measurement model results

The research model is evaluated through an analysis of convergent validity (factor loadings and average variance extracted, AVE), internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability), and discriminant validity (Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio, HTMT).

Table 1 Outer model evaluation

Code of constructs/variables	Outer loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
Amount and depth		0.852	0.883	0.604
I usually talk about myself on social media for extended periods.	0.822			
I often discuss my feelings about myself on social media.	0.890			
I often express my personal beliefs and opinions on social media.	0.640			
I typically reveal information about myself on social media without intending to do so.	0.710			
I often disclose intimate, personal information about myself on social media without hesitation.	0.798			
Polarity		0.857	0.883	0.719
I usually disclose positive information about myself on social media.	0.806			
I normally express positive feelings about myself on social media.	0.761			
Overall, my self-disclosures on social media are more positive than negative.	0.963			
Accuracy		0.934	0.945	0.813
Overall, my self-disclosures on social media are more positive than negative.	0.909			
My self-disclosures on social media are completely accurate reflections of who I really am.	0.927			
My self-disclosures on social media can accurately reflect my own feelings, emotions, and experiences.	0.884			
My statements about my own feelings, emotions, and experiences on social media are always accurate selfperceptions.	0.885			
Intent		0.910	0.943	0.848
When I express my personal feelings on social media, I am always aware of what I am doing and saying.	0.945			
When I reveal my feelings about myself on social media, I consciously intend to do so.	0.870			
When I self-disclose on social media, I am consciously aware of what I am revealing.	0.945			
Self-esteem		0.888	0.917	0.690
Overall, I am satisfied with myself.	0.808			
I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	0.763			
I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	0.862			
I wish I thought more highly of myself.	0.879			
I take a positive attitude towards myself.	0.837			
Body positivity		0.960	0.965	0.755
Body-positive content is a significant part of my life.	0.860			
I am very interested in body-positive content.	0.817			
Body-positive content is an important part of my life.	0.873			
I am very much involved in/with bodypositive content.	0.880			

Code of constructs/variables	Outer loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
I pay a lot of attention to body-positive content.	0.892			
Making purchase decisions for bodypositive content is significant to me.	0.894			
I think a lot about my choices when it comes to body-positive content.	0.872			
I attach great importance to bodypositive content purchases.	0.871			
I feel a sense of personal satisfaction when I follow body-positive influencers.	0.861			

Source: Authors

Table 1 presents values that indicate satisfactory levels for all metric attributes. Five indicator variables from the Self-esteem construct, with outer loadings less than 0.4, were eliminated from further analysis. Manifest variables have outer factor loadings ranging from 0.713 to 0.965 and were all retained for further analysis (Hair et al., 2019).

The indicator variable AMOD3 with an outer loading of 0.640 (ranging between 0.4 and 0.7) was retained because the values for the composite reliability (CR) and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.7. In addition, the average variance extracted (AVE) for

the indicators was above 0.5, and removing this variable would not significantly improve the values of these coefficients (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Hair et al., 2019).

Both Cronbach's alpha and CR coefficients above 0.75 indicate satisfactory internal consistency across all factors (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). In addition, the AVE values are above the required minimum threshold of 0.5, confirming that the constructs explain more than half of the variance in their associated indicators (Malhotra, 2010).

The discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT), presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio

	Accuracy	Amount and depth	Body positivity	Intent	Polarity
Amount and depth	0.464				
Body positivity	0.319	0.365			
Intent	0.581	0.143	0.192		
Polarity	0.680	0.674	0.446	0.540	
Self-esteem	0.170	0.160	0.193	0.346	0.158

Source: Authors

The values of the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) ranged from 0.143 to 0.680 and were therefore well below the recommended thresh-

old value of 0.9. This shows that the measurement model successfully demonstrates discriminant validity.

Table 3 Variance inflation factor inner model matrix

	Accuracy	Amount and depth	Body positivity	Intent	Polarity	Self-esteem
Accuracy						1.969
Amount and depth						1.363
Body positivity						
Intent						1.673
Polarity						2.212
Self-esteem			1.000			

Source: Authors

Table 3 presents the results of the variance inflation factors (VIF), which indicate that all the values are below 5, with the highest being 2.212, so no multicollinearity is detected. This result indicates that common method variance is not a concern in our model and supports the discriminant validity and reliability of the constructs.

