

THE LANTERN TRIBE

EDITION 17

RATED IN THE STARS



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Rating is a quantitative marker that signifies the definite value of something. Yet, the basis of rating in our culture has been people's perception. And perception is an arbitrary standard, rooted in societal structures and hierarchies, with ratings either exposing them or, more dangerously, reinforcing them. The majoritarian culture's influence on the general perception of something sidelines any dissenting opinions, thus reinforcing pre-existing class and caste-based hierarchies.

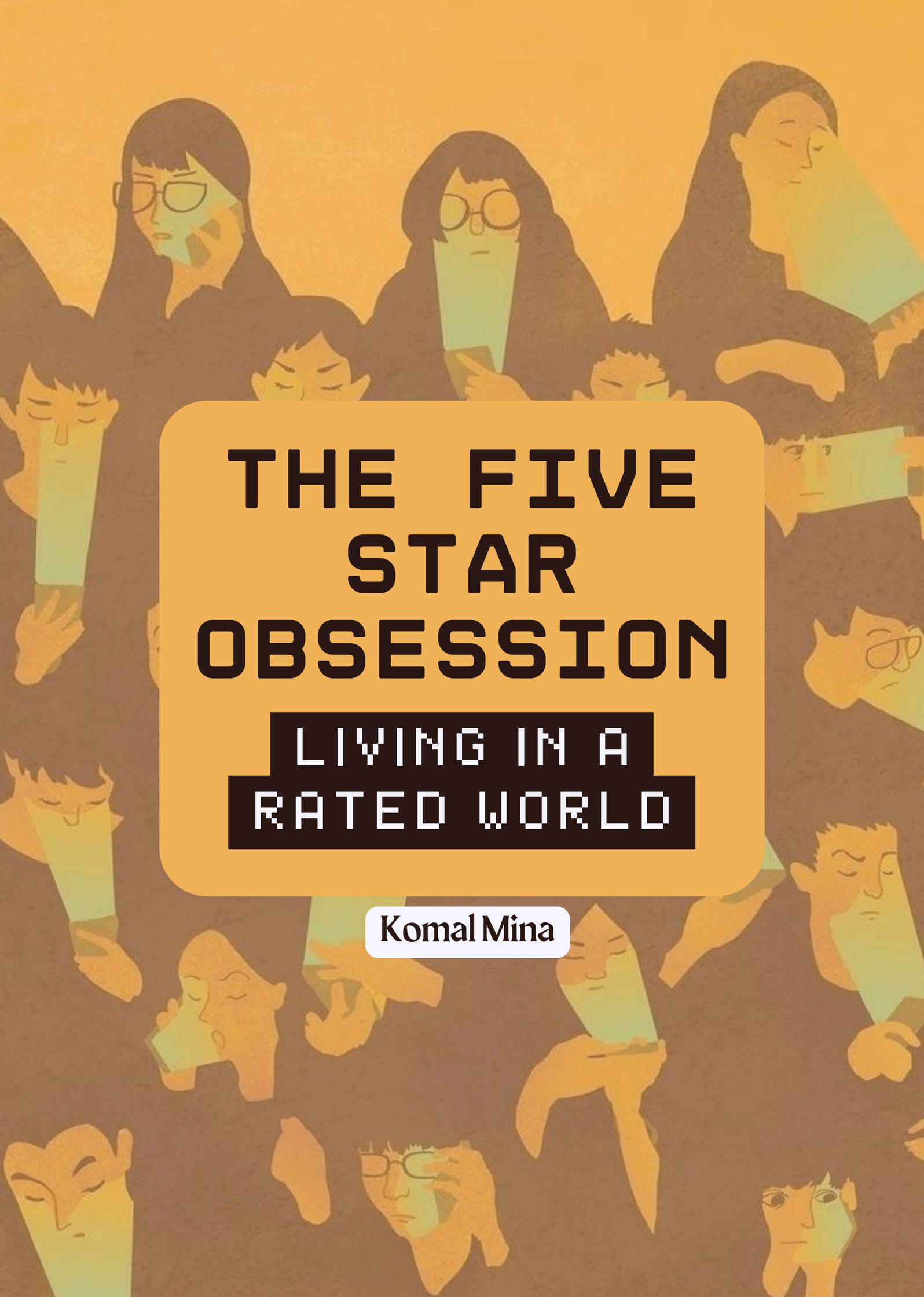
Rating culture goes beyond products, seeping into human life and mentality, dictating what deserves acceptance and what doesn't. Seamlessly, here, enter photo filters. Filtering out the "negatives", filters are a constant reminder to both users and consumers that something about you is inherently wrong and requires "fixing," leading to anxiety and eating disorders, thus sabotaging young people's self-perception from the get-go. This, coupled with the new generation's longing to "fit in"- into a vast online global culture that cannot even be defined in absolute terms- furthers the damage. The consequent impact of this desire is an emerging homogeneity in culture, with diversity getting "rated" away.

Feeding into this are media houses, capitalistic companies and influencers, whose profit margins are heavily dependent on making people feel "lack". Companies offer their products or services to influencers for free, who are then responsible for convincing their audience of their value, or the lack thereof. Oblivious to this reality, impressionable people acquiesce to their FOMO, hoping to buy their way into this elite, highly-rated club instead of seeking timeless values of satisfaction and contentment.

Rating culture has impacted dating and relationships, leading to the commodification of interactions, where one's worth can be summed up in a mere swipe of some stranger's finger on the idiot box in their hand. It has started to permanently alter human perception and interactions, oversimplifying the nuances of being human, thus reducing us to our bodies and faces.

Could a single digit ever truly define you in your complete identity? If it can not, would it be fair to do so to another person? In a time when humanity matters more than ever, we should make amends to ensure we retain what genuinely matters- which would mean prioritising authenticity over approval, community over competition, and self-worth beyond metrics. This edition is a deeper reflection in this direction.

Jyotri Nandy
Editor-in-chief
The Lantern Tribe

The background of the entire page is a stylized illustration of a diverse crowd of people. Each person is depicted from the chest up, holding a smartphone. The color palette is monochromatic, using various shades of brown, tan, and beige. The people are shown in various poses, some looking at their phones, some with their eyes closed, and some looking towards the viewer. The overall style is flat and graphic.

