Media, Fashion and Beauty: Influence on Women Empowerment

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ABSTRACT: Fashion and beauty are almost synonymous to women. In the past fifty years' world has been transformational for women. They have become a part of every sector and are proving their worth by working hard to achieve success. Fashion and beauty industries also underwent through major changes. They have become more consumer oriented rather than profit oriented. They play their roles in the lives of women by boosting their confidence and creating job openings as well as new business opportunities. This paper studies how media industry along with fashion and beauty industries are pandering to shift old systems and practices for women related to beauty and fashion. Working concerning changing perceptions towards natural beauty standards over artificial beautification these industries are making ways to empower women either by boosting their self-confidence or by supporting and giving opportunities to women of all sizes. This paper includes both primary and secondary data review. Primary data was collected using a survey that was conducted to understand the views of women on the topic and try to answer the purpose of this paper that is how has beauty and fashion industry impacted women empowerment. The findings of the research revealed that while fashion industry has added to women empowerment in ways more than one, similarly cannot be stated for the cosmetics industry. Media has a significant role to play in the depiction of these two proponents as tools of empowerment rather than commodification.

KEYWORDS: Media, Fashion, Beauty, women empowerment, job opportunities, confidence, Technology.

1. Introduction

The world is an ever-changing place. From nationalization to globalization. From hand-written letters to WhatsApp. Our world just doesn't stop. Media and fashion world is no exception. It is one of the most dynamic industry that influences and impacts the lives of millions. Media and fashion industry has amazing creativity that can power change around the world. We all like to fashion ourselves with clothes made by either well-known designers or brands and some from ordinary people. The need to look for perfect outfits that matches the occasion such as looking for a wedding dress or prom dress that

could take weeks or months and try to look for perfect pair of shoes and accessories to match the outfit just to look the best for the special day or event. "Most of us accept the fact that the way we dress reflects in most cases is our first impression, a reflection of our character and an insight into our likes and dislikes. The latest fashion trends that promote custom slogan t-shirts as a powerful tool to speak your mind or affiliate to an idea stand as a further reinforcement to this statement." (Hasin, 2018).

   "Time changes and so does everything around us. The same way that technology evolved from automatized machines to talking phones and the global 'I'-craze, fashion has evolved from laborious corsets and ample trailing gowns girdled at hips to being nonchalant and care-free with a hint of masculine styles promoted by Coco Chanel in the 1900's epitomizing the feminist emancipation" (Cooke, 2009). Fashion is fun and inspiring and more than that, fashion can help advance progress. The fashion industry has a key role to play. You can have a powerful impact by partnering to expand and support women's entrepreneurship, and helping women move up the value chain, to fuel inclusive and sustainable business, economies, and societies" (Venkatasamy, 2015).

Fashion industry has spread its branches in every corner of the world. They incorporate clothing that represents various ethnic groups. For example, modest clothing targets women who feel comfortable in covered clothes. Therefore, empowering them to accept their culture and feel confident in their attire (Lewis, 2015).

   Fashion industry has also moved towards accepting diversity. The inclusion of plus-size models for advertisement or walking on the ramp has led to women and girls accepting their body size and shape and feeling happy and confident about it (Czerniaawski, 2011).
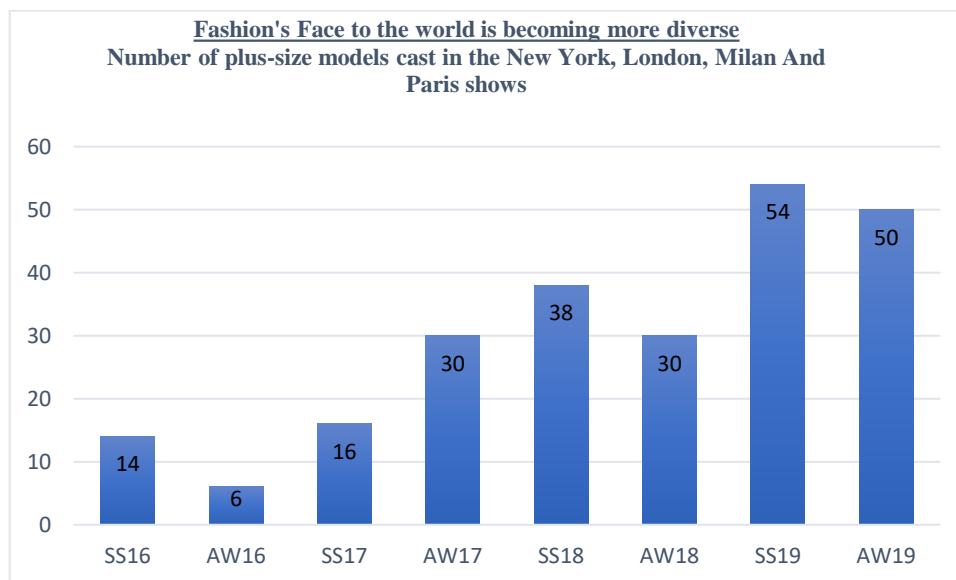

Figure 1: Diversity in fashion

Women who have indulged in a little pampering, or have worn make-up for much of their lives, will know just how powerful beauty can be. When we take the time to carry out a little self-care it makes us feel amazing. Nobody else can show that level of care to us, and taking the time to be kind to yourself, and to look after yourself can be completely transformative.

