

The Impact of Health Marketing in Digital Platforms on Egyptian Females' Body Image

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the impact of digital health marketing on Egyptian females' body image, self-esteem, and attitudes toward medicalized weight-loss interventions. As social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook increasingly promote weight-loss medications, cosmetic injections, and surgical procedures, idealized body imagery and persuasive health claims continue to shape contemporary beauty standards and influence women's psychological well-being. A mixed-method approach was used to provide a comprehensive analysis. The quantitative phase consisted of an online survey of 201 Egyptian females aged 14 to 63, measuring their exposure to health-related digital health marketing and its relationship with body image, self-esteem, and behavioral intentions. The qualitative phase included eight in-depth interviews with bariatric and plastic surgeons, psychologists, and health and beauty influencers, which were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns. Findings showed that frequent exposure to digital health marketing is significantly associated with heightened body dissatisfaction, reduced self-esteem, and increased interest in weight-loss procedures. Experts emphasized that misleading advertisements and unregulated influencer marketing content have normalized aesthetic enhancement as a lifestyle trend. Psychologists also highlighted growing social comparison and emotional distress, often requiring interventions such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT). Overall, the study underscores the need for media literacy, ethical weight-loss advertising regulations, and psychological awareness initiatives to support healthier self-perceptions among Egyptian women. The research contributes to understanding how digital health communication reshapes beauty ideals and influences women's identities in the social media era.

Keywords: *Body image, digital health marketing, Egypt, influencer marketing, plastic surgery, self-esteem, social media, weight-loss advertising*

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital platforms have become dominant environments through which individuals construct and negotiate meanings related to health, beauty, and self-worth. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube rely heavily on visual communication and influencer-driven content, making them particularly powerful in shaping body-related perceptions (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Rodgers et al., 2020). Within this environment, health marketing has increasingly adopted aesthetic narratives, promoting

weight-loss injections, cosmetic surgeries, and body-contouring procedures as accessible lifestyle choices rather than complex medical decisions.

In Egypt, the rapid growth of social media usage has intensified exposure to globalized beauty ideals while intersecting with local cultural norms surrounding femininity, attractiveness, and social value. Research indicates that Arab women experience increasing pressure to conform to narrow appearance standards,

often reinforced through social comparison and validation mechanisms embedded within social media platforms (Musaiger et al., 2013; Radwan et al., 2019). Digital health marketing amplifies these pressures by circulating idealized before-and-after imagery, influencer testimonials, and persuasive health claims that emphasize rapid and effortless transformation.

Although international scholarship has extensively examined the relationship between social media use and body dissatisfaction, fewer studies have addressed the specific role of digital health marketing within non-Western contexts, particularly Egypt. This study addresses this gap by examining how exposure to health-related marketing messages on social media influences Egyptian females' body image, self-esteem, and attitudes toward medicalized weight-loss interventions. By integrating psychological theory, health communication research, and regional analysis, the study offers a culturally grounded understanding of digital persuasion in contemporary Egyptian society.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social Media, Body Image, and Psychological Effects

A substantial body of research demonstrates that exposure to appearance-focused social media content is associated with increased body dissatisfaction, self-objectification, and disordered eating behaviors (Fardouly et al., 2015; Saiphoo & Vahedi, 2022). Systematic reviews confirm that idealized images on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok promote unrealistic beauty standards and intensify upward social comparison, particularly among women and adolescent girls (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Raggatt et al., 2022).

Experimental and longitudinal studies show that even brief exposure to idealized imagery can result in immediate increases in body shame, negative affect, and appearance anxiety (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015; Hendrickse et al., 2023). These effects are magnified by interactive features such as likes, comments, and follower metrics, which function as social validation cues and reinforce appearance-based self-worth (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012).

In Middle Eastern contexts, emerging evidence suggests that social media exerts similar psychological effects. Studies among Arab and Egyptian populations indicate that intensive social media engagement predicts higher levels of body dissatisfaction, internalization of beauty ideals, and acceptance of cosmetic enhancement as normative behavior (Melki et al., 2015; El-Deeb

et al., 2024). These findings demonstrate that the psychological mechanisms identified in Western contexts operate similarly within Arab societies.

2.2 Digital Health Marketing and the Medicalization of Beauty

Digital health marketing represents a distinct form of persuasion that combines medical discourse with aesthetic aspiration. Unlike traditional advertising, digital health marketing relies on influencer endorsements, algorithmic targeting, and visually compelling narratives that frame medical interventions as routine self-improvement practices (Montgomery et al., 2012). These practices blur the distinction between health necessity and cosmetic desire.

