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Abstract: *This study draws on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital to examine the role of aesthetic capital in attracting followers, gaining fame and ultimately the financial benefits. Moreover, the study is qualitative in nature. The study was carried out in Mardan Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. The study chose purposive sampling technique in order to select the generation Z netizens who meet the study criteria. The sampling remained continue till the saturation point. Moreover, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 social media content creators using interview guide. The data were analyzed through thematic analysis technique. The data revealed that physical appearance, attractiveness, and the strategic presentation of the self can contribute to greater audience attention, engagement and financial success. Men have to work many times harder than women to earn money through internet. To avoid hard work while easily gaining fame and financial benefit, some men exploit women such as by creating social media accounts in their names or featuring them on camera in family vlogs. Some men believe that this modern internet era has altered the definition of gender inequality.*

Introduction

Electronic media serves as a vital source of information in our daily lives, enabling the rapid dissemination of information to the public. Technological advancements and the integration of ICT have made electronic media more engaging, useful, and accessible to everyone. The internet has rapidly transformed the landscape of public communication through its speed, ease of access, and availability. Furthermore, it has established its influence across diverse sectors such as politics, education, marketing, business, entertainment, and news shaping trends within these fields. Among the various forms of media, electronic media is a modern platform where people create and share content in an impactful manner. Facebook, MySpace, Digg, and Twitter are a few examples of platforms that utilize various media formats to influence people on a massive scale. Internet users spend more time on social networking sites than on other types of websites. In the United States, the total time spent on social networking sites has increased by 99 percent, reaching a figure of 121 billion. Social media is no longer

limited to merely sharing information or content; it also offers opportunities for financial income and career advancement. Due to its vast reach and accessibility, having a social media account has become a necessity today. Facebook is a prime example of this, serving as a powerful and influential medium of the current century (Memon et al., 2015)

In many parts of the developing world, the primary means of going online is the mobile phone. On average, women are 14 percent less likely than men to own a mobile phone, meaning there are 200 million fewer women than men who possess one (GSMA, Connected Women, 2015). Globally, women lag behind men in terms of mobile phone and internet ownership. ITU survey data indicates that women are 12 percent less likely than men to use the internet (via both mobile and fixed-line connections) (ITU 2019). However, more than 1.7 billion women in developing countries do not own a personal mobile phone. While the gender gap in mobile access varies across the globe, it is widest in South Asian countries (Majid et al., 2025).

However, the Pakistani government has invested heavily in the internet economy in recent years to boost the number of women working, particularly in the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology. Tech-related jobs including digital marketing and IT, financial services and accountancy, client support, project management, and writing are typically available through self-employment. The government has created a program to educate women about these services because many women lack these skills. It offers improved productivity and technological abilities for free. This was successful when 15,000 people were identified as independent contractors and an additional 500,000 expressed interest in participating in the training. As a result, women's status with regard to employment opportunities has greatly improved. According to a recent survey, women make up 25% of freelancers and outperform men in the nation. Their achievement is \$2 greater than that of males (Rawoo et al., 2021).

Globally, it has been noted that women's economic empowerment has been greatly aided by the digitization shift, with emerging nations beginning to acknowledge its importance. This change is consistent with global development objectives that prioritize economic inclusion and gender equality (Javed et al., 2025) Women are striving for independence, and without and with the support of financial independence, no one can be independent. These days, a lot of women run online businesses and make a sizable sum of money to support their families and satisfy their own ambitions. When women are financially independent, they feel confident that they are equally valued and that they can voice their opinions in their homes and communities. Social media teaches students how to be financially stable in addition to providing them with a sense of financial independence (Butt & Hussain, 2024).

In the Pakistani digital economy, numerous women influencers consciously involve in visibility labor which is the strategic use of one's body, voice, and image to generate followers, income, or influence and it is one of the huge shortcuts for income generation. Pakistan 's social platforms prioritize engagement over ethics. Algorithms are designed to boost content with high emotional response, which means videos that spark outrage, including sexually charged scandals, receive wider distribution. Videos tagged with provocative keywords saw up to 400% more reach than neutral content, even if it included hate speech (Ali et al., 2025). TikTok is now the second most downloaded social media application in Pakistan, which is one of the top five nations with the most downloads. On TikTok, women committed a variety of gender-related offenses. Notably, Pakistani working-class women began using TikTok before their upper-class counterparts, despite the fact that more affluent users frequently view them as "digitally backward" (Kamran, 2023).

Generally, Influencers are a type of 'microcelebrity' which is a style of online performance in which individuals attempt to gain attention and popularity by employing digital media technologies, such as

webcams, blogs and social media. Influencer marketing on social media is now a multi-billion-dollar industry, expected to be valued between \$5 and 10 billion by 2020. The influencer category is dominated by women, who set the 'cultural scripts' adopted by everyday social media users commonly on the platform Instagram (Drenten et al., 2020).

