
Construction and Exploratory Validation of Online Beauty Standards Sensitivity Scale

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Abstract

As social media use has expanded rapidly, the exposure to idealized beauty has intensified and yet few validated instruments assess individual differences in sensitivity to idealized online beauty standards. The present study was designed to develop and test an instrument called the Online Beauty Standards Sensitivity Scale (OBSS) with a sequential exploratory mixed methods design. In the qualitative part, semi-structured interviews were conducted to develop an item pool of users' experiences of presenting themselves digitally. The quantitative phase included 300 social media users whose data was analyzed to examine the psychometric characteristics of the scale. To validate a unidimensional construct, an exploratory factor analysis was performed to examine sensitivity to online beauty standards as a latent construct. The items of the OBSS showed strong item coherence and excellent internal consistency. Validity evidence was limited to preliminary nomological network associations rather than full construct validation. In conclusion, the OBSS is an early-stage measurement instrument with preliminary psychometric support. The construct validity and generalizability should be confirmed through further validation, using confirmatory factor analysis, and more comprehensive criterion measures, and across cultural groups.

Keywords: Social Media, Beauty Standards, Online Beauty Norms, Online Beauty, Body Image, Scale Development, Social Comparison, Beauty Filter, Beauty Ads

Introduction

Social media have revolutionized the way beauty ideals are produced and spread in culture. In this digital world, values of beauty are those that are created and shared online, on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat and YouTube, where images are often manipulated, edited and carefully selected to showcase perfect physical beauty (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Perloff, 2014; Tiggemann & Slater, 2014). Compared to traditional mass media, contemporary social media integrates beauty ideals into peer networks, increases their psychological salience because of the sense of proximity and authenticity (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Jarman et al., 2021). One of the hallmarks of the internet beauty standard is the systematic promotion of narrow ideals and often unattainable beauty. The ideals are usually defined as a homogenized facial and body appearance without variation and enhanced with the use of digital tools like filters and editors (Vogel et al., 2014; Marengo et al., 2018). This means that when a person sees this type of content, not only does it provide information about aesthetic preferences or personal norm, it also establishes a personal norm for themselves that they can refer to for self-evaluation (Perloff, 2014; Tiggemann & Slater, 2014).

These standards have developed in parallel with the development of participatory digital culture in the mid-2000s, which allowed users to create and consume visual content at the same time through social networks. This was further stimulated by the rise of influencer culture, where beauty, fitness, and lifestyle accounts became a central focus of online identity construction and social comparison (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). The trend became more pronounced with the pandemic, when more time spent on screens and social distancing led to a greater exposure to appearance-based digital content (Jarman et al., 2021).

Psychologically, when witnessing online beauty standards, upward social comparison mechanisms are triggered, which involve comparing one's own appearance with idealized images of others. This process can be understood within the framework of Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) which suggests that when people do not have objective data to use for assessing themselves, they utilize social comparison as a means. However, in online settings, algorithm-curated feeds deepen these comparisons by presenting users with constant exposure to attractive others and peers, making them more likely to engage in negative self-evaluations (Vogel et al., 2014; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015).

Exposure to the appearance-focused social media content has been shown in empirical studies to have a negative impact on self-esteem and body dissatisfaction. Research studies have found that exposure to attractive social media profiles is associated with substantially reduced self-evaluations in comparison to average and neutral images (Vogel et al., 2014). Importantly, the impact of these effects is not restricted to 'active' consumption; negative psychological outcomes, such as body dissatisfaction and depressive symptoms, are also linked to passive consumption of appearance-focused content (Marengo et al., 2018; Tiggemann & Slater, 2014). This indicates that algorithmic exposure can alone evoke cognitive processes that rely on comparison.

One of the most consistent findings of internet exposure to beauty standards is dissatisfaction with one's body. It occurs when people feel they are not living up to the images of themselves they see online that are idealized (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015). The "perceived discrepancy" is associated with increased psychological impacts, such as depression, anxiety, disordered eating patterns and decreased quality of life (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Jarman et al., 2021). Findings from the meta-analytic evidence reveal that, across various populations, there is a strong relationship between media exposure and body dissatisfaction and eating pathology (Grabe et al., 2008).

