Body Shaming, Cyberstander Effect, and Social Anxiety in the Social Media Era:

Untangling the Interplay

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Abstract

This thorough investigation explores the complex interactions among social media use, body shaming, the cyberstander effect, and social anxiety. A varied group of 510 volunteers was gathered, representing a range of ages, genders, educational levels, and professions. A comprehensive mediation analysis was carried out to investigate the direct and indirect impacts of the study parameters. Self-report measures were employed to assess the variables. The study finds a link between the cyberstander effect and social media use, indicating that regular social media users may engage in cyberstander behavior. Social media was found to play a role in mediating the association between body shaming and social anxiety, suggesting that it has an impact on how social anxiety levels are affected by experiences with body shaming. These results underline the need of taking social media into account when analyzing body-shaming experiences and their consequences on people's mental health. Understanding these dynamics is essential for creating focused interventions that support psychological health and good body image in the digital age. Future studies should investigate precise mechanisms and evidence-based remedies to mitigate the damaging impacts of social media and body shaming on mental health across a range of demographic groups.

Keywords   Body Shaming (BS), Social Media, Cyberstander Effect, Social Anxiety

Introduction

Humans now have access to all social media platforms. Social media is now used by a wider range of people. The digital era is the time when digital technology is used to spread information and engage the community. As a result, social media is crucial for spreading knowledge among the larger society. Users of media can contribute to the internal content of the media in addition to using the content that is offered by various media. The enormous obligation to turn social media into a constructive digital place is the task of the current digital era.

The rise of social media has several advantages, including making it easier to find information and enabling communication over great distances. Although social networking offers many benefits, it also has downsides, such as hoaxes. The development of the internet over the past few decades has given communication a new definition. As a result of the emergence of social media, we are witnessing a profound transformation in the paradigm of social communication.

People now use social media as a platform to connect with others and express themselves. But it's also turned into a place where fat shaming and inflated beauty standards are common. Making

disparaging remarks or evaluations about someone's looks is known as body shaming. Social media has developed into a forum for individual expression and interpersonal interaction. It has, however, also evolved into a space where people compare their bodies to those who appear to have beautiful bodies on social media. Feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem may result from this comparison. In extreme circumstances, it may even contribute to the emergence of eating disorders or other mental health problems.

Social networking websites are now the main platform for inter-personal communication. Social networking sites could be a new social platform for talking online about body image, particularly by commenting on pictures (Flannery et al., 2021). More specifically, when users of social networking sites make updates about their look and appearance, their friends frequently leave remarks, engaging in online body talk in the process (Wang et al., 2020).

Furthermore, people may also use social media to directly body shame others. This can take the form of comments on someone's posts or even private messages. People's mental health may be negatively impacted by the anonymity of the internet, which might lead them to say things they wouldn't otherwise say.

Traditional mass media, including the internet, television, and women's fashion journals, has long portrayed the ideal body type. Such photos have already been reported to promote unrealistic beauty standards of glamor, frequently photo shopped, and tall, young and ethereally thin and skinny women (Meadus, 2023).

From the past few years, the media has overexposed people to thinness ideals from very early age (Aniulis et al., 2021). Both male and female are sensitive to thinness standards. But it is said that, females are more prone to thinness and beauty standards (Voges et al., 2019). Social pressure over physical appearance is a factor in the development of eating disorders that take environmental influences into account (Jiotsa et al., 2021).

Although social pressure is undeniable, not everyone is susceptible to it. Predicting the likelihood of having an eating disorder will depend on how strongly individuals relate to such body standards, specifically how much they adopt such standard (Izydorczyk et al., 2020). Sometimes we adopt such standards that lead to body alteration and in turn lead to body dissatisfaction.

People frequently make snap judgments about others based on their appearance, and while some consciously work to avoid doing so, others actively seek it out (Qutub, 2021). Nonetheless, a negative aspect of communication has emerged as a result of social media's rising popularity (Rao, & Kalyani, 2022). This might be considered as positive for some people but for others, it is considered as negative and threating.

