Exploring How Makeup Shapes Self-Esteem and Social Voice Among Trauma Survivors and Marginalized Women in India

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Abstract- **Makeup today is more than an aesthetic practice; it acts as a tool of self-expression, empowerment, and social negotiation. The study explores its role in enhancing self-esteem and self-perception among trauma survivors and marginalized women in India, while also assessing cultural and socio-economic influence on its use for societal acceptance and confidence. A quantitative, descriptive, and exploratory design was employed with a sample of 100 respondents selected through stratified random sampling across India. Data were analyzed using regression methods. Results showed that makeup use significantly improved self-esteem and self-perception ($\beta = 0.412$, $R^2 = 0.318$), while cultural and socio-economic factors strongly shaped societal acceptance and confidence ($\beta = 0.538$, $R^2 = 0.419$). The results confirm that makeup is not merely cosmetic but a multidimensional practice of empowerment, identity formation, and social negotiation. By highlighting its psychological and socio-cultural significance, the study underscores the need to recognize makeup as a resource for resilience, agency, and inclusion among marginalized communities in India.**

Keywords: Makeup, Self-esteem, Self-perception, Cultural and Social factors, Empowerment, Marginalized women, Trauma survivors

1. INTRODUCTION

Make-up is an old cosmetic tool used for several goals, including social differentiation, the establishment of hierarchies, and the identification of civilisations, beliefs, rituals, and decorating methods. In antiquity, the Egyptians used several procedures and formulations to enhance beauty, many of which are still evident in contemporary cosmetics (Etcoff, N. L., et al., 2011). The use of make-up enhances one's look while contributing to one's persona and sense of humanity. The objective is to improve facial tone and accentuate natural attractiveness, so generating a polished appearance that, when coupled with behavioural patterns, may communicate increased self-confidence (Bez, M. R., & André, C. F. 2017).

Consequently, beauty may be seen in more expansive ways that transcend mere physical allure. According to the principles of "Visagism," beauty is a harmonic amalgamation of the "outer" and "inner," which may fluctuate based on individual perceptions and emotional states. The impression of beauty may be associated with emotions and concurrently with the limbic nervous system, impacting individuals' self-esteem and well-being (de Souza Nuevo, P., et al., 2021).

In today's multifaceted and visually-oriented world, makeup transcends just superficial attractiveness; it profoundly influences an individual's psychological expression and social interactions. The use of makeup as a display of religious conviction and social standing may go back to antiquity. Nonetheless, the significance of makeup across cultures has markedly evolved throughout time (Davis, A. C., & Arnocky, S. 2022). From a cross-cultural as well as historical perspective, all genders engage in the application of cosmetics as a means of bodily augmentation and personal alteration. Currently, makeup is a prevalent instrument used by individuals, particularly the youth, to alter their looks and facilitate self-expression. During a critical developmental phase, adolescents undergo both physical and cognitive maturation. At this juncture, appearance significantly influences the formation of self-image along with self-confidence, with cosmetics also playing a crucial part in the process of self-exploration (Ma, Y. 2024).

Makeup has always functioned as a fundamental element of societal, cultural, and individual expression, spanning generations, geographical boundaries, and socioeconomic stratifications. Despite its extensive use, makeup has never been acknowledged as an acceptable form of entertainment in scholarly or public debate (Anchieta, N. M., et al., 2021). Recreation is often characterised as voluntary engagement in activities

pursued for pleasure, relaxation, innovation, or personal satisfaction. Although hobbies like sports, artwork, and crafts are broadly embraced under this paradigm, cosmetics, although serving similar recreational purposes, is sometimes seen as just an aesthetic improvement or a manifestation of vanity (Arora, A., & Bhalla, M. 2025).

Societal views of makeup as trivial or commercially motivated restrict its accessibility and diminish its potential as a significant leisure activity. These impressions often converge with gender standards, beauty ideals, and societal assumptions, perpetuating narratives that diminish cosmetics as superficial or frivolous. The potential of cosmetics as a means of self-expression, social engagement, and psychological rejuvenation is often overlooked, both in societal views and scholarly discourse (Morgan, J. 2025).