Because women predominate in the influencer market, previous researches have usually either concentrated on female social media influencers or matched the gender of the influencer with that of the research participant in experimental studies, presuming that an endorsement from the same gender can increase persuasiveness (Hudders & De Jans, 2022).

An influencer who is both gorgeous and extremely attractive is typically more beneficial than one who is not. Surprisingly, a female influencer seems to have more benefits for male fashion (Mettenheim & Wiedmann, 2021). Influencers are now the most popular social media figures due to the quick expansion of social media sites like Instagram, TikTok, and Kuaishou. Influencers, sometimes referred to as social media influencers, are online celebrities who become well-known by posting eye-catching images and videos on social media sites. Esthetic labor is essential in this profession. Influencers can deliver important information and grab audiences' attention through their esthetically pleasing presentation and continuous construction, which has a big impact on the audiences' intention to buy. In order to generate an observable contoured appearance and body image that highlights individual soft skills capable of turning a person's body into economic interests, esthetic labor uses strategic human esthetics (Xie et al., 2023).

Wong & Penner (2016) found that stricter beauty standards have coincided with women's greater economic and social advancement. Men are more likely than women to discriminate against attractive women, while judgments of men's work are not significantly impacted by appearance.

In international corporate culture, beauty serves as a commodified form of social, cultural, and financial capital that shapes views of professionalism and career development. Similar to manners or education, beauty can be used to advance socially and professionally. While women whose bodies are not socially acceptable may not have any beneficial outcomes, attractive women enjoy social benefits. In this society, men are also aware that they have the authority to dictate to women how their bodies should look and act. Future research should look at men's perceptions on recognizing sociocultural roles related to body marketing and attractiveness in a patriarchal society (Zubair, 2022). Riley (2022) discovered that women's ideals of beauty are set by other women, not by males. He discusses the phenomenon known as "female gaze," in which women observe other women and experience pressure to compete with one another and themselves in order to meet social standards of beauty. Women are continuously exposed to one another as a result of technological advancements and increased usage of social media, which means that the competition to meet beauty standards is always intensifying.

On Facebook generally, women receive more feedback than men, but "male" topics (those more often posted by men) receive more feedback, especially when posted by women. It is because aesthetic capital is dominated which is commonly associated with women (Wang et al., 2016)

Mear (2014) found that, beyond its significance for the sociology of work and markets, aesthetic labor is a useful tool for the emerging sociology of beauty. When carefully situated within a local context, aesthetic labor denaturalizes beauty and reveals how notions of attractiveness are organizationally produced and place-bound. Aesthetic labor poses a challenge to the concept of aesthetic capital in both economics and evolutionary biology; while considerable research demonstrates that beauty is convertible into individual rewards such as status, earnings, and romantic outcomes.

Ryan (2026) found that, "Autonomous, self-inventing, and self-regulating in the pursuit of beauty

practices" describes esthetic entrepreneurs. However, platform affordances, algorithmic logic, and commercial demands shape this autonomy. The contradiction at the core of influencer work is that, in order to succeed, one must appear effortlessly genuine while performing carefully thought-out strategic work. Additionally, he discovered that algorithmic mediation reproduces and intensifies gendered power relations that connect with race, ability, and class. Strict self-monitoring regimes target women's bodies in particular, but they increasingly use participatory platforms to conduct this surveillance under the pretense of empowerment, creativity, and entrepreneurship. While fitness influencer culture's rhetoric of "empowerment" provides some women with real fulfillment and financial opportunities, it also hides the personal accountability placed on women to meet demands for particular body ideals that are motivated by harsh disciplinary pressures and exclusive standards.

According to Rehman (2026), Pakistan's freelance economy is about to reach a significant milestone. The State Bank of Pakistan reports that between July 2025 and April 2026, freelancers made an astounding \$959 million in foreign exchange, a remarkable 49% rise from the same time the year before. Women are carving out a strong niche in this rapidly expanding digital landscape. Despite this, they make for about 1528% of Pakistan's estimated 2.3–3 million active independent contractors. According to Payoneer data, Pakistani women freelancers make an average of \$22 per hour, which is somewhat more than their male counterparts' \$20, defying global gender pay disparities.

Despite the above available literature, a significant gap is found. Most studies i.e. Rawoo, 2021; Kamran, 2023; Zubair, 2022 view women's beauty as an asset in the context of the internet, yet they fail to explain how women transform their identity in general, and their beauty in particular into economic capital. Furthermore, there are limited studies specifically in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa in this area. The aim of this study is to examine the role of aesthetic capital in attracting followers, gaining fame and ultimately the financial benefits.