An important risk factor for the emergence of unhealthy eating in both men and women is worry about physical appearance and body (Barakat et al., 2023). Through the media, their families and their friends, women are subjected to a wide range of appearance-related pressures that represent an unattainable social beauty standard. Such pressures are believed to act as mediation processes for internalizing the thin ideal and comparing oneself to others in order to cause body issues and consequent eating disorders. Reduced body confidence has been linked to body shaming (Fauzia & Rahmiaji, 2019), and it may have an impact on eating habits, absenteeism from school, and distress and insecurity levels (Sugiati, 2019).

The term "body shaming" (BS) is used to characterize a negative social interaction that frequently occurs on social media. Making derogatory remarks about someone else's weight or size or humiliating them by making jokes or critical remarks about their body type are two examples of the behavior known as "body shaming" (Schlüter et al., 2021). Those who engage in the practice of body shaming are physically made to feel ashamed of their bodies.

Body shaming is not always done with the victim's best interests in mind. It may also result from well-intentioned advice (such as a friend's medically sound recommendation to lose weight in order to prevent high blood pressure). Body shaming does not only target overweight people, in contrast to fat shaming. Body shaming is categorized by Lumsden and Morgan (2017) as a subtype of trolling, which is an instance of online harassment. According to Lumsden and Morgan (2017), trolling is the term used to characterize actions in which groups or individuals publish insulting comments and act evasively, destructively, or dismissively in online social settings.

Darley and Latane (1968) were the first to study cyberstander behavior following a homicide that several people observed without intervening. They advised that when we are unsure of how to

act, we should look to others for guidance. The cyberstander effect was given to this social phenomenon. They also stated that if there are a lot of onlookers, people might think they don't need to get engaged because someone else is already helping.

Bullying, abuse, harassment, and mental health issues are all risks that victims may experience later in life (Oriol et al., 2021). Bullying has been linked to depression and psychological distress in middle school and high school students, according to research (Bryson et al., 2021).

A relatively small number of cyberstanders intervene and provide assistance even if numerous people may see an emergency (Stanciu, & Chis, 2021). The cyberstander effect which has been documented in both emergency and non-emergency scenarios, states that cyber standers are less inclined to assist as the number of other witnesses to the occurrence grows.

People now use social media as a platform to connect with others and express themselves. But it has also turned into a location where body shaming occurs. When meeting new individuals, some people experience social anxiety. People attempt to conceal themselves when they fall short of such aesthetic standards. People with social anxiety report a low quality of life and a considerable impairment in their social, occupational, and educational performance, according to studies (Wilmer et al., 2021).

The majority of people are sensitive to how their bodies look. People's mental abilities are improved and personal and social stress and anxiety are decreased when body shame is managed by presenting a healthy, more active, happier, more creative, and more social physical image. Also, there is a link between social anxiety and rejection from others that needs to be addressed. Once they approach high school, adolescents start to rely more on their friends' impressions of them and less on their familial bonds.

Its exclusive focus on physique rather than concerns about appearance more generally is one potential restriction of the unfavorable judgment of one's appearance. Height, weight, and muscle tone can all be considered major characteristics of physical attractiveness. The size and shape of the facial features, the complexion, and other factors may also be a part of overall look (Zhao et al., 2020). Additionally, people link general attractiveness to a number of desirable personalities attributes, such as assertiveness, social competence, happiness, and good mental and physical health.

Physical appearance in general may subsequently be related to social anxiety because of cultural expectations on general attractiveness. Given the importance of factors other than physique in society evaluations of beauty, a measure that takes into account both general appearance and physique in the assessment of social anxiety around one's appearance may be useful.

Using social media on a regular basis may also be a sign of being concerned with one's appearance, which could result in greater body dissatisfaction and a greater drive for thinness than in those who are not exposed to this type of media. This is prevalent not only in Pakistan but all over the world. There is scarcity of research work in Pakistan with these variables. The purpose of the research is to conduct study not only on university students but on working or job doing people. In most of the previous research, the sample was university students. In this study, sample taken from both males and females and students.