Empirical research demonstrates that repeated exposure to cosmetic surgery advertisements and weight-loss promotions on social media increases willingness to pursue both invasive and non-invasive procedures (Alghamdi et al., 2023; Mendelson et al., 2021). Influencers play a particularly powerful role, as their perceived authenticity and relatability enhance trust and reduce perceived risk (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

Scholars have raised ethical concerns regarding the normalization of medicalized beauty, especially when marketing content minimizes risks, exaggerates outcomes, or targets psychologically vulnerable audiences (Clarke & Griffin, 2008; Puhl & Suh, 2015). Such practices contribute to the medicalization of normal body variations and reinforce weight stigma, with potential long-term psychological consequences.

2.3 Regional and Egyptian Studies

Although regional scholarship remains limited, available studies suggest that Arab women increasingly navigate hybrid beauty ideals shaped by Western media and local cultural expectations. Research among Arab youth highlights the role of social media in reinforcing body surveillance, appearance monitoring, and validation-seeking behaviors (Musaiger et al., 2013; Ahmed & Nassar, 2023).

In Egypt specifically, recent studies link high social media exposure to symptoms of body dysmorphic disorder, dieting behaviors, and emotional distress (El-Deeb et al., 2024; El-Kholy et al., 2023). However, few studies have explicitly examined digital health marketing, underscoring the importance of the present research in advancing understanding of media-health dynamics in the Egyptian context.

3. METHODS AND THEORY

3.1 Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to explore how digital health marketing—particularly advertisements for weight-loss products, injections, and cosmetic surgeries—affects Egyptian females’ body image, self-perception, and behavioral intentions. The methodology integrated both quantitative and qualitative approaches to generate a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon. The quantitative component relied on a structured online survey distributed to 201 Egyptian females across various age categories. The survey measured frequency of exposure to digital health marketing, perceptions of body image, trust in influencer-promoted content, and behavioral intentions toward weight-loss interventions. Descriptive statistics were used to outline demographic patterns and exposure tendencies, while inferential analysis employed Spearman’s Rank Correlation to test relationships among variables and Kruskal–Wallis tests to assess group differences based on age and education.

The qualitative phase used in-depth interviews with experts from three fields: medical and cosmetic practitioners, psychologists, and social media influencers specializing in beauty and health. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and explored expert perspectives related to psychological mechanisms, marketing strategies, and societal influences surrounding digital health marketing. A thematic analysis framework was applied to the interviews, enabling the identification of recurring themes that describe how Egyptian women interpret and internalize content promoting weight-loss products and medical aesthetics. Together, the mixed-methods approach ensured that quantitative findings captured statistical patterns, while qualitative findings offered contextual depth and explanation.

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1. Online Survey:

The questionnaire was designed to gather quantitative data on participants’ exposure to digital health marketing, perceptions of body image, and attitudes toward weight-loss interventions. It included closed-ended, open-ended, and Likert-scale questions divided into four sections:

- Demographic information (age, education, social media usage).

- Exposure to digital health marketing (frequency and type of content seen).
- Body image perception and satisfaction.
- Attitudes and behavioral intentions toward medicalized beauty interventions.

The questionnaire was distributed electronically using Google Forms to reach participants through social media channels and university groups.

3.2.2. Sampling:

A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit Egyptian females who actively use social media platforms. Participants were recruited through university networks and online communities to ensure diversity in age, education, and digital exposure. The survey instrument incorporated adapted items from validated body image and media pressure scales.

3.3. In-Depth Interviews

For the qualitative phase, in-depth interviews were conducted with experts from the three categories mentioned above. Each interview lasted between 45 and 70 minutes and followed a flexible guide allowing for probing questions and follow-up discussions. Additionally, some interviews were hosted online via Zoom, and others were face-to-face with the interviewees.

Interview questions focused on perceptions of digital health marketing, psychological impacts on women, cultural factors influencing body ideals, and the role of influencers in shaping attitudes.

