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## AN EXPLORATION OF CONSUMER DIGITAL COMMUNITIES AND THEIR ENGAGEMENT IN ACHIEVING IDEALIZED BEAUTY STANDARDS

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### **Abstract**

This research study explores the ways in which Sri Lankan women negotiate, construct, and challenge beauty standards within the highly dynamic, user-generated context of Facebook consumer communities. Addressing a significant gap in South Asian digital cultural studies, the research investigates the complex interplay of colonial legacies, global beauty trends, and algorithmic influences in shaping idealized beauty standards. The main objective of the study is to explore the influence of social media communities on achieving idealized beauty standards of females. Employing a qualitative ethnographic approach, the study explores in-depth thematic analysis of thousands of user-generated posts and comments drawn from four prominent, public Sri Lankan beauty groups; thus, approximately 50 to 100 posts were analyzed across each of the four groups. The findings reveal a digital ecosystem in which peer-to-peer trust is often more influential than commercial advertising, thus the study reveals that Women actively develop hybrid “local” beauty identities by combining traditional Ayurvedic practices with global cosmetic trends. Furthermore, these communities function in a crucial manner that fosters emotional support within their digital community. This study adopted community of practice theory and postcolonial theory in alignment to achieve study objectives. The study concludes that Facebook beauty communities are not merely passive recipients. Instead, they function as active Communities of Practice where women play a significant role in shaping beauty perceptions.

**Keywords:** *Beauty standards, Communities of practice, Ethnography, Postcolonialism, social media*

## 1. Background Of the Study

The negotiation of beauty standards in Sri Lanka's digital environment reveals a combine influence of colonial legacies, current social economic disparities, and structural dynamics of social media algorithms. Among social media platforms, Facebook has emerged as a significant space where women engage with diverse beauty ideals, ranging from those promoted by multinational cosmetic brands to practices rooted in indigenous Ayurvedic traditions (Kumara and Jayawardane, 2018). With over 8 million users and accounting for more than 61% of social media engagement in Sri Lanka in early 2025, Facebook remains the country's most widely used social networking platform. Although platforms such as TikTok and Instagram also influence beauty trends, Facebook continues to play a dominant role in facilitating beauty-related discussions and community interactions (Singh, Talukdar and Mongwe, 2024). Some scholar's emphasis that, Sri Lanka's colonial experience under Portuguese, Dutch, and British rule entrenched a strict color hierarchy that favoring light skin and Western attributes as symbols of modernity and social standing. This phenomenon, termed a (Al-Haidari and Coughlan, 2026) "pigmentocracy," persists in beauty advertising with 78% of Sri Lankan women indicates societal pressure to employ skin-lightening products (Perera, Rodrigo, & Senanayake, 2021). Current advertising initiatives intensify this by targeting low-income women with fairness creams, they by socioeconomic disparities socioeconomic inequalities (Samper, Yang and Daniels, 2018). At present Facebook now accessible to 87% of Sri Lanka's internet users, the platform has developed into a space for the co-creation of aesthetic expertise knowledge via initiated user-driven communities (NapoleonCat, 2024). Thus, Beauty-focused Facebook groups function as digital Communities of Practice, enabling members to share skincare routines, beauty advice, and personal transformation experiences (Peeters and Pretorius, 2020). These groups emphasis a synthesis of global beauty trends, such as Korean skincare features with traditional ingredients as turmeric, kohomba, and sandalwood (Kumara and Jayawardhana, 2018). Furthermore, individuals' perceptions and expressions of beauty within these online communities are influenced by intersecting social identities, including ethnicity, religion, and social class (Khamis, Ang and Welling, 2017).

From a theoretical perspective, the Communities of Practice framework (Lave & Wenger, 1991) provides valuable insight into how beauty-related knowledge is created, shared, and legitimized within digital spaces. Ethnography further highlights how activities such as liking, commenting, and sharing contribute to community participation while simultaneously reinforcing dominant aesthetic norms (Kozinas, 2015). These dynamics converge with postcolonial feminist theory, which examines how colonial respectability politics continue to drive conceptions of "appropriate" femininity online (Al-Haidari and Coughlan, 2026).

Despite the increasing influence of online digital beauty communities in South Asia, most existing studies has largely focus on Western or East Asian regions (Faddoul *et al.*, 2015). In the Sri Lankan context, 56% of women identify social media as the main source of beauty inspiration (Index Box, 2024), however limited research has examined how Facebook algorithms and online group cultures reproduce historical cultural power structures.