The industry certainly isn't perfect, but beauty for many women all around the world means confidence, empowerment, and freedom to express themselves. There's a reason why it's called beauty 'therapy', because it makes you feel good (Britton, 2012).

Not just make-up but various beauty treatments and procedures-built confidence in women and girls leaving them feeling confident in their own skin.
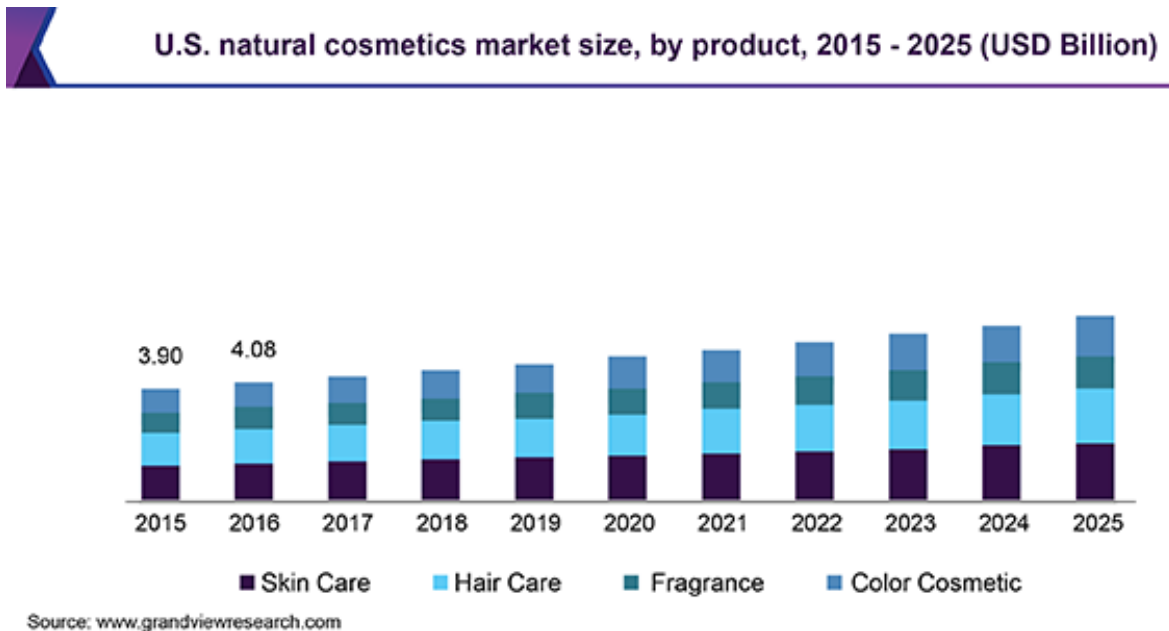

Figure 2: U.S natural cosmetics market growth

Today Media, fashion and beauty industry are thriving to empower women and encouraging them to accept themselves. They know that they are catering the women of today's world, woman that is capable of multitasking and ruling the world. Media having an access to a large audience should be an effective tool in the empowerment of women. But is this real empowerment or just an illusion. By asking women to conceal their flaws through make-up, are they really asking them to accept their identity? Therefore, this paper will aim to find out whether these two industries are paving the way for empowerment or making the women believe in a world that does not exist.

2. Literature review

Today's society has created a certain expectation of the perfect image one must attain. This has led to people setting unrealistically high standards for themselves, which is especially the case with young women. The problem that arises when people are unable to live up to such expectations is the loss of confidence and the feeling of being rejected by society, both of which tend to lead to severe mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression. (Thompson, 2017). For most of their lives, women have been taught to compare themselves to one another, instead of respecting and honoring their individuality. Thankfully, times are changing, and the fashion and beauty industries are changing with them. The focus is slowly shifting to acceptance and celebration of women's natural beauty and the use of these industries' products for true female empowerment (BLACK, 2009).

2.1. Fashion industry and women empowerment

The fashion industry is the most glamorous and underrated of industries, but equally important. Almost every individual is a direct consumer of fashion, frequenting retailers or buying from flea markets. It generates job opportunities for qualified and unqualified, skilled, or unskilled people all over the world. The clothing industry contributes a lot to the global economy. Just image a world without 5th Avenue or Champs Elysees and that by itself stands as a valid argument. The fashion industry engages retailers, multinationals, production houses, publishers and more. All of these companies provide business to more traditionally accepted fields such as law, technology or finance (Maloney, 2019).

Table 1: Employment in Selected Fashion and Apparel Industries and Occupations			
	Number of Employees	Median Hourly Wage	Average Annual Wage
Fashion Designers (All Industries)	18,940	$32.41	$78,870
Apparel Manufacturing Industry (All Occupations)	123,000	$12.64	$37,350
Selected Occupations			
• Computer occupations (such as information analysts, developers, and systems administrators)	840	$33.63	$77,270
• Market research analysts and marketing specialists	510	$28.85	$67,200
• Fabric and apparel patternmakers	2,030	$24.61	$55,590
• Industrial machinery installation, repair, and maintenance workers	1,410	$16.75	$38,900
• Tailors, dressmakers, and custom sewers	1,200	$13.42	$33,490
• Textile machine setters, operators, and tenders	6,280	$11.64	$25,860
• Sewing machine operators	49,960	$11.14	$24,700
Apparel, Piece Goods Merchant Wholesalers (All Occupations)	147,390	$18.49	$56,160
Selected Occupations			
• Business operations specialists	6,740	$28.15	$66,770
• Graphic designers	1,860	$25.29	$55,770
• Production, planning, and expediting clerks	2,820	$23.56	$50,720
• Merchandise displayers and window trimmers	330	$17.50	$42,790
• Laborers and material movers, hand	18,150	$12.33	$27,140
Clothing and Clothing Accessory Stores (All Occupations)	1,414,320	$11.27	$29,460
Selected Occupations			
• Market research analysts and marketing specialists	1,340	$25.96	$61,180
• Accountants and auditors	1,030	$32.14	$72,010
• Buyers and purchasing agents	3,550	$24.78	$65,250
• Designers	12,210	$13.67	$31,660
• Retail sales workers	1,056,960	$10.55	$24,840