3.3.1. Ethical Approval and Consent

All interviews were conducted in Arabic, transcribed verbatim, and later translated into English for analysis. The researcher ensured that participants were informed about the purpose and confidentiality of the study before each interview. In addition, all participants were asked for consent regarding the recording of each meeting beforehand for solely academic reasons.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

3.4.1. Qualitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using the **Statistical Package for the Social Sciences**

(SPSS), which enabled both descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. Descriptive statistics—including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations—were used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and provide an overview of the key study variables. For inferential analysis, non-parametric statistical tests were employed due to the ordinal nature of the questionnaire items and the non-normal distribution of several variables. **Spearman's rank-order correlation** was used to examine the strength and direction of relationships between continuous and ordinal constructs, such as exposure to digital health marketing, body dissatisfaction, trust in influencer content, and behavioral intention. Additionally, **Kruskal–Wallis H** tests were conducted to assess differences in perceptions, psychological responses, and behavioral tendencies across multiple independent groups. Together, these statistical tests allowed for rigorous hypothesis testing and provided empirical evidence regarding the influence of digital health marketing on women's body image and weight-loss-related behaviors.

3.4.2. Qualitative Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview data. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step method, the researcher transcribed, coded, categorized, and interpreted the data to identify recurring patterns and key themes. This process involved iterative comparison between transcripts to ensure that insights were consistent and theoretically grounded.

3.5 Theoretical Framework

This study integrates Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), the Social Media Influence Model (SMIM) (Perloff, 2021), and Image Theory (Boulding, 1956) into a unified explanatory framework.

Social Comparison Theory explains how women engage in upward comparisons with idealized digital representations, leading to dissatisfaction and diminished self-esteem. SMIM extends this process by highlighting the role of algorithmic repetition, peer feedback, and influencer authority in intensifying exposure and persuasion. Image Theory elucidates how repeated visual exposure constructs internalized mental images that redefine perceptions of normality and desirability. Together, these theories explain how exposure, psychological processing, and internalization interact to shape body image perceptions and behavioral intentions.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The quantitative analysis revealed consistent patterns demonstrating the influence of digital health marketing on Egyptian females' perceptions and behaviors. The results showed that participants were highly exposed to digital health advertisements, especially on Instagram and TikTok, with younger respondents (aged 15–25) reporting the highest level of exposure. A significant negative correlation emerged between exposure to digital health content and body image satisfaction, supporting the first and third hypotheses. Increased exposure corresponded with greater dissatisfaction and more negative self-evaluations related to body appearance.

Participants were asked to indicate which social media platforms they use most frequently. Instagram was the most used platform (159, 79.1%), followed by Facebook (139, 69.2%), YouTube (74, 36.8%), TikTok (39, 19.4%), and Snapchat (23, 11.4%). Fewer participants reported using X/Twitter (10, 5.0%), WhatsApp (2, 1.0%), Watch it (1, 0.5%), and Shahid (1, 0.5%) (see Table 4.8).

Table 1: Most Frequently Used Social Media Platforms

Social Media Platform	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Instagram	159	79.1%
Facebook	139	69.2%
YouTube	74	36.8%
TikTok	39	19.4%
Snapchat	23	11.4%
X (Twitter)	10	5.0%
WhatsApp	2	1.0%
Watch it	1	0.5%
Shahid	1	0.5%

Instagram (79.1%) and Facebook (69.2%) dominate social media use among Egyptian females in this sample. These platforms are widely known for their visual content, which often drives appearance-based comparison and exposure to beauty-related marketing.

TikTok and Snapchat, although used by fewer participants, remain notable as they host highly curated short-form beauty content. The pattern reflects a visually intensive online environment, directly relevant to hypotheses concerning body dissatisfaction and the internalization of idealized beauty imagery.

Table 2: Age Groups of Participants

Age Group	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
14–23	31	15.4%
24–33	37	18.4%
34–43	46	22.9%
44–53	62	30.8%
54–63	25	12.4%
Total	201	100%

The age distribution shows that a substantial proportion of respondents were **young adults and women in their early and mid-thirties**, with the 14–23 age group representing 15.4% and the 24–33 age group representing 18.4%, totaling **33.8%** of the sample. This indicates that younger participants form a large and influential segment of the study population, particularly relevant given the strong digital engagement typically

associated with these age groups.

At the same time, another major portion of respondents were women aged **34–43 (22.9%)** and **44–53 (30.8%)**, the latter being the single largest subgroup in the sample. Women in the **34–43 and 44–53** age groups are typically experiencing natural aging processes, which can include skin laxity, weight fluctuations, and other physical changes. This makes them more conscious of their appearance and health, leading them to consider weight-loss methods and cosmetic surgeries as viable options to achieve a more youthful look and improve their overall well-being.