THE FIVE STAR OBSESSION

LIVING IN A
RATED WORLD

Komal Mina

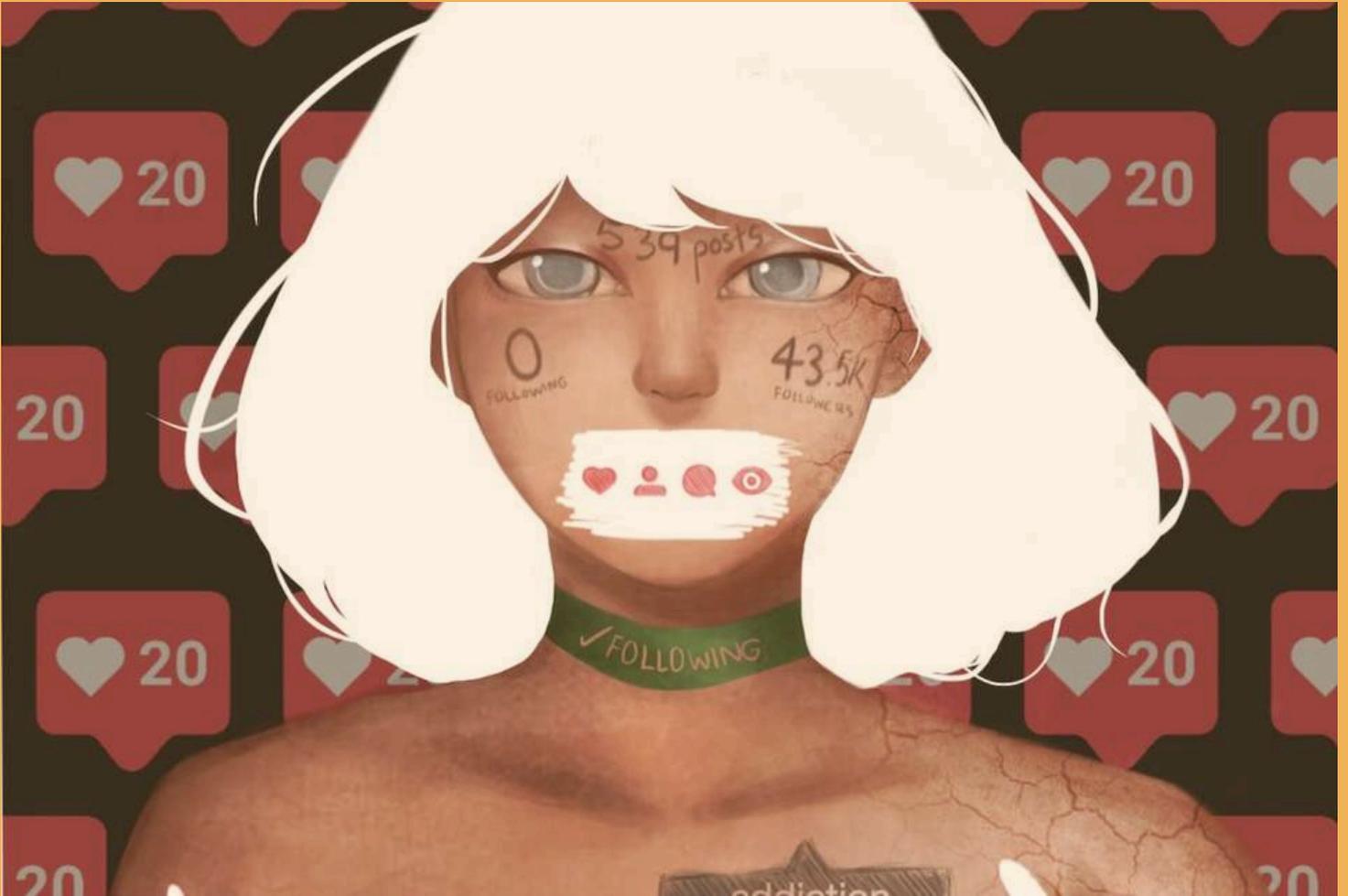
INTRODUCTION

In today's time, the digitally equipped world has seen rating culture fully integrate itself into our assessment of products, services, and even people. Things like rating systems are present in the form of customer reviews on e-commerce websites or ride-hailing services that rate drivers with stars. 98% of consumers read online reviews for local businesses, with 76% trusting online reviews as much as personal recommendations. This heavy reliance on ratings fosters a sense of collective validation, where individuals align their opinions with popular consensus. As a result, rating culture promotes groupthink, where people may trust high-rated services or products without critically evaluating their own preferences or needs. This can sometimes lead to biased decision-making and the amplification of trends that may not necessarily reflect individual experiences. People's perceptions and decisions are directed by a number of industries, with the power of social media and dating apps altering platforms to gain further control over ratings. However, what's the implication of constant evaluations for society? The rating culture does promote accountability and transparency, but it also raises concerns about mental health, self-validation, and social anxiety. Constant evaluations can lead to ethical issues, making people overly dependent on ratings for their self-worth and decision-making.

Rating culture is evident across various sectors. For instance, e-commerce platforms like Amazon and Flipkart influence purchasing decisions through star ratings and reviews. Similarly, ride-hailing services like Uber and Ola determine driver credibility based on user feedback. Social media platforms also encourage rating systems, where likes and comments impact content visibility and user validation. While these systems offer transparency, they can also create pressure and bias, affecting both businesses and individuals alike.



THE EVOLUTION OF RATING CULTURE



The practice of ratings has been there for centuries in one form or the other. Recommendations through word of mouth, along with expert review, served as the main parameters for consumer decisions. The internet served as a medium which changed everything for the better by enabling users to share their opinions through digital ratings. Consumers were given the power to rate products and services using websites such as Amazon and Yelp, or even criticise the entertainment industry using Rotten Tomatoes and IMDB, which brought forth the concept of aggregate score ratings.

Rating culture has further been popularised by social media liking systems with features like “likes” and “upvotes” leading to enhanced visibility of online content. Now influencers, brands, and even individuals are subjected to a continuous cycle of evaluation, where their success is often quantified through numbers.

The influence of rating culture has extended to visual media, where individuals are increasingly subjected to scrutiny based on their physical appearance, clothing choices, and lifestyles. Social media reels and interviews often capitalise on this trend, where random strangers are asked to rate someone's looks or outfit, reinforcing superficial judgment. This constant exposure to being evaluated by thousands online can have profound psychological effects, including self-esteem issues and anxiety. The harsh criticism or validation through likes and comments creates an environment where self-worth becomes dependent on public approval, further perpetuating unrealistic beauty standards.

TYPES OF RATING SYSTEMS

Product & Service Ratings: Platforms such as Amazon and Flipkart depend on customer ratings and reviews to make sales.

Entertainment & Media Ratings: Sites like Rotten Tomatoes, Metacritic, and IMDB provide ratings for films, television series, and books.

Professional Ratings: LinkedIn endorsements, employee reviews on Glassdoor, and academic citation metrics all build a professional image.

Social & Dating App Ratings: Swipes on Tinder and likes and follows on Instagram serve as the most basic form of social validation.

Workplace Performance Ratings: Most organisations have rating systems for assessing employees for evaluations, bonuses, and promotions.

EFFECTS OF RATING CULTURE

Rating culture has both positive and negative effects on society, shaping consumer behaviour, business practices, and personal well-being. On the positive side, ratings increase consumer confidence by providing critical information that helps users make informed decisions. Businesses and service providers are motivated to maintain high ratings, ensuring consistent quality. Public reviews also promote responsibility, pushing organisations, employees, and influencers to align with their goals and deliver on expectations. Additionally, rating systems reduce monopolies on information by allowing everyone to share their experiences, creating a more transparent and equal platform.



However, rating culture has significant downsides. The pressure to receive high ratings can cause social anxiety and mental health issues, as people seek validation through external approval. Many businesses manipulate ratings using fake reviews, misleading consumers. A Harvard Business School study found that 16% of Yelp reviews are fake, and a BBC investigation revealed that businesses buy positive reviews while competitors post fake negative ones. These practices undermine trust in rating systems.

Furthermore, rating culture reduces human value to mere numbers, overlooking genuine capabilities and personalities. It also reinforces bias and discrimination, as prejudices in reviews can unfairly impact marginalised communities. When ratings dictate opportunities, individuals and businesses may suffer due to factors beyond their control. While ratings provide transparency and accountability, they also introduce ethical concerns. Their impact depends on responsible implementation and safeguards against manipulation and bias.

CONCERNS SURROUNDED ETHICS AND THE INCREASING EVOLUTION OF RATING CULTURES

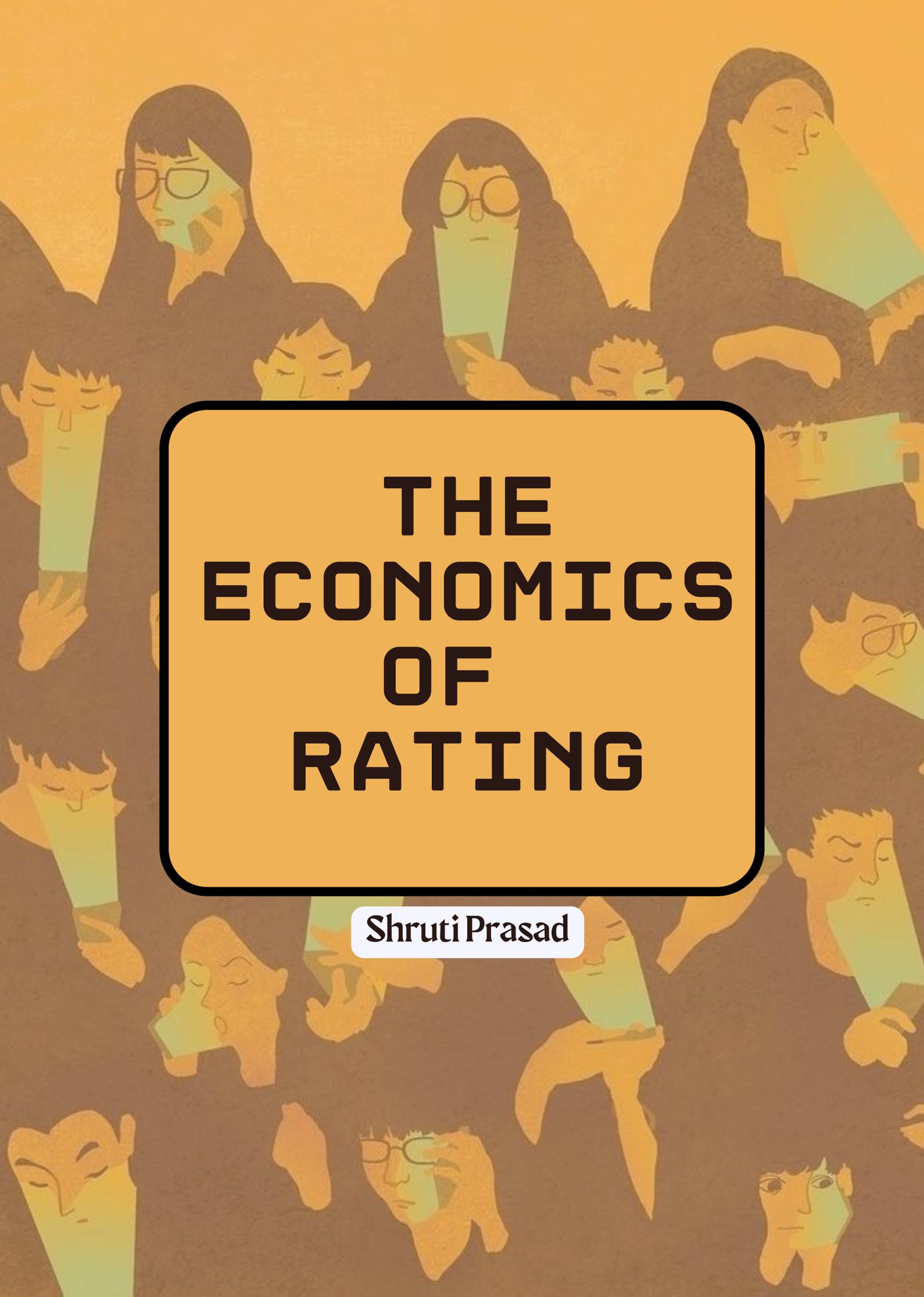
The first consideration is the use of emotionally harmful algorithms that attach a star rating to personal well-being while reviewing them. This culture also brings questions about privacy, fairness, and the emotional consequences of rating systems. Additionally, algorithms designed to showcase only high-rated content can form echo chambers, where there is no room for new ideas. On a wider scale, platforms need to deal with the issues of fake reviews, cyberbullying, and privacy concerns.