### 1.1 Rationale of the research context

This study demonstrated three key gaps in the existing literature the limited incorporation of postcolonial south Asia viewpoint research on digital beauty , the algorithmic silencing of lack of voices in social media environment , and the scarcity of empirical investigation into how Sri Lankan women engage with beauty standards These shortcomings are particular significant in the Sri Lankan context, where colonial beauty hierarchies endure alongside the rapid evaluation of digital platforms . Although Facebook engages more than 87% of national social media users (NapoleonCat, 2024), digital literacy exhibit a gender disparity , with only 32.6% of women consists of computer literate compared to 36.1% of men (LIRNEasia, 2023).Prevailing studies on digital beauty discourse predominantly focused on western or East Asian regions (Fardouly and Vartanian, 2016).Moreover , platform algorithms exacerbate the exclusion of intersectional identities as Tamil-language content related to traditional practices such as kumkum makeup receives significantly lower engagement rate than Sinhala-language contents on contouring and globalized norms (Digital Outlook Sri Lanka, 2023). Methodological perspective, the study addresses another crucial gap by shifting beyond dominant traditional survey-based methods (DataReportal, 2024), which often fail to overlook the emotional and cultural efforts involved in beauty negotiations. Instead, it uses Lave and Wenger's (1991) Communities of Practice (CoP) framework in integrate with decolonial feminist lenses. Furthermore, this study explores how Sri Lankan women develop, validate, and circulate beauty norms through shared interactions.

### 1.2 Justification of the research problem

Despite the rapid growth of Sri Lanka's beauty industry and the increasing influence of digital platforms on everyday life, limited empirical research gap exist in examining how Sri Lankan women negotiate and reinterpret beauty standards within digital communities. Although Prior studies focus more on cosmetic consumption patterns, awareness of product safety, and the socioeconomic determinants influence on cosmetic use, particularly among specific populations such as university students of (Udayanga *et al.*, 2023), but investigating beauty standards throughonline digital platforms remains lower level. Previous studies conducted in other postcolonial contexts have examined how Eurocentric beauty ideals are internalized, reproduced, and reinforced through digital platforms.(Yens *et al.*, 2025). However, such analyses have not been investigated adequately within the Sri Lankan context, where colonial legacies intersect with contemporary process of digital modernization. From a theoretical perspective, frameworks such as postcolonial theory, black feminist thought, and Communities of Practice provide important conceptual tools for understanding and interpreting beauty norms. Nevertheless, these frameworks have seen limited adoption in Sri Lankan digital context. Postcolonial theory has predominantly been utilized in western and African contexts to investigates how colonial histories drive body politics and aesthetic hierarchies (Space, 2023). Similarly, Black feminist and intersectional beauty perspectives, which emphasize interconnected roles of race, class, and gender interact to drive beauty ideals, have rarely been adopted in South Asia.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

#### **Main research objective**

To explore the influence of social media communities influence on achieving idealized beauty standards of females.

#### **Specific research objectives**

- a) To examine how Sri Lankan women negotiate, construct, and contest beauty standards within Facebook beauty groups.
- b) To analyze the role of Facebook's platform algorithms and moderation practices in shaping visibility and marginalization of beauty norms, trends, and user narratives.
- c) To investigate forms of resistance, adaptation, and hybridization that emerge as women engage with both global beauty trends and local cultural traditions in digital spaces.
- d) To explore the implications of these digital negotiations for developing more inclusive and culturally relevant beauty paradigms, and to inform policy and industry practices in Sri Lanka

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Beauty Standards and Idealized beauty standards**

Beauty standards change over time and shaped by historical, cultural forces and social factors (Elite Learning, 2025). In Sri Lanka, the history of colonialism strongly influenced on perceptions of beauty, with fair skin and features historically linked with social status and privilege (Deskill, 2023). This preference, often treated as “hegemonic whiteness,” is directly align within the Sri Lankan society, as fair-skinned individuals often appear media, cinema, and even beauty contests, reinforcing the notion that lighter skin is more desirable and socially advantageous (Deskill, 2023; Jayasinghe & Manike, 2024).