One pathway to these results has to do with the process of internalization, which occurs when people internalize socially constructed appearance ideals as their personal standards of self-evaluation. Once internalised, these ideals serve as cognitive reference points that shape self-perception, and lead to chronic dissatisfaction when unattainable ideals are not realised (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015). Experimental and longitudinal studies have shown that internalization of the ideal is a core mediator between media exposure and body dissatisfaction and eating pathology (Grabe et al., 2008; Holland & Tiggemann, 2016).

Another essential psychological area impacted by exposure to online beauty standards is self-esteem. Self-esteem is defined as a person's general assessment of his or her self-worth and is very responsive to feedback received through appearance in digital environments (Vogel et al., 2014). Recent studies have suggested that being exposed to highly attractive peers or celebrities on social media can lead to a significant drop in self-esteem relative to neutral (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Vogel et al., 2014). The interaction between cognitive style and environmental exposure is very noticeable amongst people who make frequent comparisons of appearance.

In addition to cognitive and affective responses, online beauty standards also have behavioral impacts. Those who feel they do not match the ideals of their online may engage in restrictive dieting, excessive exercise, and cosmetic consumption as well as digital self-editing before posting content (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Tamplin et al., 2018). These behaviors are a reflection of both self-regulatory efforts and social evaluation that is anticipated; when people try

to match their appearance to their perceived expectations of the norm (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014).

Importantly, social media platforms are designed to feed algorithmically recommended content that is engaging, which compounds their effects. Media images are heavily promoted, especially those appearing in the appearance section (beauty, fitness, lifestyle) as these are highly liked (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Marengo et al., 2018), leading to a higher level of passive exposure even in those who are not actively seeking such content. This feature of design helps to normalize idealized beauty standards in everyday digital media consumption.

Online beauty standards do not affect everyone in the same way. Vulnerability can be greatly moderated by demographic and psychological factors. This is especially true of adolescents and young adults because they are at a developmental stage that involves identity formation and are more sensitive to peer evaluation (Jarman et al., 2021). There are also gender differences, as women have traditionally been more likely to be dissatisfied with their bodies, though there is a growing body of evidence that men are becoming more vulnerable to this issue due to muscular ideals in digital media (Vogel et al., 2014; Nesi & Prinstein, 2015). The cultural context also influences these processes, as there can be competition between the westernized ideals of beauty and the local ideals; which can increase psychological stress in non-western cultures (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016).

One of the other key differences that has come out of recent studies is the difference between active and passive social media usage. In comparison to active consumption of appearance-oriented social media, such as posting or commenting, the passive consumption of such content has been linked to more adverse mental health outcomes (Marengo et al., 2018). This indicates that social media usage is not solely linked with psychological impacts, but also with the nature of the usage and the content that is consumed (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015).

These processes can be understood from another perspective through the lens of self-objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The theory argues that people absorb the self-view of an observer, causing chronic self-surveillance, appearance monitoring. In social media contexts, this process is accelerated with the many evaluative feedback mechanisms in which users are constantly involved, including likes, comments, and visual comparison metrics, which strengthen objectified self-perception (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014; Perloff, 2014).

Social Comparison Theory and Objectification Theory are two theories that offer an integrated explanation of the effects of the online beauty standard on psychological functioning. The evaluative processes induced by idealized images are described by Social Comparison Theory and the internalization and effects of an external gaze are described by Objectification Theory (Festinger, 1954; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). In the light of these frameworks, it is inferred that the influence of the online beauty standards may be considered as external stimuli and internalized cognitive schemas to influence emotional, behavioral and self-evaluative processes. Some people can cope with the appearance of content but others cannot, and are more likely to be reactive to content that may lead to changing their behavior. Research on the relationship between social media and body image/mental health has been fruitful, yet, as noted, there is a lack of a psychometric instrument capturing individual differences in reactions to online beauty norms. Without a valid measure to systematically recognise such differences, and without the planning of specific interventions in order to minimise psychological harm, this would be extremely difficult. In order to overcome this limitation, the present study develops the Online Beauty Standards Sensitivity Scale (OBSS), which is a unidimensional latent construct reflecting overall sensitivity to online beauty standards. This conceptualization is based on previous models and empirical findings, resulting in a comprehensive model of individual differences in the sensitivity to online beauty norms.

