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Visual Gender Stereotypes on Social Media, Physical Self-Concept and Gender Role Attitudes among Vietnamese Adolescents and Young Adults

Hoang Khanh Uyen[1], Nguyen Thi Thuy Ngan[2*]

[1]Hanoi – Amsterdam High School for the Gifted, Hanoi, Vietnam
Email: hoangkhanhuyen2009@gmail.com
[2]Hanoi College of Industry and Trade, Hanoi, Vietnam
Email: nguyenthuyngan9290@gmail.com
*Corresponding author

Abstract: *Social media feeds give young users a steady flow of images that present narrow body ideals and a traditional division of work between women and men. This study examined how often Vietnamese adolescents and young adults report seeing two kinds of visual gender stereotypes, appearance stereotypes and gender role stereotypes, and how these reports relate to physical self-concept and traditional gender role attitudes. A cross-sectional survey collected 85 responses; after three straight-lining cases were removed, 82 respondents aged 15 to 30 were analysed (57.3% female; 78.0% aged 15–18). Four five-item Likert scales were checked for reliability and analysed with Pearson correlations, two multiple regression models and independent-samples t-tests. Respondents reported frequent exposure to appearance stereotypes (M = 3.38) and largely rejected traditional gender roles (M = 2.03). Neither type of exposure was related to physical self-concept, and exposure to gender role stereotypes was not related to gender role attitudes. Exposure to appearance stereotypes showed a moderate negative association with traditional attitudes (β = −.31, p = .014), opposite to the expected direction. Gender comparisons suggest that this association reflects the composition of the sample: women reported more appearance content (d = 0.82) and held less traditional views (d = −0.91), and the association weakened once gender was taken into account. In this sample, the reported frequency of exposure says little about self-image or role beliefs, and gender appears to be a central variable for research in this area.*

Keywords: *social media; visual gender stereotypes; physical self-concept; gender role attitudes; adolescents; Vietnam*

1. Introduction

Social media has become a largely visual space. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube deliver short videos and edited photos, and for many adolescents they are a daily source of ideas about how women and men should look and behave. Content analyses show that these images often repeat older gender displays. Instagram selfies were found to be more gender-stereotypical than magazine advertisements (Döring et al., 2016), and young women whose selfies used stereotyped poses received more likes and comments (Butkowski et al., 2020). Narrow portrayals of women also persist in television, magazines and advertising (Collins, 2011; Mortensen et al., 2020; Sink & Mastro, 2017).

Two concerns follow from this content. The first concerns appearance. Objectification theory proposes that repeated contact with idealised and sexualised bodies may lead people to view their own bodies from an observer's position, with body shame and appearance anxiety as possible outcomes (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Santoniccolo et al., 2023). The second concerns roles. Images that place women at home and men at work may help to keep traditional beliefs about the division of labour in place (Grau & Zotos, 2016; Ward & Grower, 2020). The evidence for the second concern is less settled. Meta-analytic links between media use and stereotyped beliefs are small (Ward & Grower, 2020), stereotypes in written text have weakened over the past century (Bhatia & Bhatia, 2021), and young adults in India reported only limited media influence on their gender views (Gayathri & Bhuyan, 2024).

Much of this work relies on Western samples, content analyses of media texts, or laboratory studies in which participants play sexualised game characters (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009; Fox et al., 2013, 2015). Survey evidence that considers appearance stereotypes and role stereotypes side by side is scarce, and evidence from Southeast Asia is scarcer still. Keeping the two apart matters. They describe different content, and they may relate to different outcomes: appearance content to how people see their bodies, role content to what they believe about men and women. Vietnam is a useful setting because young people spend a large part of the day on short-video and image platforms; in the present sample, 93.9% reported at least two hours of daily use.