With regards to mental health, making sure that balance is integrated into rating systems is crucial. For example, incorporating soft bounds and stricter measures towards fake reviews can ensure the preservation of users' mental well-being. Consumers are more likely to choose a product with a 4.5-star rating over a 5-star rating because they perceive perfect ratings as suspicious or manipulated. A study highlights an intriguing aspect of consumer psychology—people tend to distrust perfection, associating it with manipulation or artificial inflation. This suggests that consumers are becoming more sceptical of online ratings, recognising the prevalence of fake or biased reviews. This behaviour reflects a shift towards critical thinking, where users no longer take ratings at face value, but instead, look for authenticity in product and service reviews. However, this also implies that businesses might attempt to engineer 'imperfect' but favourable ratings to appear more trustworthy. It raises questions about how companies and platforms can ensure the credibility of ratings while maintaining user trust. Additionally, this scepticism could extend to other areas, such as social media validation and professional feedback systems, influencing how individuals perceive and engage with online ratings. In addition, creating policies and campaigns against bullying and reducing neglect associated with mental health within the rating system offers the users the best approach against culture shock.

ENDING REMARKS

In my opinion, eliminating rating culture is impractical because it is continuously evolving and integrated into every platform. Nonetheless, it is irrefutable that state rating cultures require a complex level of scrutiny. This evaluation needs specialisation skills and adjustments within the digitally influenced world. As with everything, this is also an issue with both positives and negatives. Rating culture improves the level of accountability within society, but comes with the downside of dehumanising people and independence for self-validation. Adapting to these changes and assigning the appropriate measure of concern should consider the effect it has on humans and the digitalised world.



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THE ECONOMICS OF RATING

Shruti Prasad



In India, the social class of the people are also related to their caste in most cases. Even though this changes with time, it will still be years before this statement can be proven false. This article will explore how class impacts the ratings of certain products and services in India. Moreover, since caste is highly related to class, its impact on rating will also be covered.

HOW IS HIGH-CLASS RELATED TO HIGHER SOCIAL STATUS?

Firstly, social class can be understood as the socioeconomic state in which a group of people can be categorised. It is frequently determined on the basis of income, education, and social standing. Most of the time, all three of these determining factors come hand in hand. For instance, if a person is of a higher social status, they are more likely to be highly educated, which consequently secures a future of higher income for them. Therefore, higher status can be considered to be dependent on high income, which can be used to conclude that a person's class position highly impacts their social status.

HOW SOCIAL CLASS IMPACTS CONSUMER DEMAND?

Social class influences the aspirations of the customers. The reason behind this is merely their desire to attain a higher social status, irrespective of their current social standing. Consumers' ambitions to achieve a higher social status are shaped by their social class. In human philosophy, it is elegantly captured by William James: "Act as though you are, until you become." Commonly known as "fake it till you make it," this principle underscores the power of embodying desired qualities as a pathway to actualising them. The way our society is built requires everyone to be constantly chasing a higher status. There is no end to this desire. This is how the power play of the higher social class is introduced, which eventually defines the benchmark for every service and product in the world.



VALUE FOR MONEY MARKET IN INDIA IS CHANGING TO LUXURY

There is a clear divide between the caterers of value-for-money products or services and luxury products or services. The world is still latching onto having value for money today and trying not to be distracted by momentary flare. But India still has a market that might not be influenced by the higher social class due to the income disparity in the country. Nonetheless, the fact stands that the luxury market for India is increasing at a very high rate. The reason behind this is also social media, which has people hooked on certain products that are trending. And who are the ones shaping the luxury market as well as the general trend? The higher social class. The ratings of the products are shaped by the social class that controls product criticism. In the case of luxury items, it is the higher class.

CORRELATION OF HIGHER CLASS WITH TRENDS AND RATINGS

Trends are set through ratings. The higher-rated products and services get attention and become a part of the trend, while the lower-rated ones don't. There are also biases in play in these online ratings and reviews. They include Expectation Bias, Value Perception Bias, and Experience Gaps. Expectation bias occurs when people's expectations about an event or experiment influence its outcome or results. Value perception bias occurs when people's personal beliefs or perceived value of something influence how they judge or interpret information about it. Experience gaps occur when different customer groups perceive and evaluate the same product or service differently based on their expectations, needs, or financial situations. While middle-class consumers may be more tolerant of defects in high-end products, wealthier consumers frequently display expectation bias because they have higher expectations and are more likely to be critical of small annoyances. This results in an overall lower rating for luxury services due to the wealthier customers' grip on the ratings of luxury products. Because lower-income consumers evaluate products based on cost-effectiveness, value perception bias is also visible. This means that an inexpensive product that provides good value may be rated higher than an expensive one that is not worth the price. When wealthy customers praise the sophisticated features of high-end products, while consumers on a tight budget criticise the price, it creates an experience gap that also impacts ratings overall.

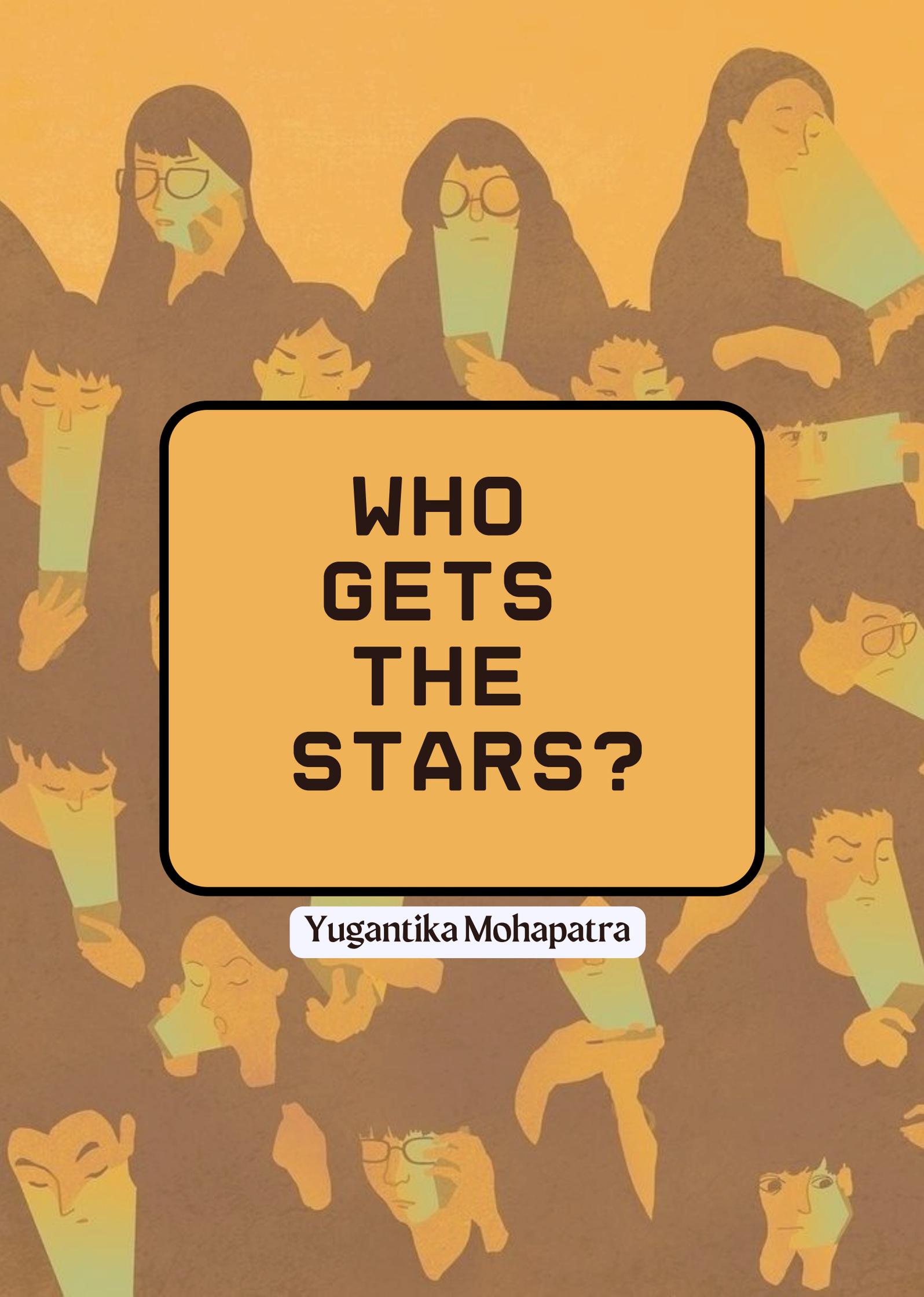
HOW DO COMPANIES REACT TO THESE DIFFERENCES?

While the higher social class might have an upper hand in the market of luxury items, the other social class people look for value in a product and rate it badly for its lack thereof. Consumer ratings, which are influenced by socioeconomic class, are used by businesses to modify prices. This is because wealthy consumers have higher expectations, and luxury brands limit availability rather than cut prices to maintain exclusivity. While some companies use dynamic pricing, which keeps prices low for consumers on a tight budget and high in affluent areas despite mixed reviews, mass-market products use affordability-focused reviews to draw in budget-conscious customers.