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment Statistics for NAICS 315000, 424300 and 448000 (March 2018).

Source: Bureau of Labour Statistics, Occupational Employment Statistics for NAICS (March 2018)

Fashion industry in now a means of bread and butter for many people. Especially women who are on social media. When over hundred million blogs were analyzed, 50.9% of the bloggers were women. These bloggers post daily either unboxing fashion items or reviewing them or showing how to style clothes. by doing this they build their reach because of which many brands and retailers pay them to promote their offerings. In this way, fashion industry has created a new career opening and is empowering many girls around the world by making them independent and confident (Thornley, 2014).

Fashion is also empowering women through diversity. From inclusion of plus-size models to modest fashion, women from various spheres of life feel represented on a bigger stage. Some examples such as Claudia Li's all-Asian model cast for SS19, or Sudanese megastar Anok Yai becoming the first black model to open for Prada in 20 years are proof that fashion industry is moving towards a more diverse culture (Verma, Anand, Arora, & Rai, 2018).

As this paper points out how fashion industry is promoting women empowerment, does it really empower women or is it just for the sake of publicity. Since promoting a healthy body image became a priority in the fashion media, all of a sudden designers began to strut a plus size model down the runway amongst their line-up of size 0-2 models. On the surface it seems like a great move toward the right direction but when you look at what the models are wearing, plus size girls are either forced into styles that haven't been designed for their curves or are wearing the singular look in the whole collection that can be worn comfortably by someone larger than a size 2 (Dakhli, 2016).

The same tends to go for ethnic models and most specifically, black models. There seems to be only two, max. three spots available on each runway for ethnic girls, especially in Europe. These two or three girls are then used as the cover girls of media stories as 'proof' that a brand or designer is embracing diversity with the fact that they are making up only a tiny fraction of the models walking during fashion week (Helena M. de Klerk, 2019).

Another major backlash faced by fashion industry is the ethical concern regarding poor working conditions of labor that manufacture clothes for these brands. They are poorly paid and work in a cramped environment. Women that wear these fashionable clothes do not think about women on other side of the spectrum that are forced to work in excruciating environment and are sexually harassed in the process (Adam Arvidsson, 2010).

Fashion industry impacts almost everyone every day. it should keep working towards empowering women not just those who wear their offerings but those as well who are the source of their profit (Joergens, 2006).

2.2 Beauty industry and Women Empowerment

By carrying out self-care, women allow themselves to feel worthy, to feel loved and cared for. Their perception of self-worth plays a huge role in their everyday lives, from the

decisions they make to their general thoughts and feelings about themselves. One of the best ways to improve self-worth is through self-care, such as giving a manicure, booking in for a massage or a facial, or simply meditating or practicing yoga (Ruck, 2018).

There are various beauty brands that empower women through different ways. Here are some of the examples:

2.2.1 L'Oréal

The L'Oréal-UNESCO initiative 'For Women in Science' was established in 1998 and aims to strengthen the role of women in science by honoring outstanding women researchers who have contributed to scientific advancement. This collaboration grants a $100,000 USD grant to several winners from around the world each year. The awards are the result of a collaboration between the French cosmetics corporation L'Oréal and the Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) of the United Nations. The main aim of this initiative is to motivate young women to enter the scientific field and unleash their talent without any hindrances (Lovas, 2017).

2.2.2. Dove-real beauty

The brand is known for using 'real women' to promote their products and has earned their status as an authentic and responsible advertising name. Dove were one of the first, if not the first, to champion body confidence back in 2004 with the launch of their 'Real Beauty' campaign. In their latest campaign, they're continuing to fight for equality for all women and have cast 32 real women from 15 different countries and ethnicities, who range from ages 11-71. But the most important part to empowering women and championing body confidence is publishing campaigns that are 100% untouched. They are not photo shopped. Each of the woman featured were able to select which of her images they wanted published as well, giving them the control of how they'd be seen in the media (Murray, 2012).

But there is a catch in this as well. Beauty companies, even though are trying to empower women through their advertisement they do so to increase their own profits. The languages used in these advertisements stand as proof that it's not about women empowerment through women accepting themselves for who they are but by using their products which will help in improving their appearance by hiding their flaws. (Carreon, 2017). The idea behind this kind of promotion is to convince women that fixing what they dislike about their appearance, facial features, hair color or texture, their weight or figure will help them love themselves, and thus functions as an act of self-care. Some brands may instead push images of more diverse beauty, including a range of skin colors, hair textures, body sizes, and perhaps even ableness. Even still, these companies are selling something that hinges on the importance of the female body as something that draws worth from its appearance. (Jha, 2016).