This study therefore asks three questions. (i) How often do Vietnamese adolescents and young adults report seeing visual appearance stereotypes and visual gender role stereotypes on social media? (ii) Are these two forms of exposure associated with physical self-concept and with traditional gender role attitudes? (iii) Do women and men differ on these variables, and do such differences help explain the associations observed? The study contributes in three ways. It measures the two forms of visual stereotype separately, it reports results that run against common expectations rather than setting them aside, and it shows how gender composition can produce an association in a pooled sample. Section 2 reviews the literature and states the hypotheses, Section 3 describes the method, Section 4 reports the results, and Sections 5 and 6 discuss and conclude.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

2.1 Visual gender stereotypes on social media

Research on visual gender stereotypes builds on Goffman's analysis of gender display, which coded how posture, touch, gaze and position in the frame signal femininity and masculinity. Kang (1997) applied this coding to magazine advertisements from 1979 and 1991 and found little change in how women were shown, with body display even more stereotyped in the later sample. Döring (2022) later turned these categories into a coding scheme for advertising and social media images, including feminine touch, the kissing pout and muscle display. Applied to Instagram, such categories show that self-made images can be as stereotyped as commercial ones or more so (Döring et al., 2016). Similar patterns appear in fitness and clean-eating posts, where hashtags and the platform interface frame bodies in gendered ways (Baker & Walsh, 2018), and in celebrity photography, where women's images carry more cues of submission and less facial prominence (Mortensen et al., 2020).

Portrayals of social roles have received a parallel line of work. Across media, women are underrepresented and are often shown as subordinate, sexualised or tied to domestic roles (Collins, 2011). Prime-time television still pairs dominant men with sexually provocative women (Sink & Mastro, 2017), and even favourable news profiles of scientists frame family and career differently for women and men (Mitchell & McKinnon, 2019). Advertising has moved toward more varied images, with men now shown more often in caregiving roles, yet it tends to trail behind social change (Grau & Zotos, 2016). Taken together, these studies point to two dimensions of visual stereotyping that this study measures separately: appearance, meaning idealised bodies, beauty content and edited faces; and roles, meaning who earns, who cares, who leads and who may show emotion.

2.2 Theoretical lens

Three perspectives guide the hypotheses. Objectification theory holds that a culture which treats the female body as an object to be looked at teaches women to monitor their own appearance, a habit linked with shame and anxiety about the body (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Cultivation theory proposes that repeated contact with consistent media images is associated with beliefs that match those images, while social cognitive theory stresses that people learn norms by watching models, especially models who are rewarded (Döring, 2022; Ward & Grower, 2020). On social media the reward is visible as likes and comments, which tend to favour stereotyped self-presentation (Butkowski et al., 2020). All three perspectives assume that frequent exposure matters, which makes self-reported frequency a reasonable starting measure for a survey.

2.3 Appearance stereotypes and physical self-concept

Physical self-concept refers to how people evaluate their own appearance, including satisfaction, comfort without makeup or filters, and confidence in front of others. Experimental studies report that women who played or embodied sexualised characters showed lower self-efficacy (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009) and more body-related thoughts (Fox et al., 2013, 2015). A recent review links objectifying media content with internalised appearance ideals, body shame and self-monitoring (Santoniccolo et al., 2023). Related work outside the media field shows that endorsing gender stereotypes goes together with a lower domain-specific self-concept (Ertl et al., 2017). On this basis we expected:

H1: Exposure to visual appearance stereotypes is negatively associated with physical self-concept.

2.4 Gender role stereotypes and gender role attitudes

A review of two decades of developmental research found small but consistent links between media use and stereotyped beliefs about gender roles in children and adolescents (Ward & Grower, 2020). Women shown gender-stereotypic television commercials later reported less interest in quantitative careers (Davies et al., 2002), and stereotyped portrayals are linked with traditional role beliefs and with sexism more broadly (Santoniccolo et al., 2023). We therefore expected:

H2: Exposure to visual gender role stereotypes is positively associated with traditional gender role attitudes.

2.5 Cross-paths

The two kinds of content often appear together. Selfies combine body display with role-related cues (Döring et al., 2016), and sexualised portrayals have been linked with less favourable views of women in general (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009; Fox et al., 2013). Appearance content may therefore also relate to traditional beliefs about roles. In the other direction, role content that presents men as strong and women as carers frequently relies on body ideals, such as the muscular man or the slim homemaker (Baker & Walsh, 2018), and so may relate to how people judge their own bodies. Both cross-paths are treated as exploratory:

H3: Exposure to visual appearance stereotypes is positively associated with traditional gender role attitudes.