BOTTOM LINE

In India, social class, often intertwined with caste, significantly shapes consumer behaviour, perceptions, and ultimately, product and service ratings. Higher social classes tend to dominate the luxury market, setting trends and expectations through their critical and influential reviews. In contrast, lower-income groups prioritise value for money, resulting in stark differences in ratings based on affordability and perceived worth.

This divergence gives rise to expectation bias, value perception bias, and experience gaps, all of which impact overall consumer feedback. Businesses leverage these class-driven rating patterns to adjust pricing strategies, maintain exclusivity, or appeal to cost-sensitive segments. In essence, social class does not just affect access, but it also defines how the market is experienced, rated, and priced.

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WHO GETS THE STARS?

Yugantika Mohapatra

FOOD

The rechristening of millets, once dismissed as the “poor man’s grain”, into “shreeanna” reflects a long tradition of rebranding through cultural erasure of local heritage to satiate the neo-colonial, elite gaze. For years, millets were central to the Indian food palette, but elite, colonial, and upper caste narratives pushed them back to adapt to the dominant culture. Only recently have they seen a revival with the global resurgence of “healthy and nutritious diets”, often foregoing the traditional farmers whose livelihoods were destroyed thanks to their cultural hegemony and will now be dictated through this resurgence. The 2023 International Year of Millets by the UN signalled this shift, but we are always trying to curate our story to sit next to the foreign optics rather than being focused on our culture.

Despite the global popularity of Indian food, a Michelin-starred Indian restaurant remains rare. The Indian restaurants that flaunt the tag conform to Western-friendly tastes and aesthetics, and now even domestic discourses mimic these trends. Terms like “curry or masala” dominate the menu card vocabulary due to convenience, simultaneously erasing the multipolarity of our cultures. Authentic kitchens for tribals, Dalits and regional kitchens from Arunachal and Jharkhand are nearly invisible in metropolitan dining scenes. The dominant narrative is of amalgamation: South, North or East, each has a dominant food that becomes the poster child of the region. Sidelining its multiple cultural realities and identities, and no matter how good or bad its representation is, it has to be weighed against the “face” of food. Domestically, upper-caste North Indian vegetarianism dominates the representations of cultural purity, even though many of us ate what was available. And what was available was rarely the quintessential Indian dishes- Paneer or Butter Chicken Masala. They became iconic because they represented dominant standards of palpability, presentation and held the power to be export material.



FASHION

Food, fashion, language or media all become a critical site of cultural gatekeeping. The recent rise of the so-called “Scandinavian scarf” fits neatly into the social-media-driven revival of the trad-wife, modesty-core aesthetic. Except that the scarf in question is just a “dupatta” which carries deep cultural memories, significance, and complexity for South Asian women. It is now rebranded as a European fashion trend. What was once ridiculed as backwards and oppressive, or made us easy targets, is now elegant, chic and modest thanks to the Europeans.

For so many of us, the dupatta was a site of tension; some felt trapped in them, some resisted them, and others embraced them as an extension of their identity. And regardless of its personal significance, it was politicised. Countless women have give up wearing saris, dupattas and bindis in Western countries out of the fear of being stared at, ridiculed or even attacked. Meanwhile, these symbols that once marginalised us are repackaged as trendy. The Coachella-era “boho” craze exemplified this perfectly, where bindis and jhumkas were devoid of their cultural context. What is seen as beautiful is clearly not the object but who wears it. The same sari or scarf that invites judgment on a South Asian woman is seen as graceful or avant-garde on a European runway, showing how dominant narratives dictate not only what gets rated but who gets to be seen as tasteful, modern, or stylish.

CINEMA



The Telegraph review of *Slumdog Millionaire* declared, “Danny Boyle’s latest film *Slumdog Millionaire* is a wonderful tribute to Mumbai and its people”. The film became a global symbol of Indian life, fitting seamlessly into the Western gaze: a poverty-stricken, corrupt chaos from which salvation lies in Western validation. This image dominates international perceptions of India, not by coincidence, but through embedded neo-colonial mechanisms of recognition. Cultural products that highlight India's struggles often become the most visible, while stories of resilience, joy, or complexity remain underrepresented. Though these darker portrayals are real, the attention they receive reinforces a singular, limiting narrative. We are rarely allowed to escape the moulds crafted by our perceived failures.

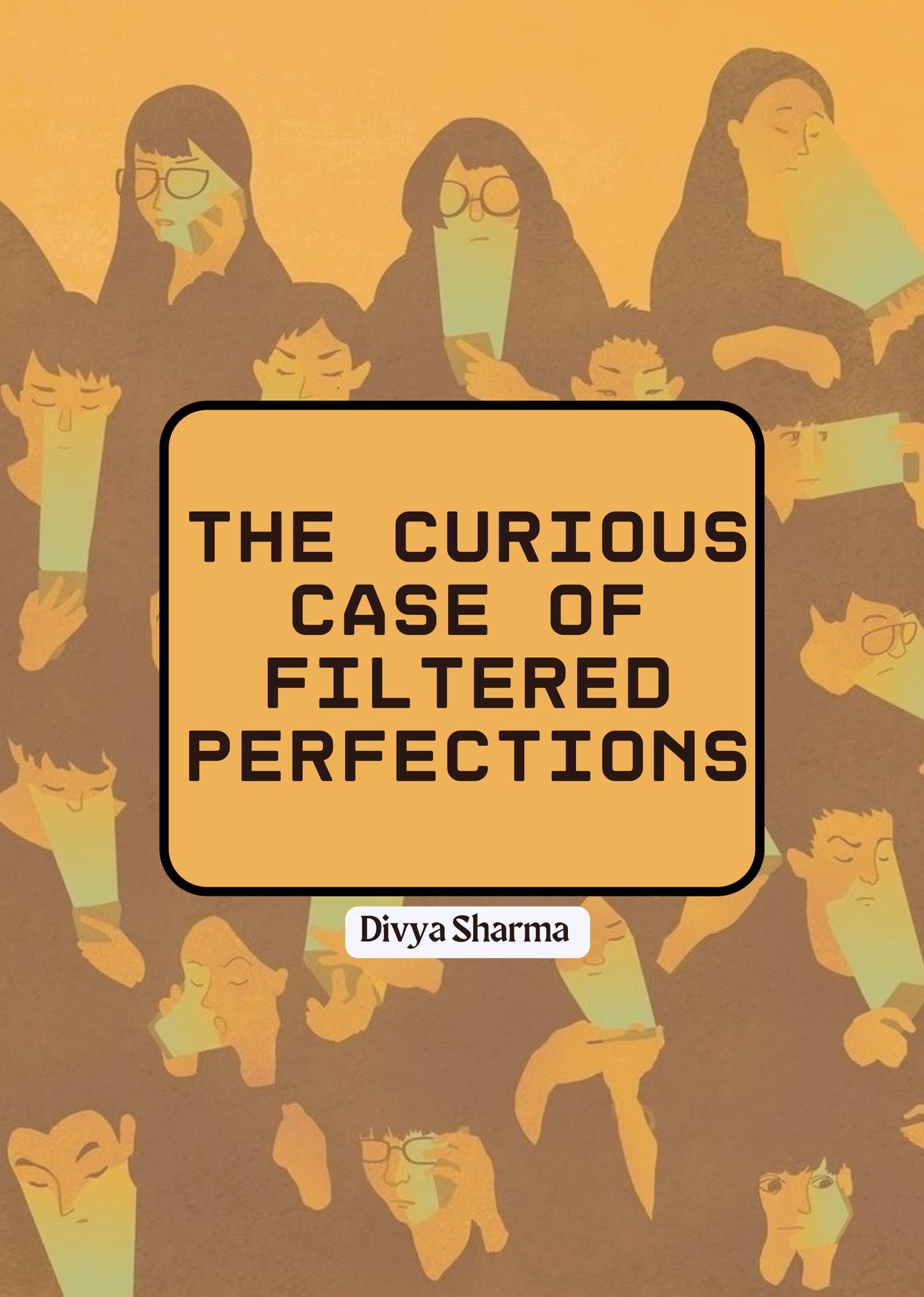
The Oscars function as a benchmark of cinematic excellence, setting the tone for what is remembered and revered. Yet their approach to diversity continues to falter. In 2024, when trans rights were under national scrutiny, the Academy highlighted *Emilia Pérez*, a film about trans lives, without engaging with its cultural and representational gaps, especially in the portrayal of Latin American trans identities.

Similarly, African American actresses are often awarded for roles as maids or slaves, and Indian narratives that earn acclaim tend to highlight poverty or systemic failure. This restricts the stories celebrated globally, especially when access remains unequal. Until recently, Oscar voters weren't required to watch all nominated films, allowing bias to shape decisions.

When *Laapataa Ladies* was India's Oscar entry, criticism erupted about our representation. Films like *Slumdog Millionaire*, *Santosh*, and *Lion* all depict India's poverty and receive recognition. Domestic recognition follows similar hierarchies. Hindi-language cinema dominates, sidelining regional traditions. Films in Malayalam, Assamese, or Tamil need international praise to be appreciated at home. Caste and class also shape whose stories are heard. Dalit or working-class films like *Fandry* face barriers. Meanwhile, hyper-masculine films like *Animal* win awards while feminist films like *Lipstick Under My Burkha* are censored.