3. Research Methodology

This research paper includes both primary and secondary data. Secondary data consists of various journals that were read through to gain in-depth knowledge. Primary data consists of a survey that was conducted to understand the views of women on the topic and try to answer the purpose of this paper that is how beauty and fashion industry has impacted women empowerment.

3.1 Participants

A questionnaire was prepared and sent across to people in UAE. This questionnaire was sent to students, working professionals and homemakers. They were asked to fill in the questionnaire and were informed that their responses will be recorded anonymously and will be used only for research purposes. The questions were prepared keeping in mind the topic of the research study and were aimed to find out the impact of fashion and beauty industry on women empowerment.

3.2 Participant Demographics

Questionnaire was sent to women only as the paper intended to find out the impact of fashion and beauty industry on "women" empowerment. The age group was not limited to a specific age. It encompassed teenagers along with women aged forty and above. This included students as well as working women.

3.3 Data Analysis

Primary data was collected by distributing the survey among women of various age groups. The questionnaire included general question and open-ended questions. Measure of central tendency is used to analyze the data. Questionnaire attempted to understand the views of women on the influence of fashion and beauty industry on women empowerment.

Hundred and six responses were recorded. Various age group women participated, therefore views of women from different age group, occupation and lifestyle have been recorded.
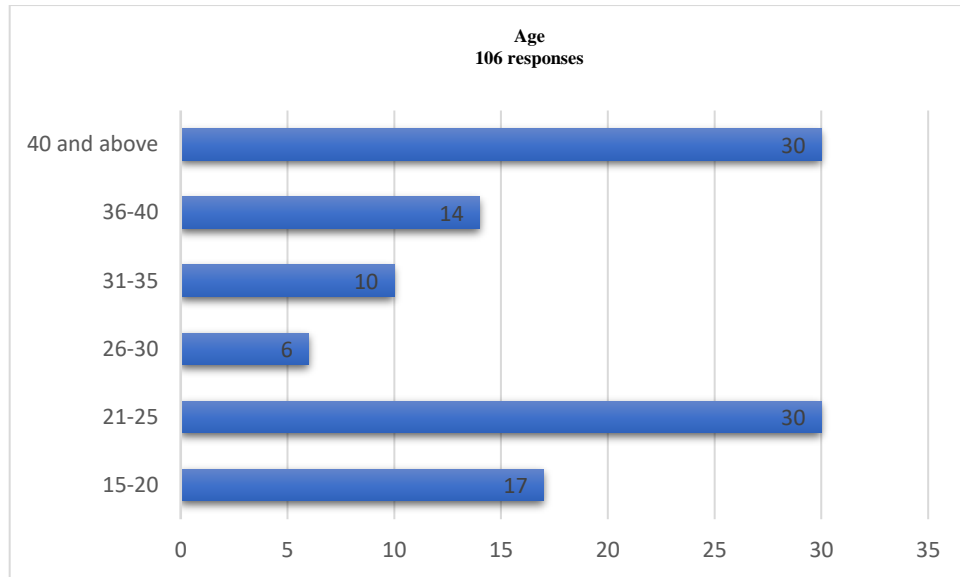
Figure 3: Age

Second question aimed to find out whether fashion industry is now more diverse than it was 10 years before.
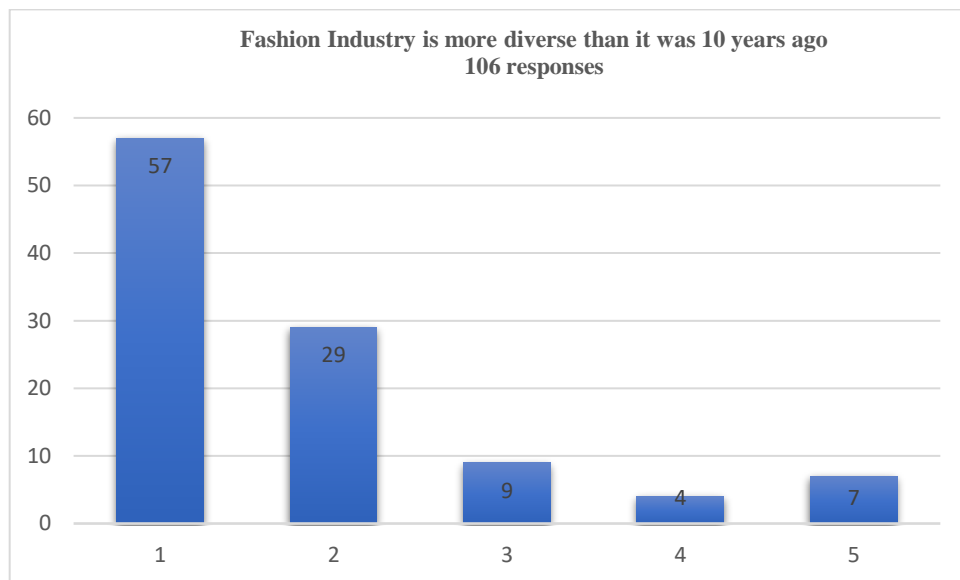

Figure 4: Fashion is diverse that it was 10 years ago

Mean: 1.79
Median: 1
Mode: 1

Here 1 depicts strongly agree and 5 strongly disagree. Therefore, the mean, median and mode when analyzed suggest that women strongly believe that the fashion industry has become more diverse and caters to the different needs of different women.