4.2 Hypotheses testing

A bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples was employed to test the hypotheses. The coefficient of determination (R^2) revealed that the endogenous variable Self-esteem is moderately explained by the exogenous variables Amount, Depth, Accuracy, Body Intent, and Polarity, accounting for 14.6% of its variance. Meanwhile, the endogenous

variable Body Positivity is weakly explained by the exogenous variables, accounting for only 2.9% of its variance. The PLSpredict procedure was applied to assess the predictive relevance ($Q^2_{predict}$) of the research model. All Q^2 values were greater than zero, with 0.003 for Body Positivity and 0.105 for Self-esteem. These results suggest that the exogenous variables provide an adequate basis for predicting the endogenous variables, and the model demonstrates acceptable predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 4 presents the estimated path coefficients, standard deviations, t-values, p-values, and confident intervals of the research model.

Table 4 Structural model assessment

	β	STDEV	t- statistics	p-value	Supported
H1a Amount and depth \rightarrow Self-esteem	-0.263	0.122	2.224	0.026	✓
H1b Polarity \rightarrow Self-esteem	0.159	0.088	1.970	0.049	✓
H1c Accuracy \rightarrow Self-esteem	0.020	0.071	0.152	0.879	x
H1d Intent \rightarrow Self-esteem	0.239	0.101	2.417	0.016	✓
H2 Self-esteem \rightarrow Body-positive content	0.222	0.073	3.024	0.003	✓

Source: Authors

The results indicate that the constructs Polarity ($\beta = 0.159$; $p < 0.05$), and Intent ($\beta = 0.239$; $p < 0.05$), have a significant and positive effect on Self-esteem. Therefore, H1b and H1d are supported. The construct Amount and depth ($\beta = -0.263$; $p < 0.05$) has a significant and negative effect on Self-esteem, while Accuracy ($\beta = 0.020$; $p > 0.05$) has a non-significant and positive effect on Self-esteem, thus confirming H1a and not supporting H1c.

Self-esteem has a significant and positive relationship with Body-positive content ($\beta = 0.222$; $p < 0.05$), confirming hypothesis H2.

The relatively low explanatory power for body positivity requires careful interpretation. While the relationship between self-esteem and body-positive content is statistically significant, the variance explained is limited. This indicates that other important predictors not included in the model likely

contribute to engagement with body positivity content. Potential omitted variables include internalised beauty standards, frequency of exposure to idealised influencers, and individual differences in resilience to social comparison. Additionally, measurement issues may partly account for the low β , as the adopted items capture interest and involvement with bodypositive content but may not fully reflect broader behavioural or attitudinal dimensions of the construct.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The development of social networks has given marketers access to valuable, effective data on consumer demographics and purchasing habits. Individuals who are successful on social media and have the power to influence their followers have become known as influencers. Social networks and influ-

encers are becoming more important every day in the virtual world of beauty and glamour. Attractive aspects of a person differ from culture to culture, but all cultures around the world share one thing in common – an appreciation and admiration of beauty. Many societal beauty standards are based on prototypes of the ideal man or woman within a particular culture. The categorisation of people and the creation of perfect body proportions for men and women have created a need for resistance, leading to a movement against imposed beauty standards and body ideals known as the body positivity movement.

This research provides useful insights into the relationships between self-disclosure and self-esteem factors. In this way, it contributes to the theory of influencer marketing by investigating the effect of Amount and depth, Polarity, Accuracy, and Intent on Self-esteem, which influences the Body-positive content.

This study confirms a significant role that dimensions of self-disclosure, particularly Polarity and Intent, play in enhancing self-esteem among Instagram users, which is in line with findings by Jacobson et al. (2020) and Lai and Yang (2015), who emphasised the psychological importance of positive self-presentation and intentional content sharing in digital environments. The unexpected negative effect of Amount and depth on self-esteem contrasts with prior literature that links frequent sharing to increased perceived popularity and social capital (Sprecher et al., 2013). This may suggest a saturation effect or content fatigue, where excessive self-disclosure dilutes perceived authenticity or invites negative social comparison, as noted by Vogel et al. (2014). The results align with Chu et al.'s (2022) observation that quality-based dimensions of self-disclosure are more beneficial for psychological well-being than mere quantity. As shown by Koay et al. (2023) and Chen et al. (2025), self-disclosure promotes perceived intimacy and relatedness, which in turn strengthens users' identification with influencers or online communities. This may explain why participants with higher self-esteem in this study also engaged more with body-positive content, mirroring the relational mechanisms observed in influencer–follower interactions.

A non-significant role of Accuracy may reflect a shift in user values where curated authenticity is more socially rewarded than factual self-representation (Toma et al., 2008). Importantly, the study

establishes a positive relationship between self-esteem and engagement with bodypositive content, expanding on research by Lazuka et al. (2020) and Cohen et al. (2021), which emphasised the empowering role of inclusive imagery. Our findings suggest that individuals with higher self-esteem are more receptive to or influenced by such content, which may function as a reinforcement loop: positive self-view encourages engagement with affirming narratives, which in turn stabilises or boosts self-image.