Makeup functions as an essential medium for self-expression, self-care, as well as social engagement for millions, with over 44% of Americans integrating cosmetic goods into their daily routines. Nonetheless, among the worldwide demographic of 2.2 billion individuals with visual impairments, cosmetics continue to be a mostly unexplored area, despite its significant emotional and cultural relevance. For several persons with blindness or impaired vision, cosmetics transcends mere aesthetics; it serves as a means of recovering agency, autonomy, and identity (Li, F. M., et al., 2025).

The primary aim of this study is to explore how makeup influence self-esteem, self-perception, and social voice among trauma survivors and marginalized women in India. Specifically, it seeks to examine the psychological impact of makeup use in enhancing confidence and identity formation, while also analysing hoe cultural and socio-economic factors shape women's engagement with makeup as a tool for negotiating societal acceptance and empowerment.

The study is significant as it highlights makeup's role beyond aesthetics, showing its positive impact on self-esteem, confidence, and self-expression among trauma survivors and marginalized women in India. By revealing hoe cultural and socio-economic factors shape makeup practices, it emphasizes the need to view beauty behaviours within broader social and structural contexts. The findings add to gender and empowerment study while offering practical insights for policymakers, NGOs and social workers to recognize makeup as a meaningful tool od resilience, inclusion, and empowerment for marginalized communities.

There are eight sections in the paper. The first part is introduction of the document. A literature review on the Exploring How Makeup Shapes Self-Esteem and Social Voice Among Trauma Survivors and Marginalized Women in India in section 2. Section 3 and 4 delineates the objectives and hypotheses of the investigation. Research Methodology is given under section 5. The outcome is presented in section 6 of the document. Section 7 presents a discussion of the outcomes. Section 8 presents conclusion for further study. References have finally been included.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Purnomo, T. (2025) marked that skincare is integral to self-care and contributes to the identity and self-esteem of women in the digital age. Exposure to beauty influencers, skincare product commercials, and beauty trends on social media shapes women's identity and intensifies the pursuit of ideal beauty standards. Study indicates that consistent skincare use, shaped by digital media, might enhance self-confidence due to improved perceptions of one's looks. Consequently, digital media serves as a significant intermediary in the connection between skincare use and the development of women's self-confidence in contemporary society.

Bernard, L., et al., (2023) the study aimed to enhance the workplace diversity literature by experimentally altering gender presentation using cosmetics among women and men to assess makeup's effect on interpersonal prejudice in a real-world job selection scenario. Individuals, both female and male, participated in employment enquiries and pre-interview discussions with store staff at 136 retail establishments throughout three shopping malls, which were randomly allocated to one of four conditions in a 2x2 experimental design based on confederate gender (female vs male) and cosmetic application (real versus placebo). These results underscore the widespread gender normative expectations for women in the workplace by analysing gender non-conformity among both women and men.

Searing, C., & Zeilig, H. (2022) investigated the influence of face cosmetics on the formation and articulation of self-image and identity among six elderly white women. The extensive literature analysis contextualises the in-depth interviews by offering significant historical and current backdrop. Make-up for our respondents served as a source of

solace and personal gratification, mostly for aesthetic enhancement rather than to appeal to the masculine gaze or to combat the effects of ageing. Make-up was determined to be crucial in the formation of women's self-image; all participants reported increased confidence while wearing it.

Djukic, I. (2021) examined the legality of employers mandating makeup use for female workers in the workplace. A concise history of makeup illustrates the enduring gendered connotations of cosmetics. The following discussion addresses official, informal, and volunteer makeup practices to elucidate how makeup constitutes a workplace grooming norm. The study contends that grooming policies mandating women to wear makeup at work constitute a form of aesthetic labour that reinforces gender normative behaviour, thus asserting that such policies should be classified as a human rights discrimination claim based on the protected categories of gender identity and expression.

McCabe, M., et al., (2020) analysed women's makeup habits and the cultural conflict between internal and external definitions of beauty in the United States. Ethnographic study uncovers conflicting narratives of beauty in women's lived experiences, juxtaposed with the beauty ideals propagated by the cosmetic industry's advertising. Women assimilate advertising discourses, neither succumbing to nor opposing them, but rather adapting them to fulfil their requirements in using beauty items to cultivate confidence and prepare for participation in society. Simultaneously, the contradictory compliance with commercial rhetoric indicates that gender discrimination persists as an intellectual influence in our culture.