The results also indicated that higher levels of body dissatisfaction were strongly associated with a greater inclination toward medicalized weight-loss interventions, including slimming injections, fast-acting non-surgical treatments, and procedures such as liposuction or sleeve gastrectomy.

Table 3: Correlation Between Body Dissatisfaction and Weight-Loss Behavioral Intentions

Women’s Level of Body Dissatisfaction	I have considered buying a weight-loss product because of social media advertisements.	I feel encouraged to try weight loss treatments when I see many positive reviews and comments on social media.	Women choose surgeries and products for faster results than dieting.	Seeing weight loss success stories or influencer posts on social media makes me more likely to try weight-loss products/treatments
Spearman’s rho Correlation Coefficient	.633**	.528**	.446**	.432**
Significance	.001	.001	.002	.004

The correlation analysis examined the relationship between body dissatisfaction and women’s behavioral intentions toward weight-loss products and treatments promoted on social media. The results showed that body dissatisfaction was strongly associated with the likelihood of considering weight-loss products after viewing social media ads (**r = .633, p < .01**). This strong positive correlation indicates that women with higher body dissatisfaction are significantly more inclined to consider purchasing weight-loss products when exposed to digital advertisements, a finding consistent with the **Social Influence Model**, in which persuasive cues and rapid-results claim increase behavioral intention. A similarly strong association emerged in the relationship between body dissatisfaction and feeling encouraged to try weight-loss treatments when seeing many positive reviews and comments on social media (**r = .528, p < .01**). This suggests that women who are more dissatisfied with their bodies are particularly influenced by user-generated approval cues, making them more likely to try weight-loss treatments after encountering positive evaluations.

Furthermore, trust in influencer marketing demonstrated a significant relationship with behavioral intention. Women who trusted the influencers they followed were more likely to consider, seek, or purchase advertised health and weight-loss products.

Additional analyses indicated that education level moderated the impact of digital health marketing. Women with higher education displayed more critical evaluation skills and were less influenced by exaggerated claims, whereas lower-education groups showed greater susceptibility. Digital literacy also played a protective role: participants with stronger digital evaluation skills were less likely to believe misleading advertisements, aligning with the sixth hypothesis. Finally, psychological tendencies such as social comparison and validation-seeking amplified the behavioral influence of digital health marketing, confirming the seventh hypothesis.

The qualitative findings further contextualized the survey results by providing expert perspectives on how digital health marketing shapes women’s self-perception.

Experts described the increasing normalization of medicalized beauty practices—such as fat-dissolving injections, fillers, and rapid weight-loss solutions—due to the repetitive and visually persuasive nature of digital advertisements. Many noted that this normalization is particularly prominent among younger females, who encounter such promotions as part of everyday digital consumption.

Interviewees also emphasized the role of platform algorithms in amplifying exposure. Once a user interacts with slimming or beauty-oriented content, similar material is repeatedly shown, reinforcing the perceived need to pursue certain aesthetic transformations. Psychologists observed that social comparison pressures are especially pronounced on visually driven platforms. Egyptian females frequently compare themselves to idealized, filtered, and often surgically enhanced images online, which increases appearance anxiety, self-criticism, and dieting behaviors. Medical experts and psychologists also pointed to the prevalence

of misleading or unregulated advertisements. They reported frequent concerns about exaggerated before-and-after photos, underdisclosed risks, and influencers giving unlicensed medical advice. Finally, experts highlighted generational differences: younger users tend to be more susceptible to persuasive imagery and peer validation dynamics, while older women tend to interpret digital content more critically.

4.1 Summary of Hypotheses Testing Results

This section provides a consolidated overview of the empirical findings related to each of the proposed hypotheses within the inferential analysis. The table below summarizes whether each hypothesis was supported, partially supported, or not supported based on the statistical evidence obtained from the analysis. This synthesis aims to facilitate a clear understanding of the study's key inferential outcomes and their implications within the theoretical framework.