Theoretical Framework

Peire Bourdieu introduced the types of capitals which include economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. The different types of capital change into one another. According to Bourdieu, capital can take three basic forms: economic capital, which is instantly and directly convertible into money and can be institutionalized in the form of property rights; cultural capital, which can be converted into economic capital under specific circumstances and can be institutionalized in the form of educational credentials; and social capital, which is composed of social obligations or connections and can be institutionalized in the form of a noble title. Bourdieu neglected to give the body and esthetics enough consideration (Kukkonen, 2021). Chris Shilling (1991) used the idea of physical capital to try to expand on Bourdieu's theory. The physical, he argued, was too significant to be reduced to a type of capital. He may have been the first to argue that because people have varying opportunities to convert physical capital into other forms of capital, physical capital actively exacerbates social inequality rather than merely expressing class location. The visual-centric design of social applications, such as Instagram, places the body at the center of identity performance, turning users into what Hearn refers to as "branded selves, where bodily capital generates economic and social value." Because influencer occupations seem like viable routes to financial independence and because femininity necessitates increased physical performance, women put effort into esthetic labor (Chavan, n.d).

Research Objectives

- To examine the differences in social media visibility and audience engagement between male and female content creators in Pakistan.
- To explore the role of physical attractiveness and appearance-related characteristics in gaining views, followers, likes, and audience attention on social media platforms.
- To examine how appearance-related physical capital is converted into economic capital through online recognition and monetization.

Research Objectives

1. What are the differences in social media visibility and audience engagement between male and female content creators in Pakistan?
2. How physical attractiveness and appearance-related characteristics helps in gaining views, followers, likes, and audience attention on social media platforms?
3. How appearance-related physical capital is converted into economic capital through monetization?

Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature. The aim of choosing qualitative methodology is to know the experiences of men and women regarding the recognition and monetization of physical attractiveness on social media in Pakistan. The study was carried out in Mardan Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. The study chose purposive sampling technique in order to select the generation Z netizens who meet the study criteria. The sampling remained continue till the saturation point. Moreover, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 social media content creators. The data were analyzed through thematic analysis technique. Ethical consideration is considered as the significant piece of the research. In this regard; I strictly followed all the rules and regulations in the area of my research and followed all the guiding principles about ethical consideration.

Analysis and Discussion

Physical Appearance

Humans are extremely sensitive to beauty. It plays a fundamental role in shaping impressions and influences subsequent decisions, leading to a preference for beautiful things or people. Beauty holds a unique and distinguished place in capturing attention: even when attention is consciously focused elsewhere, beauty swiftly, effortlessly, and unconsciously shifts that focus toward itself, doing so even when the beautiful object lies outside the center of conscious attention or the field of high-acuity vision (Lindell & Lindell, 2014). Beauty is a natural gift; society associates it with women, which is why they easily garner attention on social media platforms, whereas men have to work quite hard to attract similar notice. Later this attention becomes a source of income. In this regard on of the respondents added;

Tariq Pathan is famous on YouTube for his content on current affairs; he conducts extensive research to produce a single video. In contrast, a young woman becomes famous simply by showing her face, without putting in any such effort.

Another respondent added that;

Physical beauty and attractiveness account for 20% of success; however, if you remove that 20%, it becomes the 100% cause of failure, rejection, and other mishaps.

While people believe that women possess slightly better interaction skill than men, but beauty and attraction play a role in this as well.

Women often attract more social media followers than men due to higher user engagement, a focus on visual aesthetics (like selfies), and better networking skills.

Facebook and TikTok are widely used in Pakistan. My observations have led me to believe that most Pakistani men are losing their power on social media, while women are benefitting in various way. This is the reason why many men comment on women's posts to portray them inferior

Woman embodying success

Magno & Weber (2014) observed that in countries like Pakistan or Egypt, where levels of gender inequality are highest, women's online status is higher than that of men across various metrics. The respondents believe that women are naturally 'selected'; a woman's mere presence on social media constitutes a success in itself. One of the respondents told that;

To be famous on TikTok, you have to be a girl.

This is such a common fact here that if we ask anyone about it, their reply is.

You know the answer to this question yourself.

Another respondent added that

A friend of mine used to simply do voiceovers for videos, and her account was garnering millions of views.

Here, not only men but women too are interested in other women; it might seem surprising, but I have observed that women are also keenly interested in the appearance of other women—which is precisely why such accounts grow so quickly.

Women's Identity

This trend has become quite common in Pakistan, where many young men create social media profiles using female names. A primary reason for this is the desire to go viral on these platforms; often, they use these female personas to solicit money from others and create TikTok videos with half their faces concealed to help the account gain traction quickly. One of the respondents added that;

You know, there are people who are drawn to any profile using a female name. To reach a certain number of followers or subscribers, many guys here create accounts using girls' names.

A number women face harassment, yet they endure it for the sake of financial independence; however, various social media groups are active in addressing this issue, and no one easily dares to engage in harassment on social media anymore.