Third question tried to analyze whether women feel more confident when they wear fashionable clothes on different occasions for example, wearing power suit for meetings or interviews.
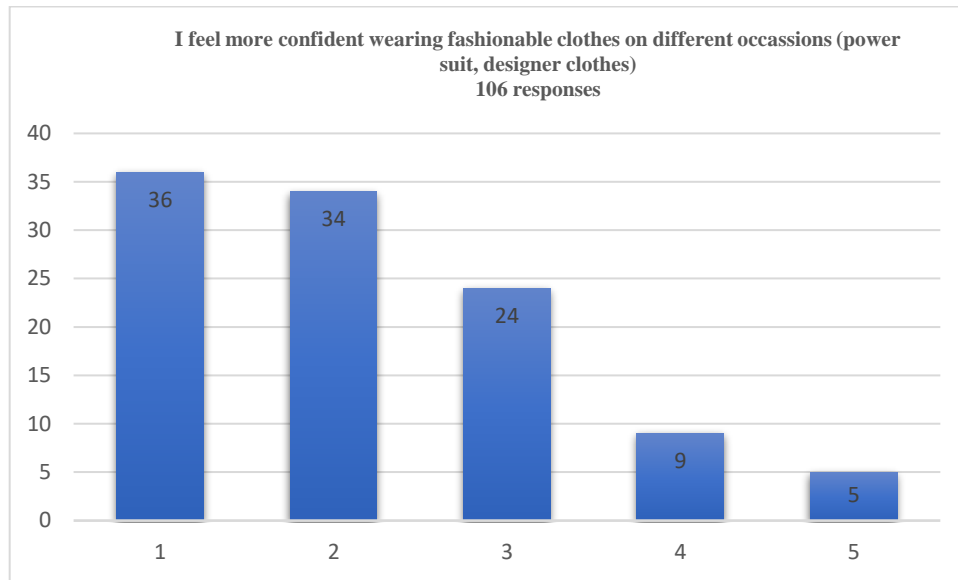

Figure 5: I feel more confident wearing fashionable clothes on different occasions

Mean: 2.17
Median: 2
Mode: 1

Again, women feel more confident when they wear fashionable clothes according to different occasion. Therefore, fashion does instill a sense of confidence in women which leads them to achieve greater heights.

Fourth question aimed to find out what women think the fashion brands do for women on the other end of the spectrum. That is; how fashion industry is looking after its women workforce.
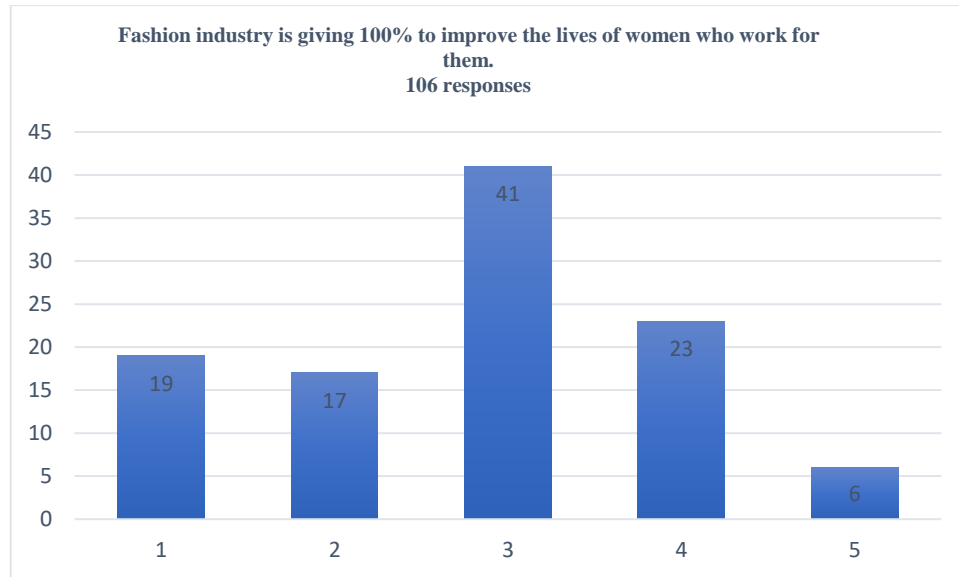
Fashion industry is giving 100% to improve the lives of women who work for them.
106 responses

Figure 6: Fashion industry is giving 100% to improve the lives of women who work for them

Mean: 2.81
Median: 3
Mode: 3

The above responses are inclined towards neutral. Which means that women are either not aware what fashion brands are doing to empower their women workforce, or they think that they are not doing enough to support and improve living as well as working conditions of the women workforce.