With the rapid expansion of globalization and the proliferation of mass media, Sri Lankan beauty standards have become increasingly complex (Elite Learning, 2025). Western standards From Hollywood movies, global fashion, and multinational cosmetic brands embedded East Asian beauty trends, particularly the “K-beauty” style. South Korean pop culture and its linkage with beauty standards have gain immense popularity in Sri Lanka, inspiring fashion, makeup, and skincare routines among young women (AIJBM, 2024). Marketing strategies and advertising campaigns further strengthen these standards, often featuring fair-skinned models and promoting products for perfect skin and body shape. As a result, the market for skin-whitening and cosmetic products continues to thrive, with brands leveraging both local and international icons to appeal to a diverse consumer base (Deskill, 2023). The rapid expansion of social media has accelerated the evolution and changes in beauty ideals, creating a paradoxical environment where standards are both more global and more contested than ever before (Elite Learning, 2025; IJERN, 2023). While Western and East Asian beauty ideals often lead, but movement towards inclusivity and diverse beauty are growing, challenging narrow definitions of attractiveness and encouraging self-expression (IJERN, 2023).

Idealized standards refer to images or goals beauty seen as perfect or ideal based in related to current cultural phenomenon, historical, or social norms (Science of Beauty, 2021; Five able, 2025). Such standards are not fixed; they reflect values and beliefs of a society and often showcases power structures. In the contemporary era, idealized standards are increasingly spread through digital media and social media platforms. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok shared endless edited images of beauty traits such as thinness, firmness, smoothness, youthfulness features most of people cannot achieve (Big Think, 2025; Science of Beauty, 2021).)

## **2.2 Media and Algorithmic Beauty Standards**

Social media tools such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok have become major digital spaces for the development and spread of modern beauty standards. Unlike traditional media which typically focus more on one way and institutionally controlled messages, rather than that social media platform more interactive in nature, participatory, and algorithm driven. This transformation allows users not only to consume beauty content but also to become active co-creators, sharing tutorials, reviews, and personal transformations that contribute to shape the collective understanding of beauty standards within online communities (Advise Research, 2022; Datar portal, 2024).

Algorithms play an important role in this process by filtering, prioritizing, and promoting content that receives higher level of engagement. Consequently , images and narratives that dominant beauty trends are more likely to gain visibility and influence users .These algorithmic processes are not fully neutral, as they are developed using datasets that often reflect existing social biases .The construct of Algorithmic Beauty Standards refers how computational systems, influenced by engagement metrics and commercial interests, reinforce and spread narrow ideals of attractiveness (Sustainability Directory, 2025).The effects of these platform dynamics are far-reaching. Filters, content prioritization, and recommendation systems create an environment in which certain standards are constantly validated and rewarded, while others are rendered invisible or deemed less desirable.

## **2.3 Communities of Practice in Digital Beauty Spaces**

The Communities of Practice framework, originally introduced by Lave and Wenger, provide a useful approach for understanding how people create and share knowledge, norms, and identities are within online spaces. According to (Wenger, 1999), a community of practice is emphasis by three key parts as mutual engagement, shared repertoire, and joint enterprise. In related to online beauty groups, these elements can be seen through the regular sharing of beauty tutorials , product reviews, and personal transformation stories, through these interactions , members collectively shapes ideas about “beauty” and the ways it can be achieved (Wenger, 1999).The connection between information technology and community practice is closely linked .features such as likes, comments , shares and content recommendation systems influence which posts are visible and who is seen as an authority, while the evolving practices and preferences of the group can, in turn, influence the platform’s culture and the types of content that are prioritized (Diva Portal, 2013).

In the Sri Lankan context, Facebook beauty groups act as active online spaces where women combine global beauty trends with align to local cultural practices. For instance, members may utilize Ayurvedic remedies rooted in South Asian wellness practices with modern K-beauty routines, showing how global and local beauty practices are blended. These groups not only facilitate learning through shared experiences and peer support, while also giving members a space to present and confirm their beauty practices. As members sharing beauty related knowledge and experiences, members develop a sense of collective responsibility in supporting each other and maintain the group culture (Wenger, 2024; Deskill, 2023).

Therefore, applying the communities of practice theory to digital beauty communities helps to determine how peer interactions, shared leaning, and co – creation influences modern beauty cultures in online spaces.

#### **2.4 Postcolonial Feminist Theory**

Postcolonial feminist theory provides an important framework for understanding how gendered experiences are influenced by the ongoing legacies of colonial history and intersection with social structures, especially for women in formerly colonized societies. Unlike many traditional Western feminism approaches , which has often treated the female experience without sufficient attention to cultural, racial ,colonial feminism foregrounds the specific contexts, histories, and identities that inform women’s everyday realities (Schwarz and Ray, 2007).A major contribution of postcolonial feminist theory is the idea of “double colonization,” which explains how women face simultaneous oppression from both colonial systems and local patriarchal systems (Ashcroft, 1989). Past scholars such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, have demonstrated how the voices and narratives of the “subaltern” those pushed to society’s margins with both gendered and colonial hierarchies are often rendered invisible or misrepresented within dominant discourses.