CONCLUSION

Recognition reflects power: who watches, who votes, who decides. Until we rethink that, representation remains partial, filtered through someone else's lens. In a world increasingly shaped by algorithms, we must accept that our knowledge systems are already being curated by powers beyond our reach. We begin to see the world through a mirage, one that is carefully constructed, yet feels natural. This mirage reflects both sides of the coin: stories that pander to dominant gazes, and stories that pretend to rebel while still being curated for palatability. Pushing for representation without questioning the frameworks of recognition dilutes the very diversity we claim to uphold. The neo-colonial lens still dominates our storytelling, and the narratives chosen to fit this lens are rarely those of our most marginalised communities. Recognition becomes a performance, not justice. Until we disrupt who gets to define value, we will remain trapped in a loop where visibility is selective, and representation remains a filtered, fractured echo of the truth.

The background of the cover is a stylized illustration of a diverse crowd of people. Many individuals are depicted holding and looking at their smartphones. The color palette is warm, featuring shades of orange, yellow, and brown. The figures are rendered in a flat, graphic style with simple lines and solid colors. The overall composition suggests a theme of digital connectivity and social media.

THE CURIOUS CASE OF FILTERED PERFECTIONS

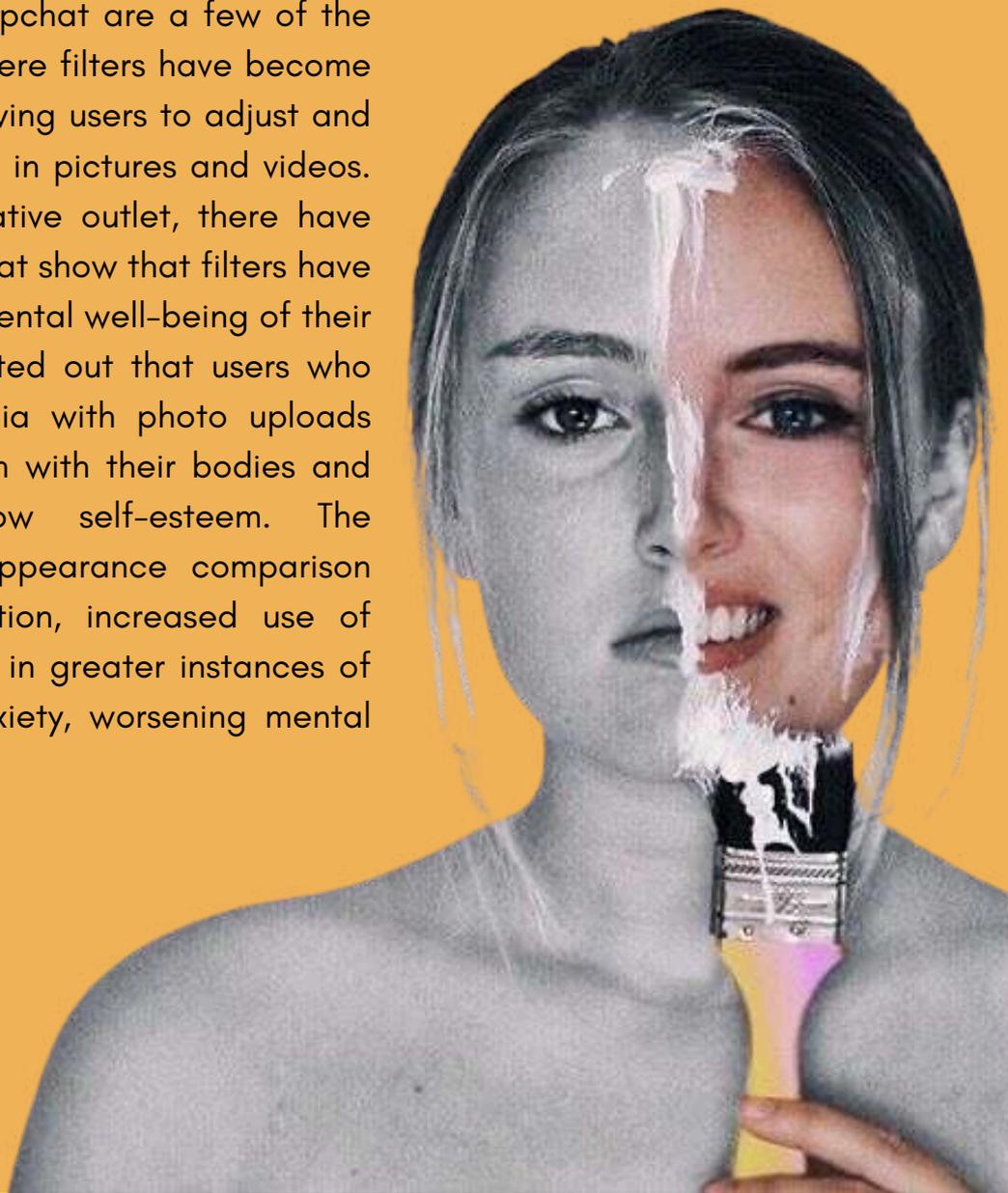
Divya Sharma

INTRODUCTION

Photo filters are an inseparable part of social media. From harmless ones that change the contrast and saturation of your selfies, to the more concerning ones that remove any texture from human faces, filters are one of the most popular social media features. Filters have shifted self-perception, influenced digital content, and even set new societal standards. This article will delve deeper into the notion of “rating culture” and how filters impact validation online in comparison to self-worth.

THE USE OF FILTER IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat are a few of the social media platforms where filters have become a part of the culture, allowing users to adjust and change their appearances in pictures and videos. Despite serving as a creative outlet, there have been studies conducted that show that filters have negative impacts on the mental well-being of their users. Research also pointed out that users who are active on social-media with photo uploads had a greater dissociation with their bodies and suffered from very low self-esteem. The phenomenon of social appearance comparison has led to this. In addition, increased use of beauty filters has resulted in greater instances of depression and social anxiety, worsening mental health with every use.



FILTERS AND THEIR UNREALISTIC PORTRAYAL OF BEAUTY

Filters implant an unrealistic standard that the majority of the population is unable to achieve. Younger women, in particular, are subject to strong peer pressure in the form of body dissatisfaction and body dysmorphia. Many studies have suggested that young adults who lack confidence, particularly girls, employ filters to enhance their self-esteem. Instead of encouraging them to embrace their authentic selves, filters provide faux comfort to their users while feeding off their insecurities.

THE GENDERED APPROACH TO FILTERS

The usage of filters in social media apps has a glaring gender bias that endorses Westernised beauty standards. For women, these tend to brighten skin tones, smoothen facial features, and even narrow jawlines to align more with Eurocentric beauty standards. Doing so helps perpetuate colourism, a form of discrimination that favours lighter skin that exists in many societies. This bias is present in men too, with chiselled jaws and lighter eye colours - once again, Eurocentric standards take precedence.

In addition, the phenomenon of “before and after” transition videos, where before is represented through filters that darken the person’s natural skin tone, highlight their dark circles and other culturally sanctioned ugly features while after is signified by filters that lighten skin, remove all blemishes, and features that are typically associated with lower caste-class people. These videos further enable the deep-rooted issues of racism and casteism. Such visual stories are problematic to the core, demonising dark and glorifying light, and thus reinforcing skin-phobia. South Asia is notorious for having such biases mixed with caste discrimination, where lower castes are marked with dark skin and more dominant ones as having fair skin, thus deepening social inequalities on the whole.

FILTERS ROLE IN DEEFAKE DEVELOPMENT

Increase in Realism

Deepfake technology usually involves the swapping or modification of particular facial elements. Shallow Fakes that use excessive face smoothing, colour correction or texture alteration filters can utilise these apps to improve the outcome of deepfake algorithms. These bits of footage are also used to mask less realistic segments of the deepfake, allowing for a more believable output. These apps with features like age progression and facial expression shifting use filter-related deepfake creation. These advanced techniques reveal innovative methods of face alteration which were previously unknown.

Facial Features alteration

Several social media filters manipulate specific facial features by, for example, changing their shape or size. This genre of altering features adheres to a freeform version of digital deepface, enabling not a video but a photo to be transformed conceptually.

Aside from their individual purposes, filters are renowned for their effect on digital media alteration. The emergence of deepfake technology, which employs artificial intelligence to manufacture incredibly realistic yet fictitious documents, raises moral issues. Deepfakes have been employed for the dissemination of false information, which erodes public confidence and seeks to manipulate social and political dialogue. The capacity to modify content with such ease raises concerns over the credibility of the information provided, thus, intense solutions to this issue in the form of verification tools are urgent.