Pantalone, K. (2020) stated that originating from feminist activism, self-care has evolved into a commodified survival strategy, used by people to get short respite from daily stress and fatigue, as well as to avert or alleviate burnout. The “Master's Research Paper (MRP)” examines how Lululemon conveys self-care as a source of restorative pleasure and optimisation to its primarily female audience, through an analysis of feminist and mainstream discourses on self-care and a “critical discourse analysis (CDA)” of Lululemon's brand communication.

3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the role of makeup in enhancing self-esteem and self-perception among trauma survivors and marginalized women in India.
2. To analyse the influence of cultural and social economic factors on women’s use of makeup as a medium for negotiating societal acceptance and personal confidence.

4. HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

H1: Makeup use has a significant impact on self-esteem and self-perception among trauma survivors and marginalized women in India.

H2: Cultural and socio-economic factors significantly influence women’s use of makeup as a tool for negotiating societal acceptance and enhancing personal confidence.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employs a quantitative approach to reach its aim. The study targets the trauma survivors and marginalized women in India, making use of a stratified random sampling technique to make the sample diverse with a respondents' sample size of 100. A descriptive and exploratory research design is applied in the investigation. And the study area for the study is All over India. A structured questionnaire is the major research tool, and the study use two types of variable i.e. both Independent variable (Makeup Use, Cultural and socio-economic factors) as well as Dependent variable i.e. (self-esteem and self-perception, societal acceptance and personal confidence) and data are gathered from both primary and secondary sources. Statistical data analysis is performed using MS Excel and SPSS, using Mean, Standard Deviation, Correlation, and Regression methods to arrive at conclusions.

6. RESULT AND INTERPRETATIONS

This section provides a concise summary of the data's findings and interpretation. To categorize the outcomes, the demographic characteristics, objectives, and hypothesis have been employed. A table that illustrates the findings and a clarification of those findings have been incorporated into the objective as well as hypothesis.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondent

Sr. No.	Demographic Variables	Characteristics	N	%
1	Gender	Male	15	15.0%
		Female	85	85.0%
2	Age Group	18–24 years	25	25.0%
		25–34 years	30	30.0%
		35–44 years	25	25.0%
		45 years & above	20	20.0%
3	Monthly Household Income	Less than ₹25,000	20	20.0%
		₹25,001 – ₹50,000	30	30.0%
		₹50,001 – ₹1,00,000	30	30.0%
		Above ₹1,00,000	20	20.0%
4	Marital Status	Unmarried	35	35.0%
		Married	50	50.0%
		Widowed/Separated	15	15.0%
5	Educational Qualification	No formal education	15	15.0%
		Up to secondary school	25	25.0%
		Graduate	40	40.0%
		Postgraduate and above	20	20.0%
6	Makeup Usage Frequency	Rarely	20	20.0%
		Occasionally	35	35.0%
		Frequently	30	30.0%
		Daily	15	15.0%
7	Awareness of Makeup as Empowerment	Not aware	25	25.0%
		Aware but never practiced	20	20.0%
		Aware and practiced	40	40.0%
		Strongly practice as self-expression	15	15.0%

The demographic profile in Table 1 indicates that the majority of respondents are female (85%), which aligns with the study's focus on women and their relationship with makeup, while a smaller proportion are male (15%). In terms of age, most respondents falls within the 25-34 years (30%) and 35-44 years (25%) groups, showing that the sample is concentrated among young and middle- aged adults, with relatively fewer in the youngest (18-24 years, 25%) and oldest (45 years & above, 20%) categories. The income distribution reflects a balanced mix, with the largest segment earning between ₹25,001–₹50,000 (30%) and ₹50,001–₹1,00,000 (30%), suggesting participation across lower-middle to middle- income households. A majority of respondents are married (50%), followed by unmarried (35%) and widowed/separated women (15%), indicating that marital status diversity is represented. Education levels reveal that most participants are graduates (40%), followed by those educated up to secondary school (25%) and postgraduates (20%), with a smaller group having no formal education (15%). Regarding makeup practices, the highest proportion of respondents use makeup occasionally (35%) or frequently (30%), while a notable segment uses it rarely (20%) or daily (15%). Importantly, awareness of makeup as a form of empowerment is high—40% are aware and practiced, and 15% strongly practice it as self-expression, while only 25% remain unaware, suggesting that makeup is increasingly recognized as a medium of confidence and self-voice among trauma survivors and marginalized women.