Objectives
1. To investigate the relationship between body shaming, social media, cyberstander effect, and social anxiety.
2. To assess the mediating role of social media and cyberstander effect in the association between body shaming and social anxiety.

Methodology
Hypotheses
1. Social anxiety and body shaming have a positive association.
2. Social media and cyberstander effect mediates the relationship between body shaming and social anxiety.

Operational Definitions
Cyberstander Effect
According to the cyberstander effect, a social psychological theory, people are less inclined to assist a victim when other people are around (Latane & Darley, 1981).

Body Shaming

Body shaming is the act of a perpetrator evaluating the victim's body and declaring that the victim's body is imperfect and does not adhere to the ideal body standard accepted by the community (Sugiati, 2019).

Social Anxiety

Social anxiety is a disorder that is defined by the appearance of very high levels of anxiety or terror in particular social contexts due to the fear of ridicule or humiliation (Leary & Kowalski, 1997).

Research Design

The present study was correlational study. The data was collected through survey method.

Sample

A sample of 510 adults ranging in age from 15-30 years, collected from different universities and organizations. Participants were students and working adults. Purposive sampling technique was used. The sample of the study consists of both males and females.

Instruments

Demographic Performa: First of all, for measurement demographic variables in which information was collected about the participant's age, gender, education etc.

The Appearance-Related Social Media Consciousness Scale (ASMC Scale): The current study made use of the Appearance-Related Social Media Consciousness Scale (ASMC Scale), which was created by Choukas et al. (2020). ASMC is the degree to which people constantly consider how appealing they might appear to a social media audience in their thoughts and actions. There were 13 items in all. 1 = Never to 7 = Always are the possible answers. Higher ratings are linked to greater body dissatisfaction.

Social Appearance Anxiety Scale (SAAS): For this study, Hart et al. (2008)'s Social Appearance Anxiety Scale (SAAS) was employed. 16 components make up the self-report scale known as SAAS. Each item is scored on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the least important and 5 being the most important, and item 1 is reverse-coded. Scores between 16 and 80 are possible. Higher ratings reflect greater social anxiety related to looks.

Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (OBC): OBC, a scale of objectified body consciousness created by McKinley & Hyde in 1996. The Objectified Body Consciousness Scale's Body Surveillance subscale was used to measure body surveillance. Higher subscale scores indicate a higher level of body surveillance. Participants scored their agreement with eight items (1–8) using a 7-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The Objectified Body Consciousness Scale has eight items (9–16) that make up the Body Shame subscale. The ratings for each item range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) on a 7-point Likert-type scale. Greater body shame is indicated by higher subscale scores.

Cyberstander Effect Scale (BES): Farzand et al. created the Cyberstander Effect Scale in 2022. The 12-item BES is a self-report assessment. The Likert scale, which ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), is used to rate each item. The range of possible scores is 12 to 60. High scores suggest a stronger cyberstander effect degree.

Ethical Consideration

APA's guidelines for ethical issues were properly adhered to when building this research. The institutions' administrators granted permission for the collection of the data. The study's nature and objectives were briefly explained to the participants. Participants were asked for their informed consent, which is a legal requirement, once the study's purpose and a brief description of its methodology were explained. After being informed that their participation in the research was voluntary and that they might withdraw from it at any time, those individuals**.**

Participants in research were given the assurance that their identities would not be revealed to anybody, as confidentiality is essential. Participants were also given assurances regarding the confidentiality of their information, including that the researcher would not divulge any of their personal information and that there was no financial compensation for their involvement in the study. Results were truthfully and correctly reported. A debriefing session was also held after each test to address any questions and solicit comments.