#### **2.5 Theoretical Contradiction between Communities of Practice and Postcolonial Feminist Theory**

Both communities of practice theory and postcolonial feminist theory provide valuable insights in to digital communities, yet they often provide some contradictory interpretations of social interactions related to digital communities. Community of practice theory primarily emphasizes collaborative learning, knowledge sharing, and identity formation through participation within communities (Lave & Wenger, 1999) From a community of practice viewpoint , it comprises three fundamental elements as the ‘domain’ of activity that creates a sense of common identity, the ‘community’ who are the members who care about the domain, and the shared ‘practice’ the community members develop to be effective in the domain (Wenger, 1999).From community of practice perspective, digital space communities function as a supportive environments where members exchange experiences, develop expertise, and collectively construct knowledge attributes. And thus, this theory generally assumes that participation promotes empowerment and belonging among community members. In contrast, Postcolonial Feminist Theory argues that social interactions are not always empowering because they are shaped by historical power relations, colonial legacies, and gendered inequalities (Muigai and Musingafi, 2024).Postcolonial feminist theory implies that the

participation within communities is inherently empowering (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012). And postcolonial theory argue that knowledge generation is deeply combine both historical and power structural relations with colonialism, gender hierarchies , and cultural domination (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012). Thus, this creates a fundamental theoretical contradiction.

## **2.6 The Sri Lankan Digital Beauty Context**

Sri Lanka's beauty sector has experienced a significant change in the recent past due to the rapid widespread of digital technologies and the increasing use of social media platforms. Social media influencers have become important in shaping consumer preferences and redefining beauty standards within the country (Bishri *et al.*, 2024). These influencers act as cultural intermediaries, bridging global beauty trend, routines and Western makeup techniques with local cultural values and traditions. Their contents consist embedded local ingredients, Ayurvedic treatments, and adaptations of international trends, making beauty information more accessible and relevant to Sri Lankan consumers. In addition, the expansion of e-commerce and personalized beauty platforms highlights the growing role of technology in align to beauty sector (Perera, Gunatilake and Wanniarachchi, no date). Online shopping platforms and dedicated beauty related apps enable consumers to browse, compare, and purchase products conveniently from their homes , and the characteristics such personalized recommendations and virtual reality features enhance the shopping experience.

## **3. Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Paradigm & Research Approach**

This study is grounded in related to interpretivist research paradigm, which aims to understand the subjective meanings and social constructed realities constructed by individuals within their specific cultural and digital spaces. Interpretivism paradigm situated for research that seeks to investigate how people make sense of their experiences, engage with others, and negotiate identities in dynamic environments in align to online spaces. A qualitative methodology is employed to capture the depth and complexity of these social dynamics. This approach well-suited for exploring processes, relationships, and meanings that cannot be easily quantified, especially in settings where context and cultural attributes are critical. Consequently, it enables the gathering and interpretation of rich, detailed data, facilitating an in-depth understanding of the cultural negotiations and identity constructions that occur within Facebook beauty groups (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

### **3.2 Research Design**

This study employs an ethnographic research design as its principal methodological approach. Ethnography, originating from conventional ethnography, is specifically designed to examine online communities, cultures, and digitally mediated social interactions through the systematic observation and analysis of naturally occurring online communications (Bowler, 2010). Thus, this involves the systematic observation, collection, and analysis of naturally occurring interactions in digital spaces, while supporting researchers to uncover trends , social norms, and shared meanings that emerge within these digital spaces (Kozinets, 2015). Consequently,

netnography offers a richer and more contextually grounded understanding regarding a certain phenomenon. Thus, ethnographic research particularly suitable for online research rather than other qualitative methods. Through ethnographic method active engagement of research participants and real-life experiences can drive This study embedded an exploratory qualitative research design, which is ideally appropriate for examining complex and under-researched social phenomena such as the negotiation of beauty standards within Sri Lankan Facebook beauty groups. Exploratory qualitative research allows the researcher to investigate emergent patterns, meanings, and social dynamics in depth, especially in contexts where little prior research exists.

### **3.3 Population and sampling**

#### **3.3.1 Population**

The target population for this study comprises Sri Lankan women who participate in online beauty-related discussions within Facebook communities. This includes women aged 13 and above, from diverse ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds, who engage in these communities through creating posts, commenting, reacting, and sharing beauty-related content. While the broader population encompasses all female Facebook users in Sri Lanka who are active in beauty discourse, the accessible population for this research is limited to members of public Facebook beauty groups that meet the study's inclusion criteria.