H4: Exposure to visual gender role stereotypes is negatively associated with physical self-concept.

Figure 1 summarises the four hypotheses.

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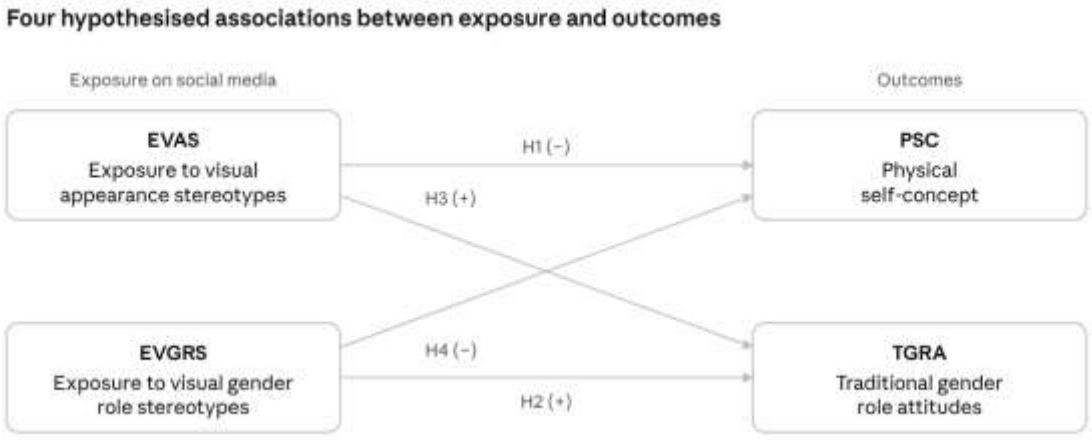


Figure 1. Research model with the four hypothesised associations (H1–H4). Signs show the expected direction; H3 and H4 are exploratory.

3. Methods

3.1 Design and participants

The study used a cross-sectional survey of social media users aged 15 to 30 in Vietnam. Data were collected between August and late September 2026 via an online questionnaire distributed across major social media platforms and administered in Vietnamese. Recruitment followed a convenience approach, so respondents chose whether to take part. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and no identifying information was collected. Formal ethical review was waived in accordance with institutional regulations because the survey was non-interventional and anonymous, and the study followed the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. All adult participants gave electronic informed consent before starting the questionnaire. For respondents under 18, parental or guardian consent and the respondent's own assent were obtained through the online form via a mandatory preliminary confirmation section completed by the parent or guardian before the minor accessed the survey. A total of 85 responses were received.

3.2 Measures

All constructs were measured with five items on a five-point scale. Item wording is given in Appendix A. The items were developed for this study to reflect the contemporary Vietnamese social media context, drawing on conceptual definitions and thematic categories from prior literature on visual gender display and role portrayals (Collins, 2011; Döring, 2022; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Ward & Grower, 2020) as well as objectification and self-concept research (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Santoniccolo et al., 2023).

Exposure to visual appearance stereotypes (EVAS) asked how often respondents saw five kinds of content: same-gender individuals with "ideal" bodies, beauty and fitness content from models and influencers, filtered or edited photos, advertisements for body-altering products, and posts or comments judging other people's looks. Exposure to visual gender role stereotypes (EVGRS) asked how often they saw women shown as responsible for housework and childcare, men shown as the main earners, men shown in leadership positions, women praised for giving up careers for family, and men shown as having to stay strong and hide vulnerability. Both exposure scales ran from 1 (never) to 5 (always).