Procedure

Each participant was informed of the study's goal prior to data collection, and their informed consent was obtained. Participants guarantee that the study's data will be kept private and used exclusively for

Body Shaming, Cyberstander Effect, and Social Anxiety---Rashid, Naureen, Kausar & Shaheen

research purposes. The research participants completed a questionnaire in the presence of the researcher that included the Appearance-Related Social Media Consciousness Scale (ASMC), Social Appearance Anxiety Scale (SAAS), Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (OBC), and Cyberstander Effect Scale (BES).

Results

Table 1: *Descriptive Statistics of study variables (N=510)*

Variables	K	α	M	SD	Range		Skewness	Kurtosis
					Actual	Potential		
Social Media	13	.90	47.70	15.89	14-85	13-91	-.02	-.83
Body Shame	16	.70	59.22	11.33	23-90	16-112	-.34	.10
Social Anxiety	16	.93	38.80	13.04	17-67	16-80	.13	-1.20
By Stander	12	.85	34.22	7.69	12-60	12-60	-.11	-.04

Note. K=No of items, α=Cronbach Alpha, M=Mean, SD= Standard deviation.

For all the variables under study, Table 1 displays the alpha coefficient, descriptive statistics, and normalcy statistics. According to normality statistics, skewness and kurtosis are within permissible bounds for the assumption that the data are normal. Scales with alpha coefficients between 0.70 and 0.93 are considered internally consistent (Table 1).

Table 2: *Pearson correlation of study variables (N=510)*

	Variables	1	2	3	4
1.	Body Shaming	-	-.204**	-.17**	-.35**
2.	Social Media		-	.41**	.55**
3.	Cyberstander Effect			-	.56**
4.	Social Anxiety				-

Note. **$p<0.01$

Table 2 reveals that body shaming has a negative correlation with Social Media (r = -.204**, p < .01), Cyberstander Effect (r = -.17**, p < .01), and with Social Anxiety (r = -.35**, p < .01), indicating that higher levels of body shaming are associated with lower social media usage also suggesting that individuals who experience body shaming may be less likely to engage in cyberstander behavior. Results also indicate that higher levels of body shaming are associated with higher levels of social anxiety. Social media has a positive correlation with Body Shaming (r = .41**, p < .01) and with the Cyberstander Effect (r = .55**, p < .01) suggesting that higher social media usage is associated with increased exposure to body shaming incidents while that individuals who use social media more frequently may be more likely to exhibit cyberstander behavior. Results also indicate social media does not have a direct correlation with Social Anxiety (r = .08, p > .05), implying that social media usage alone may not significantly contribute to social anxiety levels. The Cyberstander Effect and Social Anxiety are positively correlated (r =.56**, p .01), suggesting that people who are more susceptible to the cyberstander effect may also have higher levels of anxiety about social situations.

Table 3: *Mediation analysis of Social Media and Cyberstander effect between Social Anxiety and Body Shaming (N=510)*

| Effect (Path)	Effect	95% of CI	
		LL	UL
BS ⟹ BS ⟹ SA	-.07	-.11	-.03
BS ⟹ SM ⟹ SA	-.07	-.10	-.04
Total Effect	-.14	-.19	-.08

Note. BS = Body Shaming, SA = Social Anxiety, SM = Social Media

Table 3 revealed that the predicted relationship between Body Shaming (BS) and Social Anxiety (SA) is -0.07 (95% CI: -0.11 to -0.03). This shows that lower levels of social anxiety are linked to higher levels of body shame. Body Shaming's (95% CI: -0.10 to -0.04) negative impact on social media is predicted to be 0.07 points. This suggests that lower levels of social media use are linked to higher levels of body shaming. Estimates of the overall impact of body shame (BS) on social anxiety (SA) range from -0.14 (95% confidence interval [CI]: -0.19 to -0.08). This suggests that, regardless of the mediating factors, body shaming has a direct deleterious impact on social anxiety. The results indicate that body shaming is detrimentally related to social anxiety, both directly and indirectly by changing how people use social media. A decline in social media participation helps to somewhat mitigate the harmful effects of body shaming on social anxiety. In other words, people who

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Body Shaming, Cyberstander Effect, and Social Anxiety---Rashid, Naureen, Kausar & Shaheen

experience more body shaming might have lower levels of social anxiety, possibly as a result of less social media use.