Objective 1: To examine the role of makeup in enhancing self-esteem and self-perception among trauma survivors and marginalized women in India.

H1: Makeup use has a significant impact on self-esteem and self-perception among trauma survivors and marginalized women in India.

Table 2: Regression Analysis

Hypothesis	Regression Weights	Beta Coefficient	R2	F	t-value	p-value	Hypothesis Result

H1	Makeup Use > Self-esteem and self-perception	0.412	0.318	45.620	6.756	0.000	Supported

The regression analysis for Hypothesis 1 (Makeup Use → Self-esteem and Self-perception) demonstrates a significant positive relationship between makeup use and self-esteem among respondents. The beta coefficient of 0.421 indicates a moderate positive effect, meaning that as makeup use increase, levels of self-esteem and self-perception also rise. The model explains 31.8% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.318$) in self-esteem and self-perception, suggesting that makeup use is a meaningful predictor though other factors may also contribute. The model's overall significance is confirmed by a high F-value of 45.620 and a statistically significant p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). The t-value of 6.756 further validates the strength of this relationship. Therefore, the results support the hypothesis that makeup use significantly enhance self-esteem and self-perception among trauma survivors and marginalized women in India.

Objective 2: To analyse the influence of cultural and social economic factors on women's use of makeup as a medium for negotiating societal acceptance and personal confidence.

H2: Cultural and socio-economic factors significantly influence women's use of makeup as a tool for negotiating societal acceptance and enhancing personal confidence.

Table 3: Regression Analysis

Hypothesis	Regression Weights	Beta Coefficient	R2	F	t-value	p-value	Hypothesis Result
H2	Cultural and socio-economic factors > Societal acceptance and personal confidence	0.538	0.419	71.340	8.447	0.000	Supported

The regression analysis for Hypothesis 2 (Cultural and socio-economic factors → Societal acceptance and personal confidence) reveals a strong and statistically significant relationship. The beta coefficient of 0.538 indicates a substantial positive effect, showing that cultural and socio-economic conditions significantly shape women's use of makeup in negotiation societal acceptance and enhancing their personal confidence. The model explain 41.9% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.419$), suggesting that nearly half of the changes in societal acceptance and confidence can be attributed to cultural and socio-economic influences. The overall model fit is robust, with an F-value of 71.340 and a highly significant p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). The t-value of 8.447 further confirms the strength of this association. Hence, the hypothesis is supported, highlighting that cultural norms and socio-economic conditions plays a crucial role in how marginalized women and trauma survivors use makeup as a medium of empowerment and social voice.

7. DISCUSSION

The study confirms that makeup use significantly enhances self-esteem and self –perception while cultural and socio-economic factors strongly influence its role in societal acceptance and confidence, consistent with recent study. For instance, (Biesiadecka, M., et al., 2023) showed that women adjust makeup application strategically based on social context, while (Mafra, A. L., et al., 2022) found that body image and self-esteem directly affect the makeup use. Similarly, (Banala, M., et al., 2023) highlighted the influence of cultural pressure such as colorism on cosmetic practices, and (Cui, B., et al., 2025) demonstrated that beauty tutorial engagement shapes appearance satisfaction through socio-cultural expectations. Broader reviews (Merino, M., et al., 2024) and regional studies (Udayanga, L., et al., 2024) also emphasize that media, peer norms, and economic conditions are key determinants of cosmetic use. Together, these findings affirm that makeup is not merely aesthetic but a layered practice of empowerment shaped by psychological, cultural, and socio-economic realities.

8. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that makeup use has a significant positive effect on self-esteem and self-perception, while cultural and socio-economic factors strongly shapes its role in achieving societal acceptance and personal confidence among trauma survivors and marginalized women in India. The findings confirm that makeup is not merely an aesthetic practices but a multidimensional tool of empowerment, identity formation, and social negotiation. By enhancing confidence and offering a medium of self –expression, makeup enables women to reclaim agency in contexts often constrained by cultural norms and economic challenges. Theses insights emphasize the importance of recognizing makeup as more than cosmetic, it is a psychological and social resource that can support inclusion, resilience, and empowerment in marginalized communities.

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