Physical self-concept (PSC) covered satisfaction with current appearance, comfort with natural appearance, feeling self-conscious about appearance (reverse-scored), confidence in front of others, and wanting to change many body features (reverse-scored). Traditional gender role attitudes (TGRA) covered views that housework and childcare belong to women, that women should put family before career, that it is normal for men to stay home while women work (reverse-scored), that leadership suits men better, and that men should always appear strong. Both scales ran from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher PSC scores indicate a more positive view of one's appearance; higher TGRA scores indicate more traditional views. Gender, age group, occupation, daily social media time and main platform were also recorded.

3.3 Data screening and analysis

Three cases showed straight-lining, with zero or near-zero variation across the 20 Likert items and contradictory answers to positively and negatively worded items. These cases were removed, leaving 82 valid responses. The three negatively worded items were reverse-coded as 6 − X. Internal consistency was assessed with Cronbach's alpha, using .60 as the minimum for exploratory research (Hair et al., 2010; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Composite scores were the mean of the five items of each scale.

Analysis proceeded in three steps. Pearson correlations described bivariate associations. Two multiple regression models were then estimated, one for PSC (testing H1 and H4) and one for TGRA (testing H2 and H3), with EVAS and EVGRS entered together; multicollinearity was checked with the variance inflation factor (VIF). Finally, women and men were compared with independent-samples t-tests and Cohen's d, with Welch's correction as a check where group variances differed. As a further check on the gender

comparison, gender (female = 1) was added as a control variable to both regression models. Tests were two-tailed at α = .05. Because the study is exploratory, p values are reported without correction for multiple testing; the EVAS–TGRA correlation (p = .004) would survive a Bonferroni correction across the six correlations, whereas the corresponding regression path (p = .014) would not survive a correction across the four hypothesised paths. With N = 82, the study had 80% power to detect a correlation of about .31. Meta-analytic estimates of the association between social media use and body image concerns in adolescents are of the order of r = .17 to .19 (Fortunato et al., 2026), and at this sample size the power to detect r = .17 is only 33%. An effect of the size typically reported in this field would therefore be more likely than not to go undetected here. All statistical analyses were performed using R (Version 4.3.2).

4. Results

4.1 Sample characteristics

Table 1 describes the 82 valid respondents. Women made up 57.3% of the sample, and most respondents were aged 15 to 18 (78.0%) and attending high school (74.4%). Social media use was heavy: 68.3% spent two to five hours a day on it and a further 25.6% more than five hours. Image- and video-led platforms dominated, with TikTok (50.0%) and Instagram (31.7%) together named as the main platform by 81.7% of respondents.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics and social media use of the sample (N = 82)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	47	57.3
	Male	35	42.7
Age group	15–18 years	64	78.0
	19–24 years	14	17.1
	25–30 years	4	4.9
Occupation	High school student	61	74.4
	University student	12	14.6
	Employed	8	9.8
	Not specified	1	1.2
Daily social media use	Less than 2 hours	5	6.1
	2–5 hours	56	68.3
	More than 5 hours	21	25.6
Main platform	TikTok	41	50.0
	Instagram	26	31.7
	YouTube	9	11.0
	Facebook	6	7.3

4.2 Reliability and descriptive statistics

All four scales reached the .60 threshold (Table 2). The two exposure scales showed good consistency (α = .847 and .861), and TGRA was acceptable (α = .737). PSC was the weakest scale (α = .618); without its two reverse-scored items, its alpha rose to .724, which suggests that some respondents read the negatively worded items differently. Removing the reverse-scored item from TGRA raised its alpha to .768. The five-item composites were kept for all analyses so that each construct retained its full content.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and internal consistency of the study constructs (N = 82)

Construct	Items	M	SD	α (5 items)	α (alternative)
Exposure to visual appearance stereotypes (EVAS)	EVAS1–EVAS5	3.38	0.97	.847	—
Exposure to visual gender role stereotypes (EVGRS)	EVGRS1–EVGRS5	2.83	1.07	.861	—
Physical self-concept (PSC)	PSC1, PSC2, PSC3R, PSC4, PSC5R	3.03	0.65	.618	.724 (PSC1, PSC2, PSC4)
Traditional gender role attitudes (TGRA)	TGRA1, TGRA2, TGRA3R, TGRA4, TGRA5	2.03	0.79	.737	.768 (without TGRA3R)

Note. Five-point scales; R = reverse-coded item (6 − X). Composites used in all analyses are the five-item means.