The OBSS operationalizes a theoretical construct: Online beauty standards sensitivity, as measurable, to further promote theoretical and applied research. It theoretically connects in a unique way the body image, the social media psychology and self-objectification literatures. This idea can be put into practice very practically: to identify those who may be particularly susceptible to negative psychological effects from digital appearance culture. Overall, this research contributes to the understanding of the effects that digital environments have on humanity's mental state, self-concept and behavioral control now.

Aims and Objectives

- To develop the Online Beauty Standards Sensitivity Scale (OBSS) for measuring individual differences in effects of online beauty standards among social media users.
- To test the OBSS for its factor structure, internal consistency, and validity by examining its relationship with other established psychological measures.

Method

This study used a sequential exploratory mixed methods design that incorporated a qualitative and quantitative method for the development and validation of the Online Beauty Standards Sensitivity Scale (OBSS). A cross sectional design was used to explore the construct and to determine its psychometric characteristics. The scale development was carried out in two stages: a qualitative stage where conceptual domains were developed, and a quantitative stage where the validation and construct testing of the scale were conducted.

Phase 1: Qualitative Exploration

Participants

The qualitative phase consisted of 15 male and female social media users (18-45 years old). Convenience sampling was used to choose the participants. Relevance to the construct being investigated, as all participants reported having an active life on social media.

Measures

Interview Guide

Semi-structured interviews were used to gain information on participants' lived experiences of contact with online beauty standards. The interview guide was developed after a thorough literature review of the social comparison process, self-presentation in digital settings, and body image regulation in social media settings. The guide was designed to cover the main conceptual areas – cognitive appraisal of appearance-related information, affective reaction to exposure, and behavioral adaptations to self-presentation and appearance management.

The semi-structured approach avoided rigid categories of response and enabled participants to give detailed, subjective accounts of the perception, interpretation and internalization of online representations of beauty in everyday use of online communication. The interview structure was developed to yield rich qualitative data, relevant to construct development of the Online Beauty Standards Sensitivity Scale (OBSS), that aligned lived experience with the dimensions of the emergent measurement.

Procedure

After obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board and relevant academic authorities, the subjects were recruited and thoroughly explained to them about the purpose of this research. Prior to the studies, informed consent was obtained. Participant confidentiality and anonymity and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty was assured. Interviews were conducted

individually in a comfortable interview setting which helped minimize the influence of extraneous factors in the environment and provided a consistent setting in which to collect data. The interviews were semi-structured and began with demographic information followed by open-ended interviews to gather a detailed description of participants' experiences of online beauty standards. Interviews were audio recorded with participants' consent and audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis, in an inductive approach, with a theoretical background informed by Social Comparison Theory and Objectification Theory, was used to analyze the data. This allowed the patterns to be identified related to cognitive, emotional and behavioral responses to the internet beauty ideals. An effort has been made to deal with the questions in a strictly methodical way, but the face-to-face interviewing procedure may have had some limitations and social desirability bias may have affected the openness of the responses of the participants.

Phase 2: Quantitative Validation

Participants

There were 300 social media users aged 18-45 years in the quantitative phase. The sample included both males ($n = 130$, 43.3%) and females ($n = 170$, 56.7%). The participants were recruited by convenience sampling through academic networks and online platforms.

Measures

Online Beauty Standards Sensitivity Scale (OBSS)

The Online Beauty Standards Sensitivity Scale (OBSS) was developed to assess the overall sensitivity to online beauty standards. The construction of the scales was done with procedures commonly used in test construction which were conducting qualitative interviews and literature search to form the items of the scale, then the scale was validated through content validation with theoretical review.

The item pool was pretested for clarity and redundancy and preliminary construct-related validity evidence. The final 35-item version was rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with higher scores indicating higher levels of sensitivity to online beauty standards. The OBSS was used as part of a structured on-line survey together with other psychometric questionnaires to validate the answers quantitatively. This was done by surveying the participants, using Google Forms to make it accessible and easy for the participants to complete the survey. The overall questionnaire was presented in the same order; and the items were presented in a fixed order to guarantee consistency of responses.

Data screening procedures were conducted prior to data analysis to minimize missing data, and to identify careless or rapid responses. To examine preliminary nomological network validity, OBSS scores were correlated with measures of perceived social support (MSPSS) and general interpersonal sensitivity (ISS). These variables were selected to examine whether OBSS is associated with broader psychosocial functioning rather than construct-specific convergent measures.

Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS)

The Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS; Chen & Starosta, 2000) was used as part of the study to explore external associations of OBSS. The ISS is a 24-item test which measures the affective and behavioral sensitivity of people in intercultural situations. It includes 5 dimensions: interaction engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, attentiveness. A 5 point Likert scale is used to record responses. Previous studies have shown the scale to have good psychometric properties ($\alpha = 0.86-0.88$).

The multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet et al., 1988) is a 12 item scale that evaluates perceived social support from family, friends, and significant others. Items are measured using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from very strongly disagree to very strongly agree. The MSPSS has shown high internal consistency ($\alpha \approx 0.88$) and proved to be reliable and valid in a variety of populations. The MSPSS in the present study was used to measure the perceived social support as a theoretically relevant psychosocial factor associated with online beauty standards sensitivity.

Procedure

After obtaining relevant institutional review board approval, subjects were recruited from institutional contacts and via online sources. Informed consent was obtained and the participants given an overview of the study aims, confidentiality and the fact that they have the option of withdrawing from the study at any time without penalty.

An online questionnaire (Google Forms) was used to gather data. The survey items were organized in a predetermined sequence: Demographic information, Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS), Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), Online Beauty Standards Sensitivity Scale (OBSS). No counterbalancing was used. The average time to complete the survey was about 15-20 minutes. There were no monetary rewards given.

Incomplete responses were excluded and cases with response patterns that suggested low engagement (e.g., very rapid responses, very uniform responses) were removed from the data quality assurance procedures. Online administration allowed for greater access and reach of participants, but restricted control of environmental conditions at which responses were provided. IBM SPSS Statistics was used for data analysis. After data cleaning, data was analyzed using exploratory factor analysis, reliability analysis and correlation to measure preliminary construct-related validity evidence.

Results

The current research investigated the psychometric characteristics of the Online Beauty Standards Sensitivity Scale (OBSS), as well as its associations with theoretically relevant variables. Data screening procedures were carried out before analysis to check missing values, outlier, and response validity of the data, which should be suitable for factor analysis. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed to investigate the factor structure of the OBSS and to check the dimensional structure of the scale. All the measures of the study were examined for internal consistency reliability by Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Furthermore, to illustrate construct-related validity, Pearson correlation analyses were conducted to examine the relationships between scores on the OBSS, perceived social support (MSPSS), and intercultural sensitivity (ISS). The results of these analyses are reported in the sections below.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of the Participants

Variable	Category	f	Percentage (%)
Age	18–25 years	300	100.0
Gender	Male	120	40.0
	Female	180	60.0
Educational Qualification	Intermediate	72	24.0
	BS/BA	156	52.0
	MPhil/MS	72	24.0

Variable	Category	f	Percentage (%)
Occupational Status	Student	216	72.0
	Professional	48	16.0
	Unemployed	36	12.0
Family System	Nuclear family	174	58.0
	Joint family	126	42.0
Marital Status	Married	78	26.0
	Unmarried	222	74.0
Family Income	High income	90	30.0
	Middle income	144	48.0
	Low income	66	22.0
Social Media Usage	< 1 hour/day	36	12.0
	1–3 hours/day	132	44.0
	> 3 hours/day	132	44.0
History of Psychological Illness	Yes, currently	34	11.2
	Previously, not now	62	20.8
	Never	204	68.0

Note. f = frequency, % = percentage.

As shown in Table 1, the total sample consisted of 300 participants aged 18–25 years. Of these, 120 were male (40.0%) and 180 were female (60.0%). Regarding educational qualification, 72 participants had intermediate-level education (24.0%), 156 held a BS/BA degree (52.0%), and 72 had an MPhil/MS qualification (24.0%). In terms of occupational status, 216 participants were students (72.0%), 48 were professionals (16.0%), and 36 were unemployed (12.0%). With respect to family system, 174 participants belonged to nuclear families (58.0%), while 126 belonged to joint families (42.0%). Most participants were unmarried (n = 222, 74.0%), whereas 78 were married (26.0%). Regarding family income, 90 participants belonged to high-income families (30.0%), 144 to middle-income families (48.0%), and 66 to low-income families (22.0%). For social media usage, 36 participants reported using social media for less than 1 hour per day (12.0%), 132 used it for 1–3 hours per day (44.0%), and 132 used it for more than 3 hours per day (44.0%). Finally, 34 participants reported currently having a psychological illness (11.2%), 62 reported a previous history of psychological illness (20.8%), and 204 reported no history of psychological illness (68.0%).