Fifth question aims to answer the question that was mentioned in the research paper above. That is, whether fashion industry has proved to be a career option for social media users that helps them to move ahead in their career and gives them the confidence to enjoy life independently.
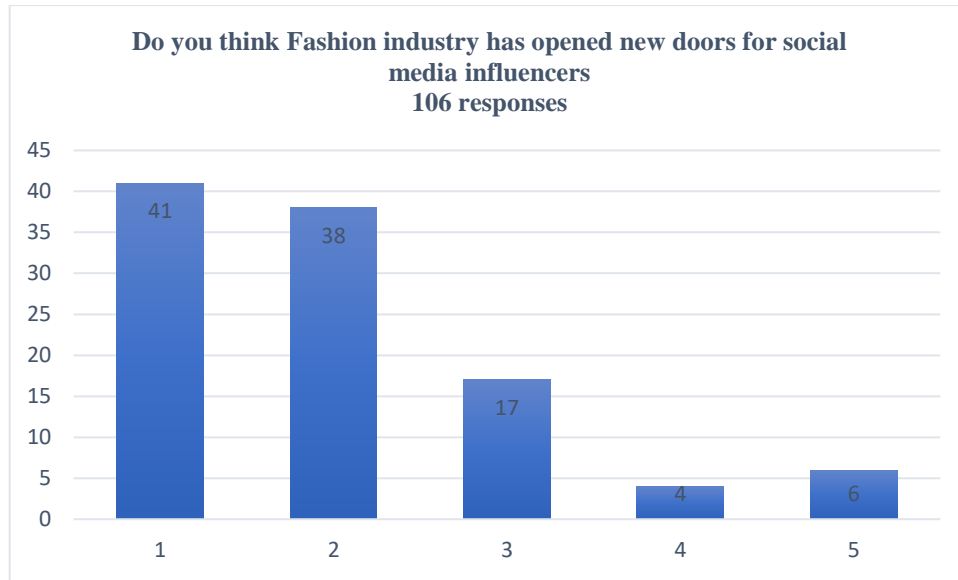
Figure 7: Do you think fashion industry has opened new doors for social media influencers

Mean: 2.01
Median: 2
Mode: 1

Women agree that fashion industry has opened new doors for social media influencers and vloggers who can earn money through paid promotions or unboxing, etc. They can also gain popularity by showing how to style clothes in various ways. Therefore, women believe that fashion industry has become a source of women empowerment through this kind of career option for various girls and women on social media.

Sixth question was an open-ended question which aimed to find out whether fashion industry has positively impacted the lives of women and the reason behind their answer.

Do you think Fashion industry has positively impacted the lives of women around the world? Give reasons.

106 responses

Yes in a way that people feel more confident when they are well dressed.

yes as women wear whats in fashion more confidently.

Yes, definitely. It has given employment to so many women who are passionate about dressing up others, and most recently also began encouraging plus sized models with the aim to establish the fact that beauty is universal.

Yes, to a certain extent.

Certain outfits may make the wearer feel more put together and boost their confidence.

Yes and no, while I do believe fashion industry has started to be more inclusive which has enabled more women to feel confident, what happens behind closed doors isn't always as appealing, especially in terms of fast fashion where so many workers make garments in unsafe environments and are paid way less than the minimum wage, not to mention its harmful for the planet as well. Impacting women around the globe positively isn't only about wealthy women but ALL women.

Yes as it has opened avenue for income at various levels

Figure 8: Do you think fashion industry has positively impacted the lives of women. Give reasons

Majority of the women think that yes it has positively impacted the lives of women by giving them the confidence to move around the society, by being more inclusive they have enabled various women from different backgrounds the confidence to accept their ethnicity. Some even think that it has become a source of income for women around the world. A minority group of respondents think that fashion industry has not positively impacted the lives of women as they think that fashion industry has not done anything great for women who work for them. They also think that fashion industry is stereotypical, racist and has generalized beauty standards.

Next set of questions aim to find out the impact of cosmetic industry on women empowerment.

Seventh question aimed to find out whether women wear make-up to hide their flaws or to enhance their natural beauty.
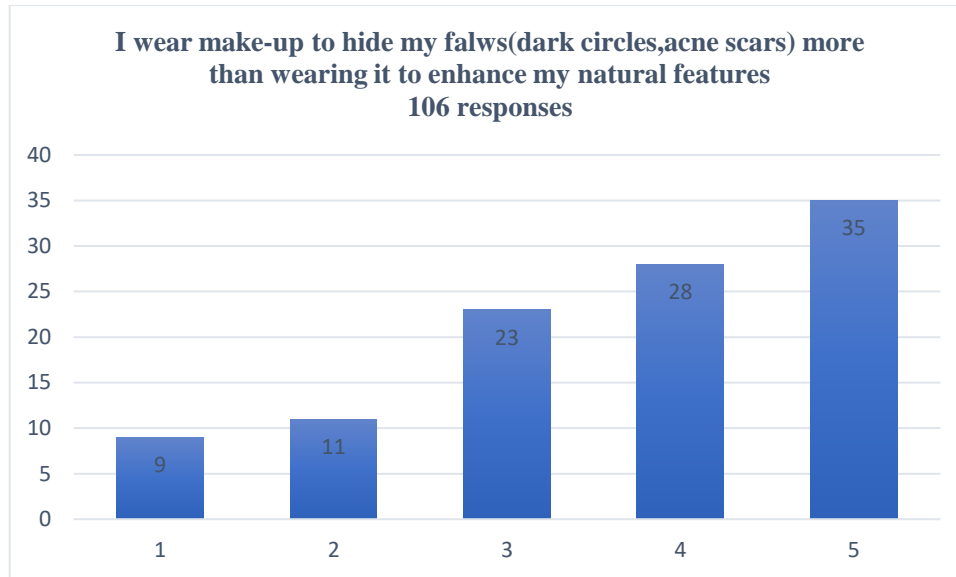
Figure 9: I wear make-up to hide my flaws more than wearing it to enhance my natural features