The means answer RQ1. Respondents reported seeing appearance stereotypes fairly often (M = 3.38) and gender role stereotypes somewhat less often (M = 2.83). Their view of their own appearance sat near the scale midpoint (M = 3.03), and they mostly disagreed with traditional gender roles (M = 2.03).

4.3 Correlations and regression analyses

The two exposure measures were moderately correlated (r = .531, p < .001; Table 3), so respondents who reported much appearance content also tended to report much role content. EVAS showed a negative correlation with TGRA (r = −.312, p = .004).

No other correlation reached significance: EVAS and EVGRS were unrelated to PSC (r = .068, p = .544; r = −.056, p = .617), EVGRS was unrelated to TGRA (r = −.160, p = .151), and PSC was unrelated to TGRA (r = −.025, p = .824).

Table 3. Means, standard deviations and Pearson correlations (N = 82)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. EVAS	3.38	0.97	—			
2. EVGRS	2.83	1.07	.531***	—		
3. PSC	3.03	0.65	.068	−.056	—	
4. TGRA	2.03	0.79	−.312**	−.160	−.025	—

Note. **p < .01, ***p < .001 (two-tailed).

Table 4 reports the two regression models. VIF was 1.393 for both predictors, well below common cut-offs. The PSC model was not significant, F(2, 79) = 0.561, p = .573, R^2 = .014. Neither EVAS (β = .131, p = .323) nor EVGRS (β = −.125, p = .345) was associated with PSC, so H1 and H4 were not supported. The TGRA model was significant, F(2, 79) = 4.260, p = .017, and accounted for 9.7% of the variance in attitudes. EVAS was negatively associated with TGRA (β = −.314, p = .014), while EVGRS was not (β = .004, p = .972). H2 was therefore not supported. H3 was not supported either: the EVAS–TGRA association was significant, but in the opposite direction to the one predicted.

Table 4. Multiple regression results for physical self-concept and traditional gender role attitudes (N = 82)

Model and path	B	SE	β	t	p	VIF	Decision
Model 1: DV = PSC							
Constant	2.978	0.278		10.712	< .001		
H1: EVAS → PSC	0.088	0.089	.131	0.994	.323	1.393	Not supported
H4: EVGRS → PSC	−0.076	0.081	−.125	−0.949	.345	1.393	Not supported
Model fit	R^2 = .014, adjusted R^2 = −.011, F(2, 79) = 0.561, p = .573						
Model 2: DV = TGRA							
Constant	2.888	0.320		9.025	< .001		
H3: EVAS → TGRA	−0.256	0.102	−.314	−2.501	.014	1.393	Not supported (significant, opposite sign)
H2: EVGRS → TGRA	0.003	0.093	.004	0.035	.972	1.393	Not supported
Model fit	R^2 = .097, adjusted R^2 = .075, F(2, 79) = 4.260, p = .017						

Note. B = unstandardised coefficient; β = standardised coefficient; DV = dependent variable.

4.4 Gender differences

Table 5 compares women and men and addresses RQ3. Women reported more exposure to appearance stereotypes than men (3.70 vs 2.96; t(80) = 3.661, p < .001, d = 0.82), and men held more traditional role attitudes than women (2.41 vs 1.75; t(80) = −4.082, p < .001, d = −0.91). Both differences are large by conventional benchmarks. Because the TGRA standard deviations differed between groups, Welch's correction was also applied, and the difference remained clear, t(59.4) = −3.89, p < .001. The groups did not differ on exposure to role stereotypes (p = .226) or on physical self-concept (p = .584).