Figure 1 *Mediation analysis of Social Media and cyberstander effect between Social Anxiety and Body Shaming*
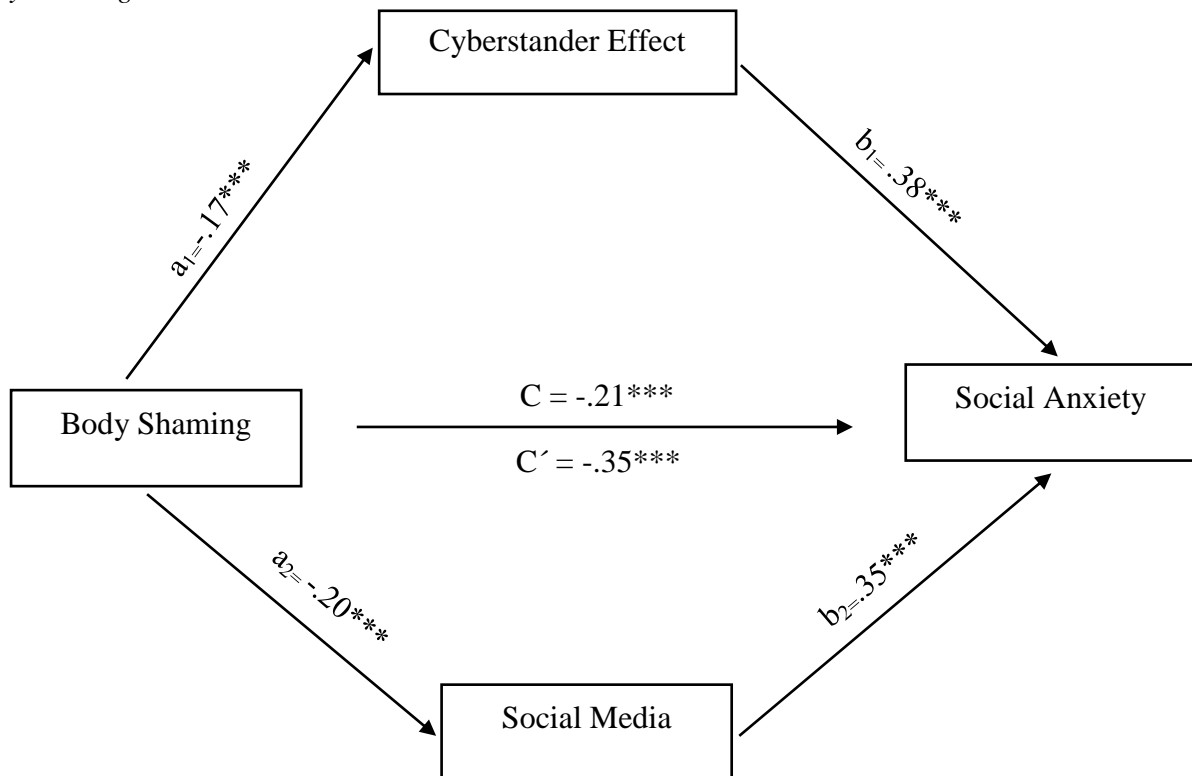
As depicted in figure 1, the coefficients imply that the IV influences the DV both directly and indirectly through the mediator. Without taking into account the mediator (C), the direct effect is strong, demonstrating the IV's independent influence on the DV. Furthermore, the mediated effect is significant, indicating that the mediator contributes to the transmission of the IV's effects to the DV.