Mean: 3.65
Median: 4
Mode: 5

Seventh question when analyzed gives the impression that women wear makeup to enhance their natural beauty and not to hide their flaws. That means make-up gives them more confidence and that they are now accepting their natural beauty and are not ashamed of it. Eighth question aimed to find out whether women are confident to go out barefaced as in without any product on their face. This question was asked to understand whether make-up and other cosmetic tools are acting as helpers or something that women depend on. Because if women depend on it, it does not define empowerment.
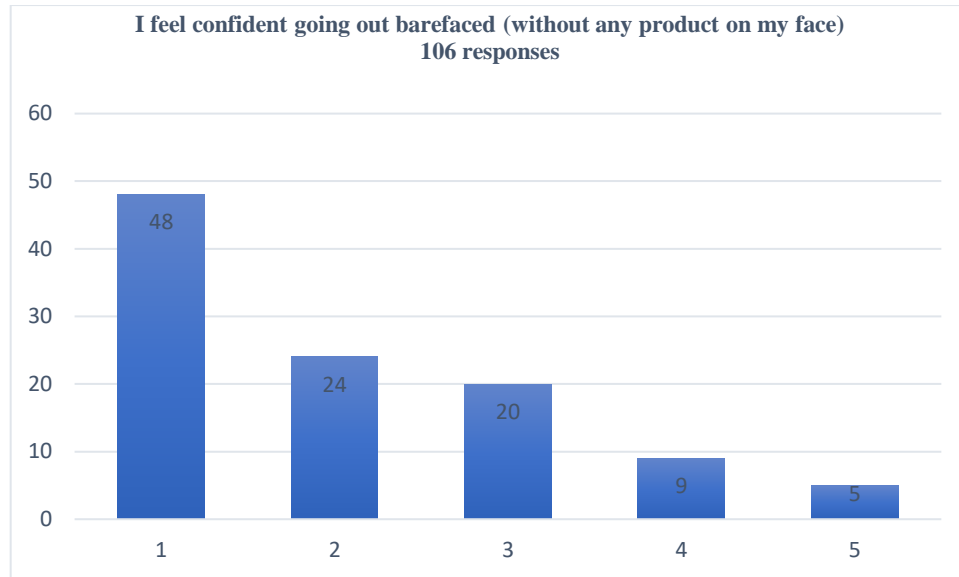
Figure 10: I feel confident going out barefaced

Mean: 2.04
Median: 2
Mode: 1

The above figures illustrate that women are confident enough to step out of their houses barefaced. They do not require to put on make-up to feel confident enough to step out. If we investigate individual answers, women belonging to the age group 40 and above have strongly agreed to the statement but those belonging to 21-25 they still think that it is important to put on some product before leaving their house.

Next question aimed to find out whether successful cosmetic surgeries help to boost confidence in women. The aim was to find out whether artificial beauty procedures help women to feel more confident or empowered.
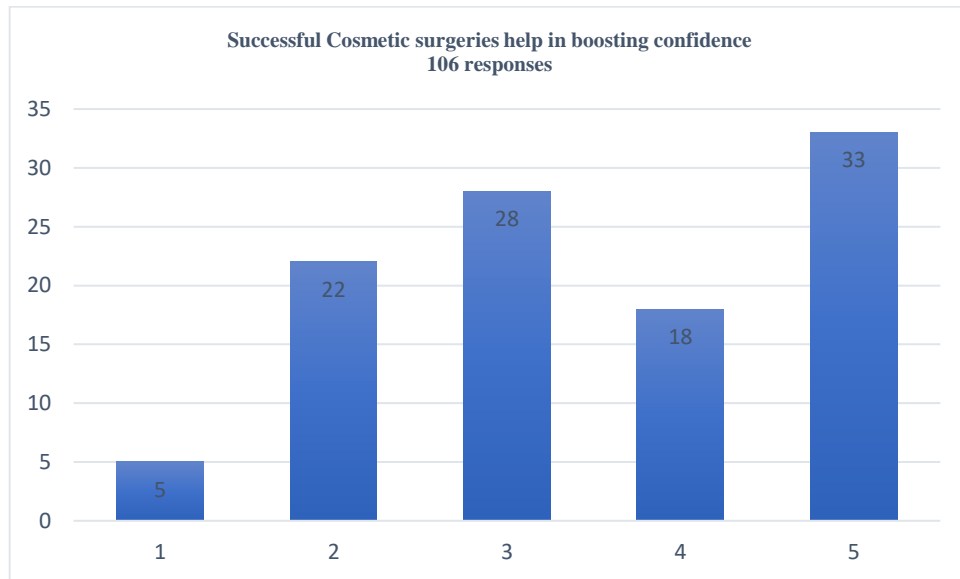
Figure 11: Successful cosmetics surgeries help in boosting confidence

Mean: 3.49
Median: 3
Mode: 5

Majority women think that no it does not boost their confidence. They do not require the help of these surgeries to move around in the society confidently. They are happy with what they have. Some of them are still not sure whether it will help in boosting confidence or not.