Previous studies have investigated whether people seek advice from influencers, whether fashion bloggers portray their brand personalities as funny female characters (Duffy & Hund, 2015), the relationship between influencers and the consumers who follow them, the relationship between content posted on Instagram and users' personality traits (Ferwerda & Tkalcic 2018), and have endeavoured to better understand body positivity messages on social media (Lazuka et al., 2020; Haywood et al., 2025).

The aim of this research was to determine whether influencers actually influence perceptions of beauty and how much respondents know about body-positive influencers. Several key findings emerged from the empirical analysis. The research results confirmed that there is a positive influence of Polarity, Accuracy, and Intent on Self-esteem, which is in line with the research findings of several studies (Jacobson et al., 2020, Bi & Zhang, 2023). This study also reveals a positive impact of Self-esteem and Body-positive content, which represents the novelty of this research.

Previous research has provided a sufficient basis for the study conducted, and the findings of the influence of influencers on beauty perceptions have opened up the possibility of examining stronger relationships between constructs more concretely and expanding the area of interest. From a practical standpoint, marketers and influencers should interpret Polarity and Intent not just as content strategies but as emotional cues that reinforce user identity. Influencers and brands promoting body positivity should aim to engage users with higher self-esteem as amplifiers of inclusive messaging.

6. Practical implications, limitations and future research directions

Several practical implications for companies and organisations can be derived from the results of this

study. The results show that Polarity and Intention have a significant and positive impact on Self-esteem, which emphasises the importance of fostering a positive environment and user intentions on platforms. Therefore, social platform developers should focus on creating positive, intention-driven interactions that enhance users' self-esteem. Strategies such as promoting supportive and constructive content, implementing features that encourage user intentions, and providing tools for self-expression can enhance these aspects. Organisations should strive to provide content in a balanced way, avoid information overload, and ensure that content is digestible and user-friendly. Simplifying the presentation of content and ensuring clarity and relevance can help mitigate the negative impact on self-esteem. Given the findings on the psychological effects of curated self-presentation and unrealistic beauty ideals, social media platforms should implement guidelines promoting transparency of photo alterations, algorithmic amplification of diverse body types, and mental health literacy. Influencer marketing regulations should also mandate disclosure of filters and editing to reduce harm among impressionable audiences. Educational initiatives aimed at fostering critical digital literacy and body-neutral messaging are recommended as preventative strategies.

As Self-esteem is significantly and positively related to body-positive content, organisations should prioritise the promotion of body positivity on their platforms. This can be achieved by showing diverse and inclusive representations, spreading positive messages about the body, and creating a community that supports self-acceptance and positivity.

A non-significant impact of Accuracy on Self-esteem suggests that while accuracy in self-disclosure is important, it does not have a direct impact on self-esteem. However, it remains critical to overall platform credibility and user trust.

Developers and marketers should work together to create user-centred experiences that take into account the key factors identified in the study. By prioritising positive interactions, balanced content, and positive messaging, companies can improve users' self-esteem and perceptions, ultimately driving adoption and usage of their platforms.

These results should be interpreted in the light of certain limitations, which also offer a valuable foundation for future research. The focus of this research is on specific constructs and the potential discrepancy between intention and actual behaviour. This

study relies on self-reported data, particularly in areas like self-esteem and body image perception. Participants may overstate positive attributes or engagement with body-positive content to align with socially acceptable standards. This could skew the observed strength of certain relationships. On the other hand, the sample is composed of Instagram users who voluntarily participated in an online survey, leading to potential selection bias and limitations in generalisability. The dominance of younger female respondents (aged 18–25) may not be representative of broader age and gender populations. While this group represents a key demographic of Instagram users, the skewed distribution limits the generalisability of findings to older populations, male users, or users of other platforms. Consequently, the results should be interpreted as indicative of patterns among young female Instagram users rather than universally applicable. Future studies should employ stratified sampling across gender, age, and platform use to increase representativeness and examine whether the observed relationships hold across more diverse populations.

Additional constructs such as internalised beauty standards, frequency of influencer exposure, or resilience to social comparison should be incorporated to improve the explanatory power of the model, particularly regarding body positivity. Researchers should explore longitudinal designs to examine causal relationships over time, particularly regarding the directionality between self-esteem and body-positive engagement. Furthermore, the moderating role of gender, age, or social comparison tendencies could be investigated. Expanding to other platforms, such as TikTok, would allow for comparative analysis of platform-specific affordances on self-disclosure and self-perception. Cross-platform comparisons and the use of mixed methods could provide further insights into users' decision-making processes on social media platforms. Integrating qualitative methods could provide deeper insights into subjective experiences behind disclosure behaviour.

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