Table 2

KMO and Bartlett's Test

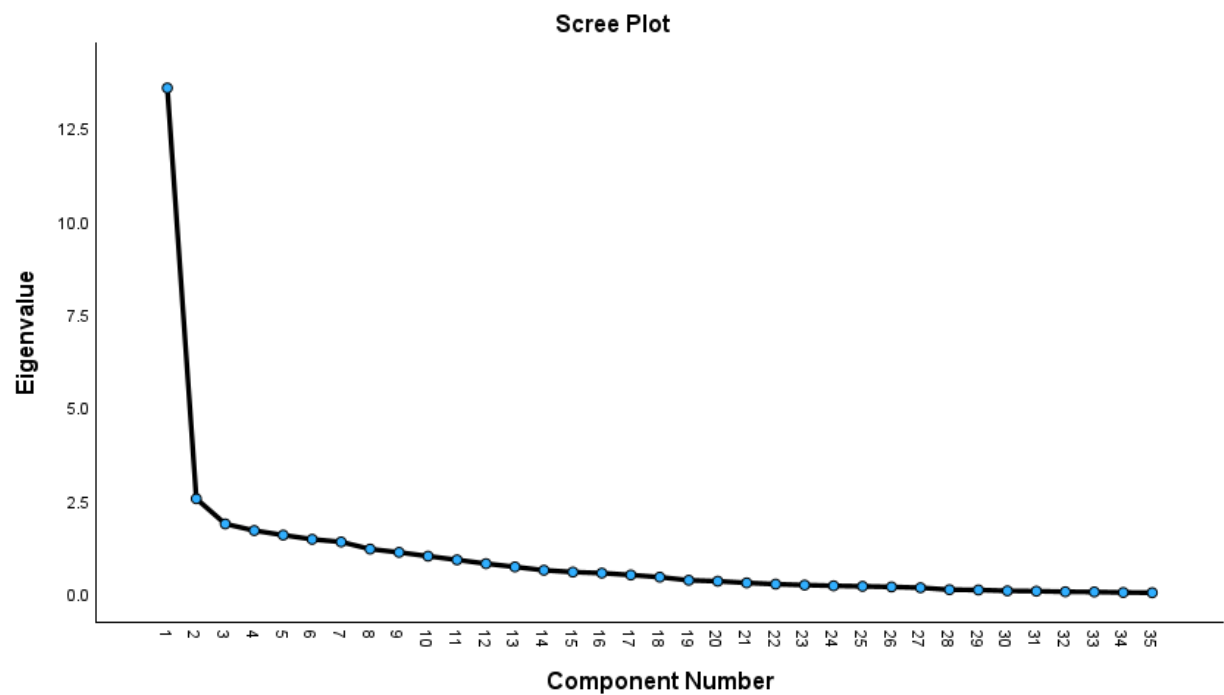
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.713
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	10125.488
	Df	595
	Sig.	<.001

Note. KMO=Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin, df=degree of freedom, Sig=Significance level

The suitability of the data set for factor extraction was tested before Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was carried out. Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.713, which suggests factor analysis is acceptable because the value is above 0.5. This is in the

“mediocre to acceptable” range but is acceptable to go ahead with the latent structure analysis. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ($\chi^2(595) = 10125.488, p < .001$), meaning that the correlation matrix was not close to being an identity matrix. This indicates sufficient inter-item correlations between the items for the extraction of factors. The results of these two indicate that the dataset fulfills the basic assumptions to proceed with factor analysis. So, it was decided that this data would be suitable for the purpose of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to check the underlying factorial structure of the “Online Beauty Standards Sensitivity Scale (OBSS)”.