#### **3.3.2 Sampling Strategy**

A non-probability purposive sampling strategy was utilized to identify "information-rich" cases that closely aligned with the research objectives. The inclusion criteria for selected threads were as follows, the post must pertain directly related to beauty topics ,The post must have at least 10 comments to ensure sufficient interaction and depth, Comments must be in Sinhala, Singlish, or English to maintain linguistic accessibility, The thread must occur within the one-month study time framework .This method ensured thematic relevance and linguistic inclusivity while allowing for the collection of rich qualitative data. Approximately 50 to 100 posts were analyzed across each four groups, resulting over 300 posts with more than 4000 individual user comments.

### **3.4 Data Collection**

For this research study, the data used from user-generated interactions within four highly engaging, active Sri Lankan Facebook beauty groups: රූ රහස් ලස්සනට ඉමු (Glass Skin & Beauty Tips), රූපලාවන්ය ගැටලු, නිශ්පාදන සහ උපදෙස්, ලස්සන රහස් With Tashani, and ලස්සනට ඉමු With Hasheem (රූ රහස් Beauty tips). These groups were chosen on purpose because of their large active members, strong user engagement, relevant content, and open access for ethical observation (Kozinas, 2015).Data collection was conducted over one month period to capture focused trends while controlling for cultural or seasonal influences such as weddings or festivals. This uniform time frame was applied across all four groups to facilitate comparative analysis and to ensure that the dataset reflected consistent community dynamics.

The data extraction process conducted using two steps using APIFY, a web scraping tool for gathering social media data. In the first phase, all posts created within the study period were retrieved and structured into datasets. In the second phase, these posts were re-queried to extract their respective comment threads and replies. The final dataset consists of post text, comment text, timestamps, engagement measures such as likes and reactions, and thread details (including reply chains). To ensure ethical compliance and protect participant privacy, all personal identifiers were removed prior to analysis, resulting in a fully anonymized dataset (Markham and Buchanan, 2015).

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

The analysis combined ethnographic methods with thematic analysis to ensure a rigorous, contextually based review of user interactions. Ethnographic started with the organization and familiarization of user-generated comments and posts extracted from the selected Facebook groups. The researcher immersed themselves in the data to understand the community's language, norms, and cultural nuances, ensuring that the analysis was sensitive to the unique dynamics of Sri Lankan digital beauty spaces. Thematic analysis was included as the primary method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within the qualitative data. This approach is particularly useful for large textual datasets such as social media comments. This study, adopted manual approach was adopted for qualitative data analysis, utilizing Microsoft Excel as the primary tool for organizing, coding, and thematically analyzing the data.

## **4. Data Analysis and Discussion**

This study adopted the thematic analysis in collection of data from four highly active Sri Lankan public Facebook beauty groups. And this research study guided by (Braun and Clarke, 2006). six-phase thematic analysis approach, this consists of different phases data familiarization, through coding, theme development, and refinement, to a detailed presentation.

The **familiarization phase** involved a detailed, iterative immersion in the dataset, which includes of posts and comment threads extracted from four highly active Sri Lankan public Facebook beauty groups. During this stage, each discussion thread examined comprehensively by reviewing the original post together with subsequent comments, replies, and reaction indicators such as emojis, hearts, and expressions like replies, and reaction indicators such as “Up”, hearts, or emojis. Practically Attention was given to recurring lexical patterns such as repeated use of words like “glow”, “color up”, “hoodia” (good), and “pea” (don’t), as well as interactional characteristics as nested replies, direct mentions, and recommendations, and cultural signifiers references to Ayurvedic remedies, local ingredients, as well as branded global beauty products such as K-beauty applications.

Thus, this consists of several attributes as high frequency of peer-to-peer consultation – Example, significant proportion of posts were explicit requests for practical guidance, such as “මේක යුස් කරන අය රිසල්ට් කියන්නකෝ” (Can those who used this share results?) or “Dry skin Ekata color up vena body lotion eka kinako. “Strong emotional Support and Solidarity – Interactions often showed encouragements (“Thank you so much, “Help please”, “Wow”) which indicated that beyond aesthetic aspirations, these groups also functioned as spaces of

emotional support and mutual care. Early Signs of Negotiated Resistance – While most discussion related upheld fair skin and Eurocentric features, there were some instances resistant commentary such as “Bleaching goanna pea” (Don’t bleach) and warnings about product side effects such as skin yellowing or damage after stopping use.