Table 5. Comparison of study variables by gender (independent-samples t-tests, N = 82)

Construct	Female (n = 47) M (SD)	Male (n = 35) M (SD)	Difference (F − M)	t(80)	p	Cohen's d
EVAS	3.70 (0.91)	2.96 (0.90)	+0.74	3.661	< .001	0.82
EVGRS	2.95 (1.13)	2.66 (0.97)	+0.29	1.218	.226	0.27
PSC	3.06 (0.60)	2.98 (0.72)	+0.08	0.550	.584	0.12
TGRA	1.75 (0.62)	2.41 (0.85)	−0.66	−4.082	< .001	−0.91

Note. Two-tailed tests with pooled variance.

This pattern offers a plain reading of the reversed H3 result. Women sit high on EVAS and low on TGRA, men the other way round, so a pooled sample would show a negative EVAS–TGRA correlation even if the two were unrelated within each gender. The gender-adjusted check supports this reading. Gender correlated .38 with EVAS and −.42 with TGRA (female = 1). With gender added to Model 2, gender was associated with TGRA (β = −.35, p = .002), the EVAS coefficient fell to β = −.17 (p = .20), and R^2 rose from

.097 to .201. The partial correlation between EVAS and TGRA, holding gender constant, was r = −.18 (p = .10). The same control was applied to the PSC model for symmetry: gender was unrelated to physical self-concept (β = .03, p = .794) and the model remained non-significant, R^2 = .017, F(3, 78) = 0.46, p = .713. Both models with gender are reported in Table 6.

Table 6. Regression models with gender added as a control variable (N = 82)

Model and path	B	SE	β	t	p
Model 3: DV = TGRA					
EVAS → TGRA			−.167	−1.302	.197
EVGRS → TGRA			−.024	−0.202	.840
Gender (female = 1) → TGRA			−.349	−3.176	.002
Model fit		R^2 = .201, adjusted R^2 = .170, F(3, 78) = 6.53, p < .001			
Model 4: DV = PSC					
EVAS → PSC			.122	0.860	.392
EVGRS → PSC			−.125	−0.943	.349
Gender (female = 1) → PSC			.032	0.262	.794
Model fit		R^2 = .017, adjusted R^2 = −.021, F(3, 78) = 0.46, p = .713			

Note. β = standardised coefficient. B and SE to be inserted from the R output. VIF for all predictors < 1.60.

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of the findings

Respondents reported seeing appearance stereotypes more often than role stereotypes. This fits content studies in which body display, beauty poses and edited faces are common in self-made images (Butkowski et al., 2020; Döring et al., 2016) and in fitness content (Baker & Walsh, 2018). Women reported clearly more appearance content than men. Our data cannot say whether this reflects what platforms show to women, what women choose to follow, or what they notice; each is plausible, and they are not exclusive.

Neither form of exposure was related to physical self-concept, and women and men did not differ on it. We see three likely reasons. First, the exposure items measure how often content is seen, whereas objectification theory places the weight on what happens next, namely comparison with the images and internalisation of the ideal (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Santoniccolo et al., 2023). Meta-analytic evidence places the association between social comparison on social media and body image concerns at r = .454 (Bonfanti et al., 2025), roughly two and a half times the size of the association reported for exposure itself, which suggests that the step omitted by the present items carries most of the effect. The experimental studies that report clear differences used intense, embodied exposure, such as playing a sexualised avatar (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009; Fox et al., 2013, 2015), which differs from scrolling past many images in a day. Second, the PSC scale had modest reliability, which attenuates observed correlations: with α = .847 for EVAS and α = .618 for PSC the attenuation factor is $\sqrt{(.847 \times .618)} = .72$, so a true correlation of .17 would appear in these data as about .12, which this sample has less than 20% power to detect. Third, the sample could detect associations of about .31 or larger, whereas media associations in this field are typically of the order of r = .17 to .19 (Fortunato et al., 2026; Ward & Grower, 2020), an effect this sample would detect only about a third of the time. The null result is best read as the absence of a moderate association in this sample, not as evidence that no association exists.