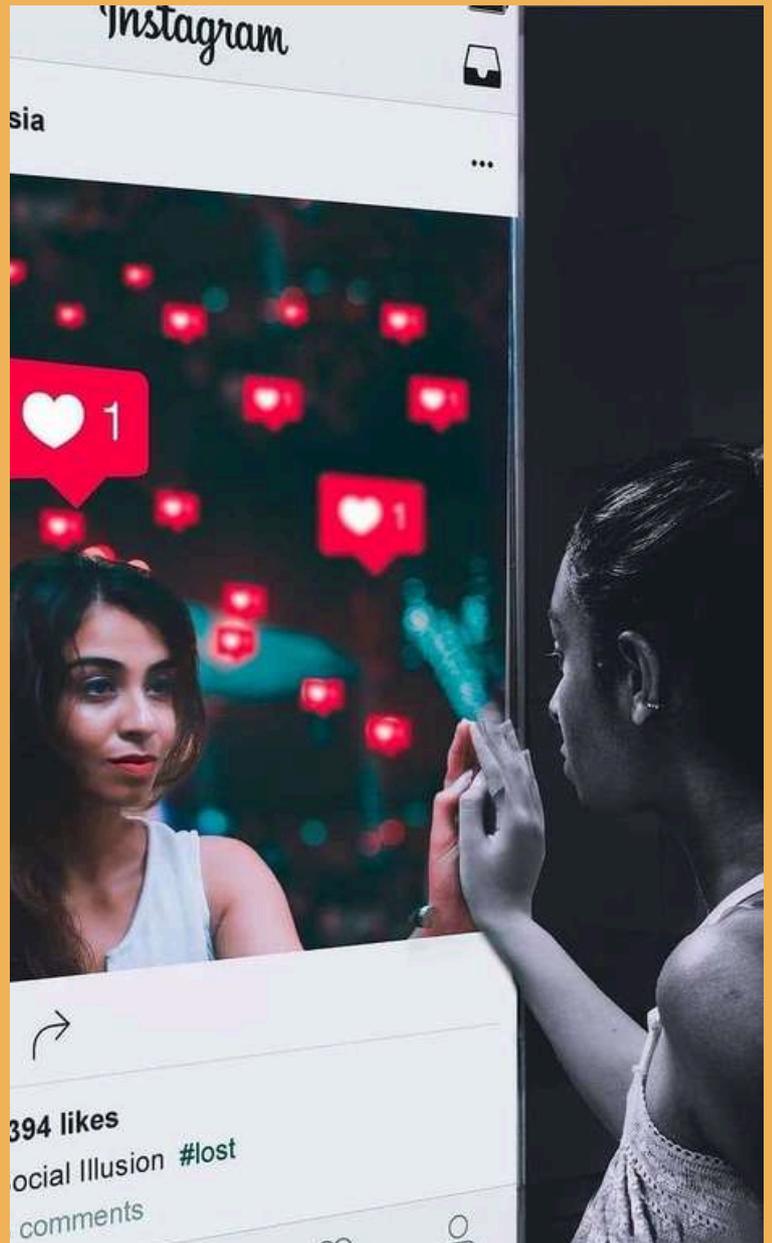
THE RATING CULTURE AND VERIFICATION USING FILTERS

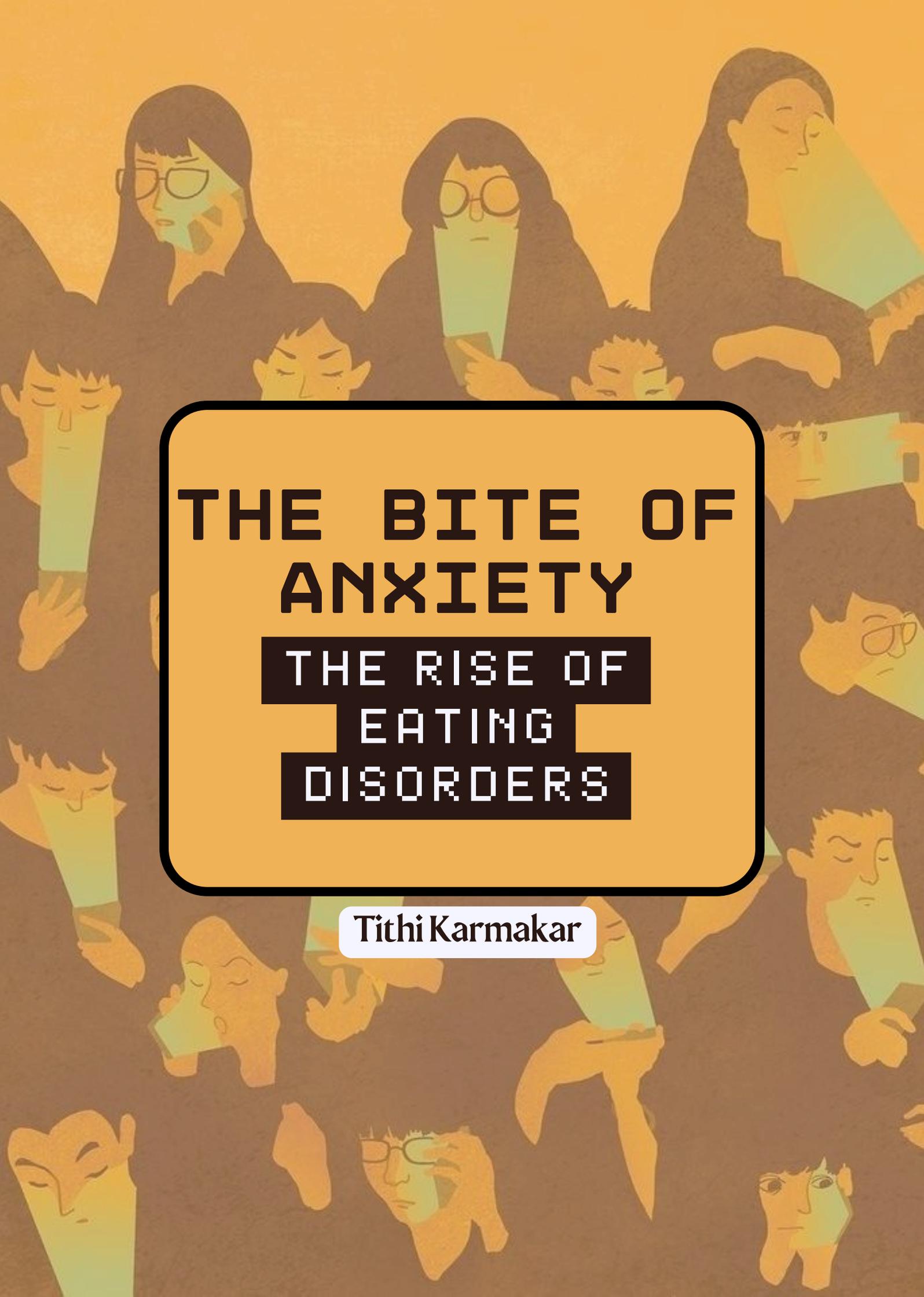
Within the “rating culture” social validation is often unveiled in the form of likes, comments, and shares. Filters can enhance this problem by allowing people to unfetter an extraordinary ideal self with the expectation of receiving more positive feedback.

Such dependencies on filtered images for validation can result in a warped view of oneself, along with the pressures of maintaining the unrealistic online persona which is expected of the individual. Studies show that when people get little or no response from others online, feelings of depression and stress follow, while the opposite response enhances feelings of social cohesion.

CONCLUSION

Though filters enable creative expression in the users, they affect the individual’s views about themselves, the societal standards of beauty, and the authenticity of uploaded content. As the rating culture progressively spreads and updates, it also becomes more important to promote media literacy, filter policies, and digital content creation policies while protecting spaces where users are encouraged to post real and unedited pictures. People need to overcome the issue of judging others based on their physical characteristics and question the roots of their biases while unlearning systemic issues like racism, casteism, classism, etc. Let filters filter out our internalised colonialism and patriarchy, not the facial features that make us who we are- human.