**Generating Initial Codes,** the second phase of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis deals in generating initial codes. This involved reviewing all posts, comment threads, and replies in the dataset to identify discrete, meaningful units of content that captured a particular feature or idea relevant to the research objectives. Thus, codes covered both semantic content (what was directly said) and latent meaning (deeper ideas or cultural context). The dataset was extract into Microsoft Excel, and each comment and post was placed in its own row. Separate columns were maintained for, Post context (group name, post title), Text excerpt, Initial code, Thematic notes (linking the code to possible future themes), Analytical memos (researcher reflections, cultural context notes) Several prominent inductive codes emerged from repeated features in the data, Product Validation Requests Frequent questions asking others for their experiences with specific products. Example: “මමක යුස් කරන අය රිසල්ට් කියන්නකෝ” (Can those who used this share results) Result Endorsements and Testimonials, Positive affirmations about product quality and outcomes. Example: “Ow hoodia” (Yes, it’s good). Fairness and Glow Aspirations Requests or endorsements oriented toward “colour up,” “pahapat wenna” (becoming fairer), and “glow wenna.” . Warnings and Cautions Negative feedback or health warnings about products, especially bleaching creams. Example: “Bleaching gaanna epa” (Don’t bleach. Requests for Affordable Options Calls for “budget-friendly” alternatives. Example: “Budget friendly serum ekak kiyannako.” Emotional care and Support that seek empathy and acknowledgment alongside beauty advice.

**Searching For themes, In** Phase 3, these codes were integrated to identify clusters of related meanings that could be analytically grouped, while retaining the cultural and contextual nuances embedded in the participants’ own language. The grouping process was guided by ,Semantic relatedness how closely the codes referred to similar types of content example, all codes that described seeking product efficacy advice ,Latent conceptual links where different codes reflected a deeper, shared social or cultural phenomenon (example- “colour up” aspirations and “reproduction of colonial beauty ideals” connecting under the broader concept of colorism) ,Theoretical alignment ensuring that emerging clusters could be meaningfully interpreted through the study’s theoretical lenses: Postcolonial Feminist Theory and Communities of Practice.

Table 1: Theme Clusters

| Theme cluster                        | Merged codes                                                                                                                              | Rationale                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Product Validation and Peer Trust    | Product validation request, positive endorsement, negative/mixed feedback, skepticism toward commercial influence, peer knowledge-sharing | These codes collectively define a recurring conversational pattern where members seek and provide peer-led product information, often privileging lived experience over marketing claims.        |
| Hybrid Beauty Practices              | Hybrid beauty practices, ingredient-specific advice, budget-friendly                                                                      | These demonstrate how members combine local/Ayurvedic remedies with globalized beauty products (e.g., K-beauty, Garnier, Vaseline), balancing cultural familiarity, affordability, and efficacy. |
| Fairness and Glow Ideals             | Fairness/glow aspiration, reproduction of colonial beauty ideals                                                                          | This grouping reflects the strong aspirational discourse around skin lightness and luminosity, rooted in colonial-era aesthetic hierarchies and colorism.                                        |
| Resistance and Caution               | Warnings & cautions, resistance to Eurocentric beauty ideals                                                                              | While less frequent, these comments challenge unsafe whitening, bleaching, or unrealistic standards, advocating either for safe natural methods or the acceptance of natural skin tones.         |
| Community Care and Emotional Support | Emotional connection /solidarity, community gatekeeping/authority assertion                                                               | These describe how members act as both caregivers' offering empathy, reassurance, and moral support and as gatekeepers who set norms, recommend best practices, and police harmful advice.       |
| Platform Engagement Tactics          | Negotiating algorithmic visibility                                                                                                        | Short “Up” or “hearts” posts are used to boost content visibility in algorithm-driven timelines, revealing members' awareness of platform mechanics.                                             |

#### 4.1 Reviewing themes

The initial themes such as Product Validation and Peer Trust, Hybrid Beauty Practices, Fairness and Glow Ideals, Resistance and Caution, Community Care and Emotional Support, and Platform Engagement Tactics were systematically revisited using the following criteria: Internal Homogeneity - Do all data extracts assigned to a theme clearly fit together and represent a unified concept. External Heterogeneity - Is each theme clearly distinct from the others, without excessive overlap. Representativeness Do the themes adequately reflect the breadth and complexity of the full dataset, including variations across different groups, languages, and types of posts. Alignment with Research Objectives Can each theme be meaningfully mapped to the study's objectives and theoretical frameworks Postcolonial Feminist Theory and Communities of Practice.