Exposure to role stereotypes was also unrelated to role attitudes. One reason may be the low level of traditional attitudes. With a mean of 2.03 on a five-point scale, most respondents disagreed with traditional roles. The distribution nevertheless retained appreciable spread (SD = 0.79, larger than that of physical self-concept, SD = 0.65), so restricted variance alone is unlikely to account for the null result, and a substantive reading is more plausible. This is in line with evidence that gender stereotypes have weakened over time (Bhatia & Bhatia, 2021), that advertising has moved toward more varied roles (Grau & Zotos, 2016), and that young adults elsewhere describe media influence on their gender views as limited (Gayathri & Bhuyan, 2024). A second possibility is that respondents who notice stereotyped content are also the ones who reject it. Reporting that one often sees women shown as homemakers may partly reflect awareness of the stereotype rather than agreement with it. The present items cannot separate these two readings.

The negative EVAS–TGRA association deserves a careful reading. Taken at face value, it would mean that people who see more beauty and body content hold less traditional views. The gender analysis suggests a simpler account. Women reported more appearance content and less traditional attitudes, and once gender was held constant the association fell to a small, non-significant level. The pooled association therefore appears to reflect differences between women and men. The partial correlation does not, however, establish that no link holds within either group: at N = 82 the power to detect a correlation of .18 is only about 37%, so the data are consistent with the gender-composition reading but cannot rule out a small within-gender association. A second, non-

artefactual reading cannot be excluded: using instrumental-variable estimates on nationally representative data, Mu et al. (2026) found that social media use leads women to hold more egalitarian gender role attitudes, so a negative association between exposure and traditional attitudes also has a plausible mechanism of its own. This finding is a practical warning for survey research on media and gender: in mixed samples, a correlation between exposure and attitudes may simply mirror gender composition.

5.2 Implications

For theory, the results suggest that frequency of exposure is too thin a measure on its own. Studies that rely on objectification or cultivation arguments would gain from measuring the steps between seeing and believing, such as appearance comparison, internalisation of ideals and critical reading of content. The results also support treating appearance and role stereotypes as separate dimensions; they were correlated, but they did not relate to outcomes in the same way. Gender should be modelled directly, through control variables or group comparisons, rather than left in the error term.

For practice, the clearest signal is the high level of appearance content reported by young women, most of them high school students. Media literacy lessons in secondary schools could include short exercises in which students identify filters, editing and paid promotion in body-related posts, with teachers recording whether students can spot these features before and after the lesson. Researchers and programme evaluators working with such data should report results separately for women and men, since pooled figures can point in a misleading direction.

5.3 Limitations and future research

Several limitations apply. The design is cross-sectional, so the associations say nothing about direction. All measures are self-reported, including exposure, which depends on what respondents notice and remember. Respondents were recruited online through a convenience approach, which may favour heavier social media users, so the results cannot be generalised to Vietnamese youth as a whole. The sample is small and mostly aged 15 to 18, so the findings speak mainly to adolescents, and gender was recorded in two categories only. The PSC scale and the reverse-scored items performed less well than the other measures. Future studies could use larger quota samples, add measures of comparison and internalisation, collect data in two waves, and use multi-group models to test whether associations differ between women and men. Two-wave evidence from 957 adolescents, 501 of them in Vietnam, shows that appearance comparison mediates the link between passive social media use and body image concerns in this region (Cheng et al., 2025), which makes it the most promising addition to the present design.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to answer three questions about visual gender stereotypes on social media among Vietnamese adolescents and young adults. On RQ1, respondents reported seeing appearance stereotypes fairly often and role stereotypes somewhat less often, against a background of heavy daily use of TikTok and Instagram. On RQ2, neither form of exposure was associated with physical self-concept, and exposure to role stereotypes was not associated with role attitudes; the one significant association, between appearance content and less traditional attitudes, ran against the expected direction. On RQ3, women reported more appearance content and held less traditional views than men, and this difference accounts for much of the unexpected association.

None of the four hypotheses was supported. That outcome is informative in its own right. In this sample, how often young people say they see stereotyped images tells us little about how they judge their bodies or what they believe about gender roles, while gender tells us a good deal. Future work will need richer measures of how content is processed, larger and more balanced samples, and analyses that keep women and men in view as distinct groups.

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