Figure 1
Scree Plot of the Eigenvalues



A scree plot was used to identify the most appropriate number of latent components in the Online Beauty Standards Sensitivity Scale (OBSS). The plot showed that the first few eigenvalues decreased rapidly and then the rest of the eigenvalues decreases slowly and steadily. The first component explained a much higher percentage of variance than all other components and suggested a strong general factor. All of the components were initially above the 1 eigenvalue level, however, a visual inspection of the scree plot suggested that the point of inflection was after the first and second components. After this point, the eigenvalues were relatively small for additional components and indicated decreasing factorial utility of additional components. Overall there is some preliminary evidence for a predominantly unidimensional structure of the OBSS supported by a weak secondary dimensionality (scree plot). But to conclude the factor structure definitively, it is necessary to confirm the factor loadings and the interpretation of the obtained factor solution.

Table 3
Factor Loadings for the Online Beauty Standards Sensitivity Scale

Factor	
1	

21. Followers are given importance on social media.	.824
30. Online standards sometimes have a positive effect too.	.752
3. Using filters hides the real appearance.	.745
15. Social media exaggerates reality.	.712
9. Online images are different from reality.	.680
5. Online beauty standards cause stress.	.663
26. Online standards affect mental health.	.662
22. Beauty is considered more important than personality.	.660
35. Beauty is considered a sign of success.	.651
16. Online beauty standards create body dissatisfaction.	.651
23. Online standards are not realistic.	.646
31. Celebrities set beauty standards.	.644
32. Real life is shown less on social media.	.640
14. Online standards affect youth more.	.637
6. Looking beautiful on social media is considered necessary.	.635
34. Online standards affect the younger generation.	.632
1. Beauty standards on social media are often unrealistic.	.627
24. People hide their flaws.	.623
29. Social media can also increase self-confidence.	.622
13. Beauty is linked with success.	.616

Note. Extraction method: principal axis factoring. A one-factor solution was extracted; rotation was not applied.

Exploratory Factor Analysis produced a coherent and a strongly loaded factor structure. From an initial item pool of 35 items, 20 items were retained, all characterized by high loadings on one single dominant factor (all between 0.616 and 0.824) which is above the minimum acceptable value for factor retention. The most significant items of the latent construct were those related to social influence and the importance of appearance in digital environments such as “Followers are given importance on social media” ($\lambda = 0.824$) and “Online standards sometimes have a positive effect too” ($\lambda = 0.752$). Items that showed the highest level of distortion of reality, like “Using filters hides real appearance” ($\lambda = 0.745$) and “Social media exaggerates reality” ($\lambda = 0.712$), also had strong loadings, all of which had a high contribution to the latent construct. The loadings of the psychological and behavioral consequences such as stress, body dissatisfaction and perceived pressure from online beauty ideals were moderately high ($\lambda = 0.651$ – 0.663). Items related to the internalization of appearance-based success criteria and perceived social evaluation also loaded together and in the same factor structure. The distribution of items suggests that the cognitive perception of realism, emotional reactions (stress, dissatisfaction) and behavioral/social beliefs (importance of appearance, social validation) are linked together within a single latent dimension. Although items reflect different thematic content areas, all items loaded strongly on a single latent factor, suggesting that these domains are not empirically separable in this dataset. All retained items exceeded acceptable loading thresholds within the extracted one-factor solution. Cross-loadings were not evaluated due to the single-factor extraction approach.

Table 4
Reliability of the Online Beauty Standards Sensitivity Scale

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.940	20

Cronbach's alpha was used to test the internal consistency of the Online Beauty Standards Sensitivity Scale (OBSS). The results showed that the 20 item scale has excellent reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.940). This score is above the recommended score of 0.70, suggesting a good internal consistency among items reflecting the same construct. The size of the coefficient indicates high inter-item correlation and homogeneity of the scale overall.

Table 5

Preliminary Nomological Network Associations of the OBSS

		OBSS	MSPSS	ISS
OBSS	Pearson Correlation	1	.334**	.327**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001
	N	300	300	300
MSPSS	Pearson Correlation	.334**	1	.378**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001
	N	300	300	300
ISS	Pearson Correlation	.327**	.378**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	
	N	300	300	300

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The observed correlations provide limited nomological network evidence. However, due to the conceptual distance of the external measures from appearance-based sensitivity, these associations should not be interpreted as convergent validity. They only suggest that OBSS may relate weakly to broader interpersonal and psychosocial functioning

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to develop and test the Online Beauty Standards Sensitivity Scale (OBSS) as a psychometric tool for measuring sensitivity to digitally mediated beauty standards. The results offer preliminary support for the existence of a psychological construct of sensitivity to online beauty standards and its manifestation within the online context. The construct was stable, internally coherent and was meaningfully related to related psychosocial constructs across all psychometric evaluation procedures, thus substantiating its theoretical and empirical relevance (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Tiggemann & Slater, 2014; Perloff, 2014).