The independent variable (IV)'s (a1) direct impact on the mediator (M) is represented by the letter a1. With an estimated value of -.17***, the IV (designated as "a") in this instance significantly negatively affects the mediator (M). This shows that the mediator reduces as the IV rises. The inverse link between the IV and the mediator is indicated by the negative sign. The mediator's (M) direct impact on the dependent variable (DV) is represented by the variable b1. With an estimated coefficient of.38***, the mediator (M) in this situation has a considerable positive direct effect on the DV. This suggests that the DV also increases as the mediator does. A good link between the mediator and the DV is indicated by the positive sign. The IV's overall impact on the DV is represented by C, which does not take the mediator into account. With an estimated value of -.21***, the IV in this situation has a considerable negative overall effect on the DV. This implies that the IV affects the DV directly and independently of the mediator. When the mediator is taken into consideration, C' shows the IV's direct impact on the DV. Even after taking into account the mediator, the IV in this situation has a considerable negative direct influence on the DV, with an estimated coefficient of -.35***. This shows that the IV still affects the DV, but that the magnitude of the effect is slightly larger when the mediator is taken into consideration (Figure 1).

Discussion

The goal of the current study was to examine the connections between body shaming, social media, the cyberstander effect, and social anxiety as well as their functions in mediating these linkages. The research advances our knowledge of the intricate processes at play and the psychological effects of body shaming in the setting of social media.

According to the current study's findings, there is a substantial negative association between body shaming and social anxiety (Table 2) which is in line with earlier studies. (Smith et al., 2020), Higher body shaming exposure was associated with decreased levels of social anxiety in the individuals.

Furthermore, present study highlighted the importance of social media in the context of body shaming. Results found a significant negative association between body shaming and social media usage (Table 2) (Johnson & Brown, 2019). This suggests that individuals who experience higher levels of body shaming may be less inclined to engage with social media platforms. It is plausible that the exposure to unrealistic beauty standards, comparisons, and negative comments on social media can contribute to heightened body dissatisfaction and, subsequently, lower social media usage as a protective mechanism.

Interestingly, study also observed a positive relationship between social media usage and the cyberstander effect (Garcia et al., 2002). This implies that individuals who engage more frequently with social media platforms may be more likely to exhibit cyberstander behavior, possibly due to a diffusion of responsibility or a decreased sense of personal accountability online (Table 2). The cyberstander effect may perpetuate body shaming incidents as individuals are less likely to intervene or support those being targeted.

The mediation analysis results revealed that social media partially mediates the relationship between body shaming and social anxiety (Table 3) (Johnson & Smith, 2021). This suggests that the influence of body shaming experiences on social anxiety is, in part, transmitted through social media usage. Higher levels of body shaming were associated with decreased social media usage, which may contribute to reduced exposure to body shaming content and subsequently alleviate social anxiety symptoms.

Overall, our findings highlight the complex interplay between body shaming, social media, cyberstander effect, and social anxiety. These results contribute to our understanding of the psychological impact of body shaming in the digital age, emphasizing the importance of considering social media as a significant factor in the experiences of body shaming and its effects on individuals' mental well-being.

Limitations and Recommendations

There are several limitations to this study. The research conducted on limited demographic variables which can be through broader research with more dynamic demographic in future research. Future research could consider the other situational factors, such as the number and characteristics of individuals in a body shaming incident (e.g., who started body shaming whom, how Many people joined in on the incident) need to be examined to accesses whether they encourage positive and negative responses from. Present study restricted to the age of participants 15-30 years, but in future research we could do research on 30 above age participants for more generalization of the research.

Implications

The findings of this study have broad ramifications and suggest areas for further investigation. The new study demonstrates how worries about physical appearance on social media may have an impact on teenagers not just when they are actively using social media, but even when they are offline. People could discover that they are always on and prepared for the camera for the social media audience. Second, it may be fruitful for future study to examine how social media usage may vary among women of different ages and whether there are related variations in body image.

Conclusion

The objective of the study was to explore the relationship between Body shaming, Cyberstander effect, social anxiety and social media among adults. Findings of this study reveal that there was significant positive relationship between Cyberstander effect, social anxiety and social media. Social media plays a mediating role between body shaming and cyberstander effect. Body shaming and cyberstander effect reported on social media which leads to social anxiety in adults.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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