Next question aimed to find out about how women feel about pictures of models with perfect skin that flash at them 24/7 on social media.
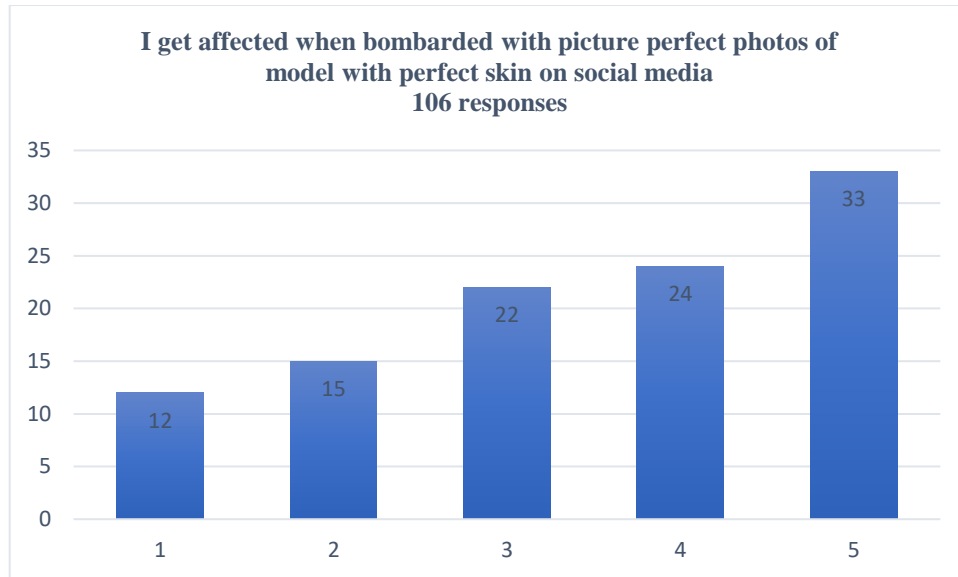
Figure 12: I get affected by pictures of models with perfect skin

Mean: 3.48
Median: 4
Mode: 5

Again, women do not get affected by these pictures anymore. They have accepted themselves for who they are, and they know for a fact that these pictures have been perfected through the use of editing tools. It's not humanly possible to have flawless skin. Every skin is unique and beautiful in its own way.

The questionnaire ended with an open-ended question asking women whether they think that cosmetic industry should promote natural beauty or artificial beautification.
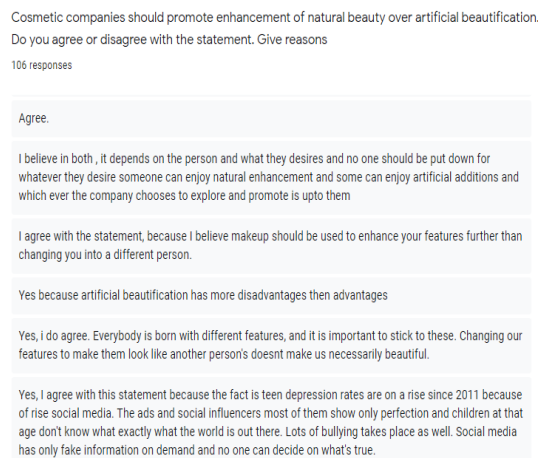

Figure 13: Promotion of natural beauty over artificial beauty

Almost everyone agreed with the statement that natural beauty should be promoted more than artificial beautification. Women have moved on from the phase where everyone wanted the perfect skin, which was defined by these companies. They are now at a place where they feel comfortable in their own skin. They believe that cosmetic industry should not set unachievable beauty standards instead they should promote self –love through self-acceptance.

4. Conclusion

The main aim of this paper was to find out the influence of fashion and beauty industry via advertisements, campaigns and social media marketing on women empowerment. This research intended to find out whether the influence was positive or negative. It can be concluded that both industries have different impact on women empowerment. Both industries have positive influence by creating job opportunities for women across the globe which is empowering them to be independent and explore their hidden talent. This boosts their confidence and gives them the power to change the world in their own sense. Fashion industry, by being more inclusive and diverse is empowering women to feel confident in their clothes. Today hijabis feel more confident to move around as modest fashion has helped them in accepting their ethnicity and religion. But there are some ethical concerns that shadow the success of fashion industry. Women are concerned about those women who work for these brands and are suppressed to the point where they cannot raise their voice against unfair work practices. On the other hand, cosmetic industry has not really proved to empower women as to sell their products cosmetic companies still point out what is wrong with natural features and how to correct them using their offerings. Women have moved forward and are accepting themselves for who they are. They use cosmetic products to enhance their natural features rather than use them to hide their flaws. Cosmetic industry should now move toward natural beauty over artificial beautification. Both industries have a huge impact on the daily life of a woman, therefore should work sincerely and sensibly toward women empowerment. The increase in the participation and access of women to self-expression and decision-making through the media and new technologies of communication is in a way empowering women. The powerful and positive role that the media can play in the empowerment of women and gender equality should be supported and further explored.

5. Limitations and further research

This paper is not free of limitations. It has its own set of limitations. The sample size of the survey was limited to about hundred responses which is a small number to study the impact of fashion and beauty industry on women empowerment. Secondly it was only limited to UAE residents whereas fashion and beauty impacts women around the world.

Further research can be carried out on the following topic to gain more in-depth knowledge. A study that solely focuses on the impact of one of these industries on women empowerment will help to dig deeper into the subject. Also, a study that looks into the negative aspects of both the industry can be carried out.

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