#### 4.2 Defining and naming themes

This step provides both the conceptual label and the explanatory narrative necessary for interpreting the data, offering a transparent rationale that links raw participant expressions to broader cultural, social, and theoretical meanings anchored in the study's objectives Under defining theme example Product Validation and Peer Trust under this , theme encompasses the recurring practice of seeking, offering, and privileging peer-generated knowledge about beauty products, routines, and results. Group members post queries for firsthand testimonials (“මම කියන්නේ අය වෙළඳාම කියන්නකෝ”), share endorsements, express skepticism about commercial marketing, and rely on experiential knowledge over advertisements. Hybrid Beauty Practices, this theme captures the dynamic blending of globalized (e.g., K-beauty, branded serums) and local traditional (e.g., Ayurvedic, indigenous herbal remedies) beauty routines. Members share routines that combine domestic ingredients like turmeric or papaya with internationally marketed brands, adapting practices for affordability, access, and personal suitability. Fairness and Glow Ideals this theme describes the deeply embedded aspiration toward lighter, more luminous (“colour up,” “glow”) skin. Resistance and Caution, **this** theme brings together posts and comments that challenge, question, or outright reject colorist and Eurocentric beauty practices (e.g., bleaching), highlight risks, and promote acceptance of natural skin tone and health-conscious alternatives. Community Care and Emotional Support this theme encompasses exchanges of empathy, encouragement, and solidarity among members. Emotional support appears both in direct comfort (“Thank you so much”) and in the collective guidance offered to those facing beauty-related anxieties or dilemmas. Platform Engagement Tactics The final theme describes user practices aimed at maximizing post visibility and engagement within Facebook's algorithmic environment such as using “Up,” “hearts”, or strategic bumping.

#### 4.3 Discussion of Results and Findings

The discussion synthesizes six refined themes Product Validation and Peer Trust, Hybrid Beauty Practices, Fairness and Glow Ideals, Resistance and Caution, Community Care and Emotional Support, and Platform Engagement Tactics. Product Validation and peer trust dominate, with members privileging user testimonials over commercial advice, Example

“මේක යුස් කරන අය රිසල්ට් කියන්නකෝ එක ග්ලෝ වෙනවද?” This aligns with Communities of Practice theory (Wenger, 1998), by fostering shared experiences, echoing digital consumer shifts where peer reviews outpace marketing (Gannon and Prothero, 2018). This also emphasizes that instead of relying mainly on traditional beauty experts and marketers, people now look to community members who share their own experiences that enhanced both authenticity and credibility. Hybrid beauty practices, this theme captures the dynamic blending of globalized (e.g., K-beauty, branded serums) and local traditional (e.g., Ayurvedic, indigenous herbal remedies) beauty routines. Members share routines that combine domestic ingredients like turmeric or papaya with internationally marketed brands, adapting practices for affordability, access, and personal suitability. This grounded hybridity supports research suggesting that digital communities foster a “local” spectrum of beauty identities: users contextualize universal trends within locally meaningful routines (Kumara and Jayawardane, 2018). These findings indicate a more complex process of cultural negotiation, rather than passively adopting global beauty trends, participants selectively adopted and localize these practices according to affordability, accessibility, and cultural familiarity

Fairness and glow ideals persist, driven by colonial legacies and algorithmic reinforcement, with frequent requests for “colour up,” “parapet winna,” and “glow winna” products. Sri Lankan studies confirm 78% of women face societal pressure for skin-lightening (Jayasinghe & Manike, 2024; Perera, Rodrigo, & Senanayake, 2021). Resistance and caution emerge reflects, despite the dominance of Eurocentric standards, the analysis highlights important instances of resistance and reflexivity among group members, including warnings against bleaching (“Bleaching goanna pea”), endorsements of natural tones, and safe remedies. These form digital counter-publics challenging Eurocentric norms (Favikon, 2023). Community care and emotional support position groups as affective spaces, with empathy-laden threads example “Help please,” “Thank you so much!” and gatekeeping by admins/members moderating misinformation, building social capital per Communities of Practice. Platform Engagement and Algorithmic Participation, **emphasis** the empirical evidence from the data suggests conscious engagement with platform mechanics members use strategies such as “Up” and “hearts” to maximize visibility, encourage participation, and navigate algorithmic curation. Overall, these themes highlight collective epistemologies reshaping beauty discourses in digital Sri Lanka.