The factorial structure suggested that the experience of online beauty standards is one overall psychological process, not a collection of psychological traits. This implies that the cognitive appraisal of appearance-driven content, emotional reactions to content exposure, and behavioral dispositions towards self-presentation are interconnected. The integration is in line with Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), which suggests that people make comparisons with available social standards continuously and compare themselves with those standards with which they can easily access idealized representations, which are often reinforced. In digitized environments, these comparisons become constant, algorithmically amplified, and thus more salient than other processes of evaluation (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015; Vogel et al., 2014; Vartanian & Fardouly, 2015).

A further testament to the homogeneity of the construct is the internal consistency of the OBSS. This suggests that the scale items are measuring the same general psychological predisposition and are not measuring scattered or loosely connected attributes. In early-stage scale development, coherence is often assumed when items are created to examine the domain of a construct as narrowly as possible (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The OBSS functions as a unidimensional latent construct reflecting overall sensitivity to online beauty standards.

The correlation findings provide weak nomological network evidence for the OBSS. Associations with general interpersonal sensitivity and perceived social support are indirect and do not represent convergent validity. These findings suggest that OBSS may relate to broader psychosocial functioning, but construct-specific validation using body image and appearance-related measures is still required.

The weak association with perceived social support likely reflects general social connectedness rather than construct-specific overlap with appearance sensitivity. This is probably because these social reinforcement mechanisms are ingrained in the platforms that are designed by their nature to rely on presentation of self and appearance-based visibility and acceptance, which are correlated with perceived approval and validation, and relational acceptance. Self-evaluation in such contexts is more dependent on feedback from others as well, which adds to the psychologizing of expectations of appearance norms (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014; Jarman et al., 2021; Perloff, 2014).

The nomological positioning of the OBSS is further supported by the interrelationship between the psychosocial constructs in a wider network of interpersonal and evaluative processes. Although it shares relationships with general constructs of sensitivity and social perception, the OBSS maintains conceptual distinctiveness, and represents an environment-specific response pattern focused on appearance. This means that sensitivity to online beauty standards is not just about being aware of what is happening in the wider society but is a psychological orientation that is informed by contemporary visual culture (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016).

Theoretically, these findings are in line with Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), which suggests that repeated evaluation of appearance results in an observer-based self-evaluation perspective. In this context, the shared organization of the OBSS indicates that the expression of self-objectification processes can be manifested in linked ways, as in the case of cognitive monitoring, emotional distress, and behavioral adaptation. In digitally mediated worlds that are constantly visible, compared and feed-backed, such processes can be more intertwined and self-reinforcing (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014; Perloff, 2014).

Overall, the results confirm the theoretical basis and psychometric properties of the OBSS as an important tool to measure online beauty sensitivity. The scale represents an early-stage measurement structure with preliminary empirical support, which reflects the perception and reaction to the norms established by appearance in the world we live in today. Further evidence for structural stability and generalizability are warranted, however, in multiple population and multiple long-term settings to strengthen the evidence (Hair et al., 2010; Kline, 2016).

Conclusion

The present study developed the Online Beauty Standards Sensitivity Scale (OBSS), which is a psychometric measure to assess sensitivity to digitally-mediated beauty standards. Exploratory factor analysis indicated high unidimensionality within a single latent continuum. The internal consistency and reliability of the scale were good, and item-to-item consistency was good. Evidence for validity, however, is only preliminary and relates to nomological associations with related psychosocial constructs. These results are theoretically congruent but not full construct validations. Based on the overall results, it can be concluded that the OBSS is an early psychometric instrument that has good structural properties. Additional research is needed to validate these analyses with other factor analytic approaches, with higher criterion levels for external validity, and with a larger and more diverse sample to enhance the robustness and stability of the factors and their measures, and to provide cross-context validity.

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