THE BITE OF ANXIETY

THE RISE OF EATING DISORDERS

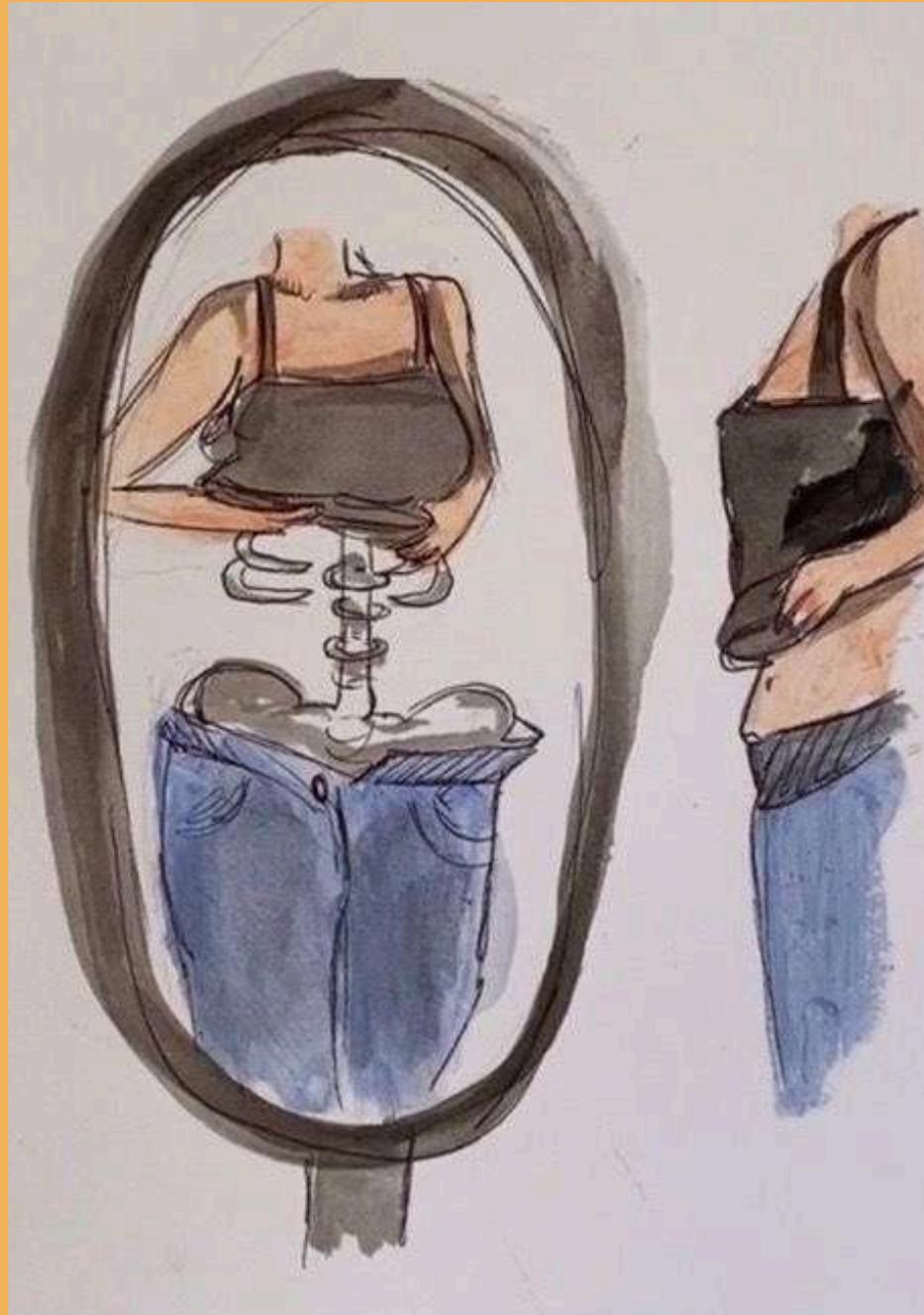
Tithi Karmakar

The increase in anxiety levels and the incidence of eating disorders are being recognised as major concerns in public health globally and in India, especially. This article attempts to analyse the correlation between anxiety and eating disorders, with a focus on their prevalence, risks, and the Indian culture.

ESTABLISHING THE CONNECTION

Anxiety disorders involve persistent, overwhelming feelings of fear or worry that can deeply affect how a person behaves, even influencing their eating habits. For example, research has found a strong link between anxiety and eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder.

Anorexia nervosa is characterised by extreme food restriction, an intense fear of gaining weight, and a distorted body image. Bulimia nervosa involves cycles of binge eating followed by compensatory behaviours like vomiting, excessive exercise, or fasting. Binge eating disorder, on the other hand, is marked by recurrent episodes of eating large amounts of food in a short period, often accompanied by feelings of guilt and loss of control, but without purging behaviours.



In fact, about two out of every three people struggling with an eating disorder also deal with an anxiety disorder, with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) being especially common among those with anorexia or bulimia.

WHY DOES ANXIETY AFFECT THE WAY WE EAT?

Anxiety can disrupt eating in opposite ways- some binge eat for comfort or as a coping mechanism, while others lose their appetite or avoid food. Stress can suppress hunger, making eating feel overwhelming, while restriction can worsen anxiety, creating a vicious cycle. This temporary sense of control or relief can ease their anxious feelings for a short while, but it's often followed by guilt and even more anxiety, creating a cycle that makes both the anxiety and the disordered eating worse, with inadequate nutrition further heightening stress and emotional instability.

WHY ARE EATING DISORDERS OFTEN OVERLOOKED IN INDIA?

In India, awareness and understanding of eating disorders have traditionally been low. However, recent studies suggest that these issues are on the

rise. For instance, a survey from 2015 reported that roughly 2-2.4% of Indians suffer from eating disorders, with women being particularly vulnerable.

A recent systematic review found that stress and body image issues can really increase the risk of eating disorders in India. For instance, 67% of psychiatrists in Bangalore have come across at least one case of an eating disorder in a year, and about 26% of adolescent girls report disturbed eating attitudes. Clearly, there is an urgent need for intervention strategies that speak directly to the Indian experience.

WHO IS AT MOST RISK?

Several socio-cultural factors contribute to the rising incidence of eating disorders in India:

Cultural Pressures: The spread of Eurocentric beauty standards has increased concerns about appearance, especially among Indian women.

Social Media Influence: Constant exposure to idealised images online can leave many feeling inadequate and anxious.

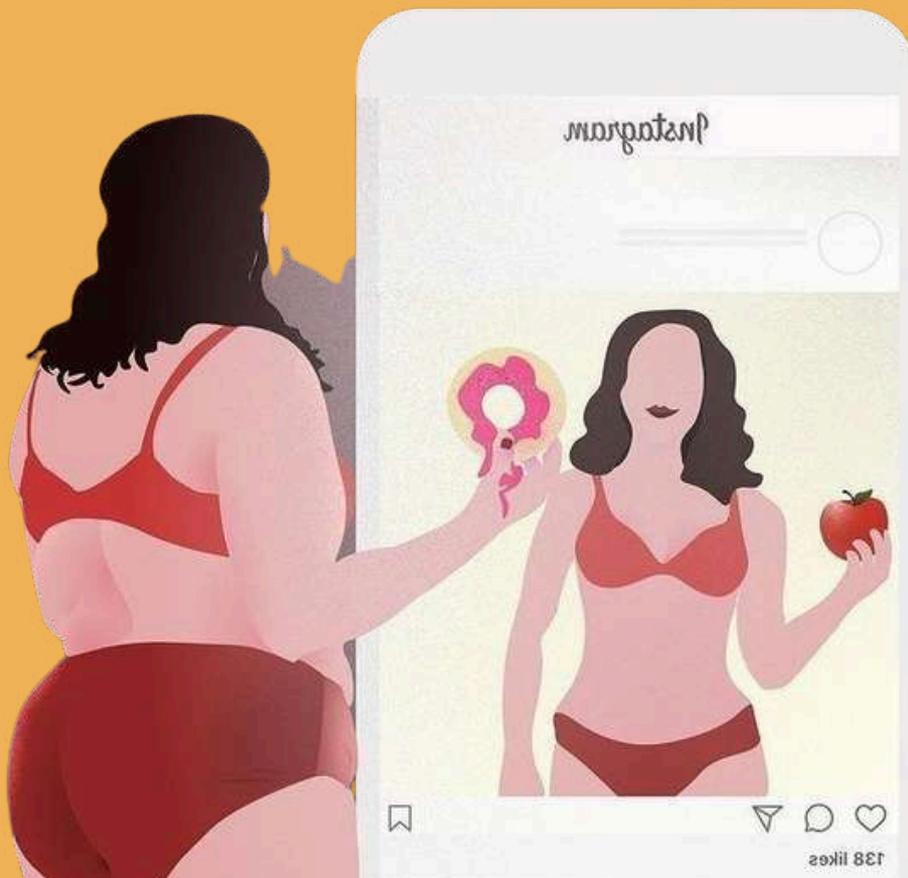
Psychosocial Stressors: High academic pressures and societal expectations contribute to stress, which can manifest as anxiety and subsequently lead to disordered eating behaviours.

Recent research among medical students indicates that about 13% are at high risk for developing eating problems, affecting both men and women nearly equally. Factors like peer pressure, excessive exercise, and the use of laxatives or diet medications also play a role. All these factors combined make eating disorders a complex and especially pressing issue. In India, since anxiety and eating disorders often go hand in hand, it can be concluded that if we can help someone manage their anxiety, it might also ease their struggles with eating disorders.