## 5. Conclusion

The study focuses to investigate how Sri Lankan women negotiate, construct, and challenge ideals of female beauty standards within the dynamic and interactive context of Facebook beauty groups. Previous studies related to digital beauty cultures has predominantly centered on Western or East Asian contexts, this work addresses a critical empirical and theoretical gap concerning the lived, digital experiences of women in a postcolonial South Asian context. This study was adopted a qualitative, interpretivist paradigm, utilizing ethnography as its core methodology to capture naturally occurring interactions in their native digital environment. Data, in the form of thousands of user-generated posts and comments, were systematically collected from four large, public Sri Lankan Facebook beauty groups and subjected via Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. The thematic analysis yielded six

interconnected themes that collectively encapsulate the central dynamics of these online communities. Themes as product Validation and Peer Trust, Hybrid Beauty Practices, Fairness and Glow Ideals, Resistance and Caution, Community Care and Emotional Support, and Platform Engagement Tactics. Examples, Product Validation and Peer Trust, revealed that the communities function as powerful ecosystems of informal peer review, where members systematically privilege experiential knowledge over formal commercial claims, users' express comments like “මේක යුස් කරන අය රිසල්ට් කියන්නකෝ” (Can those who used this share results).

Furthermore, findings demonstrate that while colonial legacies and global trends continue to reshape beauty standards and trends, participants actively adapt local and international practices, rely heavily on peer-generated knowledge, and strategically engage with Facebook's algorithmic systems to amplify their voices. Importantly, the presence of counter-narratives and acts of solidarity highlight the agency, reflexivity, and community cohesion that underpin these digital spaces. Taken together, the results not only address the study's research objectives but also provide a nuanced understanding of Facebook beauty groups as sites of both reproduction and transformation of beauty discourses in contemporary Sri Lanka context.

## **6. Recommendation and Implications**

Based on the empirical findings of this study, which illuminate the complex dynamics of Sri Lanka's digital beauty communities, the following recommendations are proposed for managers, marketers, and brand strategists within the beauty, personal care, and digital marketing sectors. These recommendations are designed to be actionable, ethical, and strategically aligned with the observed behaviors and values of contemporary Sri Lankan consumers. Example the study demonstrates that within these digital Communities of Practice, peer validation is a more powerful and trusted form of knowledge than traditional brand advertising. To leverage this dynamic ethically, companies must fundamentally shift their approach from direct promotional messaging to fostering authentic community dialogue, research and development centers, marketers and brand managers should prioritize creating innovative product lines that authentically incorporate trusted Ayurvedic ingredients. The findings also showcase that in related to community care perspective these online beauty groups are significant affective spaces where emotional support is exchanged, not just product information.

## **7. Future Research Direction & Research Limitations**

This study provides significant future research avenues such as firstly, significant opportunity lies in expanding the scope of platforms and timeframes to capture a more holistic, in deep insights in related to e digital ecosystem. This study especially focuses on Facebook social media platform in future some other social media platforms such as YouTube, Tik Tok can be useful in capturing more valuable insights in align to beauty standards. Thus, visually driven platforms like Instagram and TikTok are rapidly gaining influence, particularly among younger audiences, and operate with different content formats, community norms, and algorithmic logics. Comparative cross-platform study would therefore be invaluable in mapping the full

ecosystem of digital beauty discourse, analyzing how norms and practices shift across different technological affordances. Furthermore, this study's cross-sectional design provides a rich but static snapshot in time. A longitudinal study, tracking these communities over several years, would be uniquely positioned to analyze the evolution of beauty standards in response to shifting social trends, new technologies, and changing market dynamics, offering insights into the durability and transformation of the cultural patterns identified herein. However, given the rising impact of TikTok and Instagram on beauty perceptions and consumer behaviors in Sri Lanka, future research should extend to these platforms to provide a more comprehensive understanding of digital beauty negotiations across the evolving social media landscape (AIJBM, 2024; Lakmal et al., 2020). This research focuses only Facebook beauty groups and excludes other popular platforms like Instagram and TikTok, thus which may limit the wider online digital beauty standards discourses. This study utilizes public beauty oriented while excluded private communities where users may share more personal experiences. Methodologically, the study relied on self-reported online content, which may not fully represent offline practices or personal motivations. Furthermore, Language issues, cultural gaps, and the need to anonymize data also limited detailed analysis. Although the Communities of Practice framework was useful for examining shared learning and interaction within online beauty groups, it did not fully address the influence of platform algorithms on content visibility and participation. This study collect data for one month; it also limits the generalizability of the findings in future more time period should investigate to gain much more deeper insights.

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