I don't use platforms like TikTok myself. There was a girl in our hostel who had listed her phone number on Instagram and used her own photo as her profile picture; consequently, she received a lot of messages, and her videos would often go viral. However, a woman frequently has to reveal her identity to become famous, which exposes her to harassment.

Throughout history, women have been viewed as inferior, but the modern era has shifted this trend; although the effects of patriarchy persist, social media has significantly altered this mindset, and today, a woman's identity holds a distinguished status on social media platforms.

Economic Independence

Many men cannot tolerate women's financial independence; for most of them, it comes as a profound shock. Men prefer to maintain their status as the household's breadwinner, as this allows them to exercise control by managing the woman's basic needs, whereas a woman, conversely, desires freedom. In this regard one of the respondents added;

Whenever someone, especially a woman, starts building income online, there are always people who have something negative to say. They'll call it attention-seeking, they'll mock it, or they'll act like earning money through social media somehow isn't "real" work. My Facebook is monetized, I'm growing my other platforms, and I'm proud of that.

Thanks to user-friendly features, customizable tools, and financial incentives, Facebook is transforming

from a mere social networking site into a business platform for women in Pakistan (Zulqarnain et al., 2020). A respondent said in this regard;

Women earn a lot of money from Facebook compared to men. Most of their earnings come from photos they share because of the high engagement and views those posts get. People might fail to comment on a woman's photo, but they will almost always view it, which makes the post reach even higher. In just two weeks, a woman who is active on Facebook can earn between \$50 and \$70. It is rare for a man's photo to get the same number of likes and views. People are simply more interested in women's content

Another respondent claimed that;

75 percents sell their own selves in the form of their body portraying and gestures

Various apps offer countless filters designed to enhance women's beauty and make them more attractive, effectively erasing disparities in complexion and appearance among them. Initially, this paves the way for their success. Furthermore, strong communication skills and encouragement from educated individuals constitute another crucial step toward success. To achieve financial independence, a woman either disregards the opinions of traditional minded people or uses her communication skills to provide a reasoned justification for her choices

Family Vlogging

Family vlogging on YouTube is a growing trend in terms of both popularity and scope. An increasing number of couples are quitting their jobs to become full-time "vloggers"—or "creators," in industry parlance. In this practice, parents film their daily lives with their children and upload the footage to YouTube in daily or weekly episodes for others to watch and respond to. Vlogging reflects the current Western obsession with documenting and recording one's own self (Kennedy, 2024). In this regard one of the respondents told that;

Just look at Sourav Joshi Vlogs; he was once so poor that his kitchen didn't even have a door.

Family vlogging is deeply emotional, blending empathy, love, and humor—and that is exactly what people enjoy watching. That is precisely why Sourav is so wealthy today

But the religious group in the country view family vlogging a threat to the upbringing of the young generation and culture. In this regard one of the respondents viewed that;

Religious people view family vlogging very negatively and protest against it, whereas the majority of Gen Z holds liberal views and believes that religious individuals look with envy upon those who engage in family vlogging

Family vlogging is becoming common practice in Pakistan; the growing trend demonstrates that netizens are interested in families and the sentiments shared among them, yet it remains a controversial practice

Conclusion

The aim of this study is to examine the role of aesthetic capital in attracting followers, gaining fame and ultimately the financial benefits. The findings of the revealed that that physical appearance, attractiveness, and the strategic presentation of the self can contribute to greater audience attention, engagement and financial success. Men claim that beauty and allure are feminine traits. For this reason, they view this new era of the internet as being in women's favor. Women also agree with this point, Furthermore, the study's respondents revealed that men have to work many times harder than women to earn money through internet. Some men create accounts under female names to avoid putting extra effort, as people tend to give greater preference to posts made by women. Another tactic for men is considered family vlogging. Often married couples make it a means of earning because family vlogging gets a lot of attention. Men with traditional mindset often leave various discouraging comments on

women's posts because they feel their status as breasting to be under a serious threat. On the hand, women strive to break free from patriarchy, particularly in the pursuit of economic autonomy. Open minded men and women play an active role in encouraging this struggle and promptly highlight any distressing incident face by women. Thus, in Pakistan, aesthetic capital. In Pakistan, the role of aesthetic capital serves as a source of wealth and fame not only in the physical realm but also in the digital world. Furthermore, it redefines the gender inequality.

Recommendation

This study is recommended to the human rights organizations to create awareness about appearance-based discrimination and challenge the unrealistic beauty standards and its role in the undermining of real social issues. Furthermore, the researcher needs to further explore the so that further facts about it can be brought to light. More generally, the shift in human thinking brought about by modern social media represents a significant development in the course of human evolution. This phenomenon warrants scholarly discussion in seminars and conferences. Students and teachers of the social sciences should give particular attention to this phenomenon.

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