Table 4: Hypotheses Testing Results

Hypothesis	Statement	Results Summary	Support Level
H1: Exposure to weight-loss digital marketing negatively affects women's body image perception.	Increased exposure to weight-loss ads and related content correlates with higher body dissatisfaction and harmful eating reactions.	Significant positive correlations between exposure indicators and body dissatisfaction ($r = .402-.608, p < .01$). Women with higher perceived social media impact showed more restrictive eating behaviors (Kruskal-Wallis, $p = .018$).	Supported
H2: Women with higher body dissatisfaction are more likely to seek medicalized weight-loss interventions.	Elevated body dissatisfaction predicts greater intentions to consider weight-loss products, treatments, and surgeries.	Strong positive correlations between body dissatisfaction and behavioral intentions ($r = .446-.633, p < .01$). Significant differences in perceptions of before-and-after images ($p = .011$).	Supported
H3: Frequency of exposure to social media health advertisements is associated with higher body dissatisfaction.	Greater daily social media use correlates with increased social comparison, appearance dissatisfaction, and influence of idealized images.	Kruskal-Wallis tests showed significant differences in comparison behaviors and self-critical feelings across time-use groups ($p < .001$). Heavier social media users exhibited higher comparison and dissatisfaction.	Supported
H4: Higher trust in influencer marketing predicts stronger behavioral intentions towards weight-loss products.	Trust in social media and influencer content directly correlates with purchase intentions and receptiveness to weight-loss messages.	Significant positive correlations between trust and behavioral intentions ($r = .219-.566, p < .01$). Trust variables are strongly linked to encouragement and influence from reviews and success stories.	Supported
H5: Socioeconomic status influences social media-driven weight-loss attitudes and behaviors.	Differences in perceptions and behaviors based on education and marital status.	- Significant differences found primarily among education groups ($p < .05$) in perceptions of social media effects and weight-loss trends. Marital status effects were limited; only celebrity influence showed significant variation ($p = .002$).	Partially Supported
H6: Digital literacy reduces belief in misleading weight-loss advertisements.	Women demonstrating higher awareness and critical evaluation are less likely to trust or endorse unsafe ads.	Women who perceive ads as unsafe support stricter regulation ($p = .039$). No significant differences in overall trust based on perceived and truthfulness ($p > .05$).	Partially Supported
H7: Psychological factors, especially social comparison and validation-seeking, intensify behavioral responses to digital health marketing.	Higher tendencies for social comparison and appearance dissatisfaction amplify behavioral impacts.	Significant difference in appearance dissatisfaction among groups perceiving influencer influence ($p = .045$). Most other variables showed no significant differences ($p > .05$).	Partially Supported

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings of this study, several recommendations can be proposed to enhance the regulation, communication, and public understanding of digital health marketing in Egypt. First, relevant media authorities must strengthen **oversight of online advertisements related to weight-loss products, injections, and cosmetic procedures**. Given that the study revealed a high level of exposure to misleading and idealized content, regulatory bodies should establish clearer guidelines to ensure that digital health advertisements are medically accurate, transparent, and based on approved clinical information. These regulations should also extend to influencer marketing, requiring content creators to clearly disclose sponsorships and refrain from promoting unverified or unsafe products.

Furthermore, **social media platforms should be encouraged to cooperate with national health authorities by developing mechanisms to flag, review, or restrict advertisements that promote unrealistic body ideals or medically unregulated interventions**. Increasing the visibility of verified medical information on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook would help counteract the spread of exaggerated claims and reduce the impact of harmful visual content. Clinics and healthcare professionals, in particular, are advised to adopt more responsible communication strategies that prioritize patient safety and avoid the use of heavily edited “before-and-after” images that may reinforce distorted body expectations.

At the societal level, **the findings highlight the need to strengthen digital literacy and body-image awareness, especially among adolescent and**

young adult females who demonstrated heightened susceptibility to social comparison and persuasive marketing cues. Educational institutions and mental-health practitioners should therefore implement awareness programs that help young women evaluate online content critically, understand the psychological mechanisms behind digital persuasion, and develop healthier self-perceptions. This includes workshops, school-based interventions, and community campaigns that promote realistic beauty standards and encourage critical engagement with online health information.

For influencers and digital opinion leaders, **the results underscore the importance of adopting ethical communication practices**. Influencers are encouraged to avoid presenting medicalized beauty interventions as simple lifestyle choices and to refrain from endorsing products without credible medical evidence. Instead, they may contribute positively by sharing accurate information, collaborating with certified healthcare professionals, and supporting messages that promote body acceptance and informed decision-making.

Finally, future research would benefit from **expanding the demographic scope beyond the current sample, particularly by examining rural populations, older age groups, and males, who may experience distinct forms of social media influence**. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to track changes in body image and behavioral intentions over time, especially as digital marketing trends and platform algorithms continue to evolve. Conducting platform-specific analyses may further clarify which forms of content—static posts, short-form videos, influencer testimonials, or before-and-after imagery—have the strongest impact on women’s psychological responses. These extensions would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of digital health marketing and its implications for the Egyptian context.

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