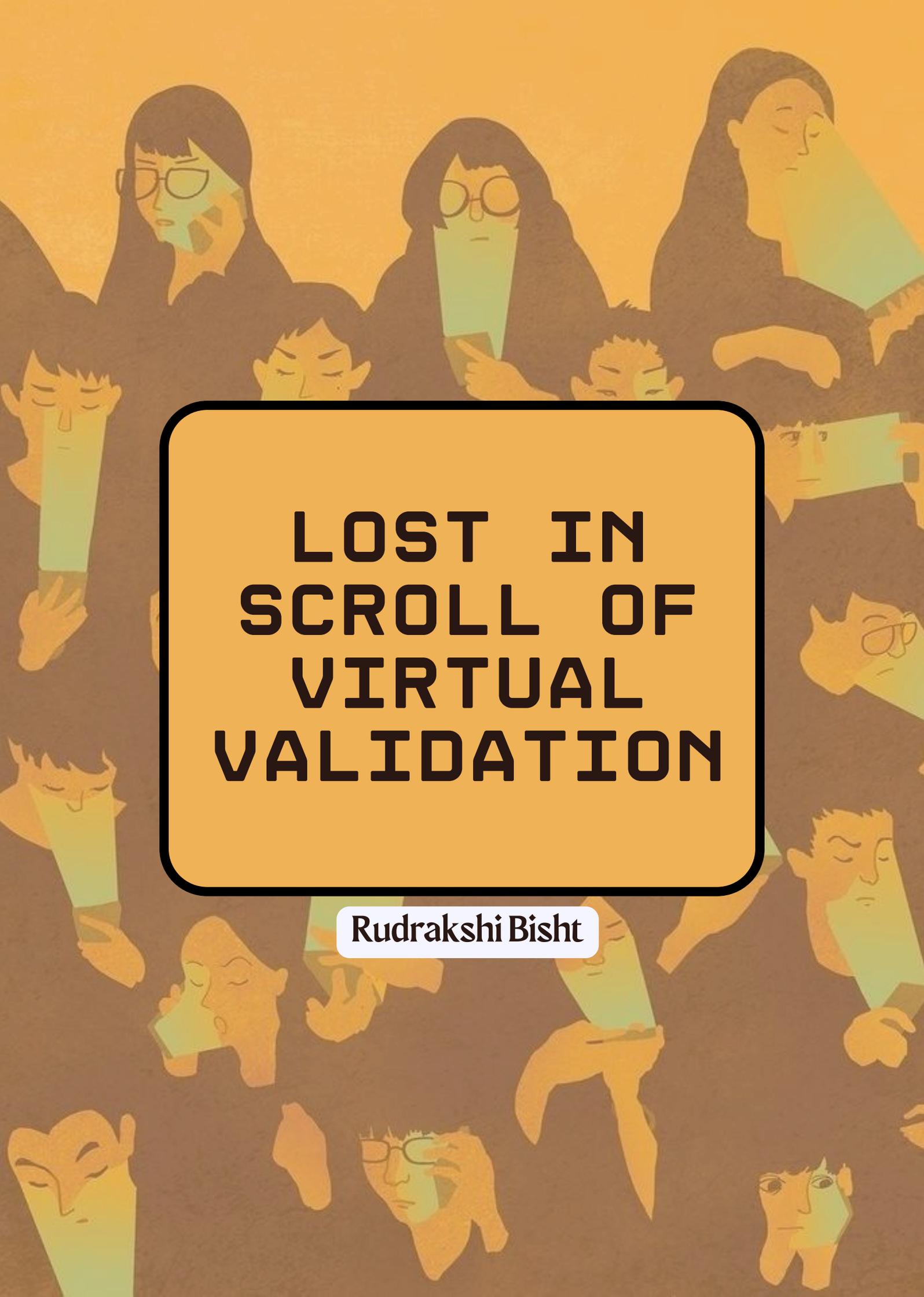
When we understand how anxiety and disordered eating are connected, it really shifts our approach to treatment. For instance, therapies that work to lower anxiety can also help reduce unhealthy eating habits. Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) has been especially promising because it equips people with practical tools to cope with stress in healthier ways, steering them away from using food as a crutch.

THE WAY FORWARD

The rise in anxiety and eating disorders is a growing public health concern in India, fuelled by cultural pressures, societal expectations, and a lack of awareness. These struggles don't exist in isolation- anxiety can fuel disordered eating, just as disordered eating can deepen anxiety, trapping individuals in an unending cycle.



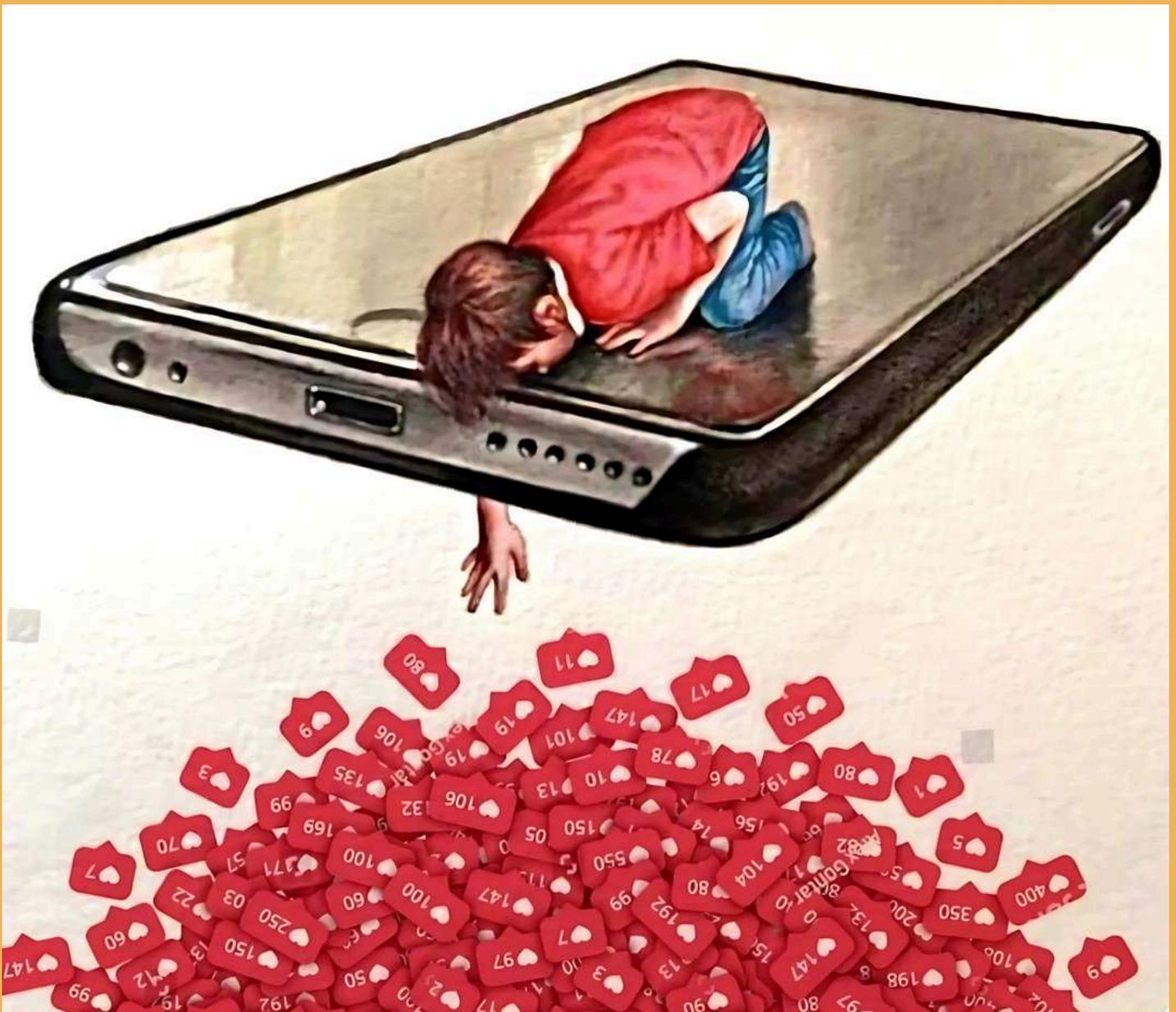
True progress lies in understanding this connection and creating interventions that don't just treat symptoms, but address the root causes. By cultivating a culture of empathy, open conversations, and accessible mental health support, we can help individuals rebuild their relationship with food, their bodies, and ultimately, themselves.

The background of the entire page is a stylized illustration of a diverse crowd of people. Each person is depicted from the chest up, holding a smartphone. The color palette is monochromatic, using various shades of brown, tan, and beige. The people have different hairstyles, some wear glasses, and their expressions are neutral or slightly weary, suggesting a sense of being overwhelmed or lost in a digital world. The central text is contained within a white rounded rectangle with a black border.

LOST IN SCROLL OF VIRTUAL VALIDATION

Rudrakshi Bisht

The importance of self-esteem for an individual manifests itself in how individuals form the overall opinion of themselves. Moreover, it guides their view of themselves, affecting their sense of judgement of their strengths and limitations. Self-esteem is essential for individuals to understand and have a perception of 'self', so that they can grow and become their best version. What does the sense of having high self-esteem feel like? To have high self-esteem is to frame your mind in a manner that allows an individual to celebrate their strengths, face challenges, and overcome weaknesses. High self-esteem allows individuals to work on themselves, enabling their minds to grow. This further leads to high satisfaction with life and one's decisions. Self-esteem is directly related to confidence, and it either enhances or deteriorates one's faith in oneself.





Living in a world infected with social media, there is an increasing encouragement for the advancement of rating culture. The rating culture is the practice of assigning any numerical or general value, like scores, or stars (as we commonly see in platforms like Google Maps to rate a venue, etc) to show pleasure or displeasure over a subject. To rate a platform like a restaurant or a place to hang out seems necessary to get opinions, and it also proves to be helpful in terms of saving time, energy, and money.

However, anything in excess is problematic. The rating culture does not limit itself to rating a place, but rather to rating every minuscule activity with regards to the outfit worn, an art piece made, etc. Assessing its impact on people on an individual basis, rating culture has proven to be toxic and beyond just a feedback mechanism. This portion of the article discusses the negative impact of what is now being promoted as the rating culture. It focuses on how it is actually mind-warping people (especially the youth) and is heavily contributing to lower self-esteem in many.





At an individual level, we are now swayed and coerced to rate our experiences, to rate every activity we engage with in a day, to the point that it has become very casual to ask anyone to go back to rephrase their experience and then rate it.

In an interview with *The Guardian*, Joel Golby comments on the impact of review culture, saying, “Since humans are compelled to review, I blindly bought many books just based on the reviews of thousands of people that were sort of rated out of five. From movies to gyms to holidays, we all love handing out a star rating.” Such statements reveal that we have started to not only rate our experiences but also rely on the ratings of others to formulate an opinion of something. In psychology, there are specific terms for such behaviour, famously known as Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Narcissistic Vulnerability and the Imposter Syndrome.

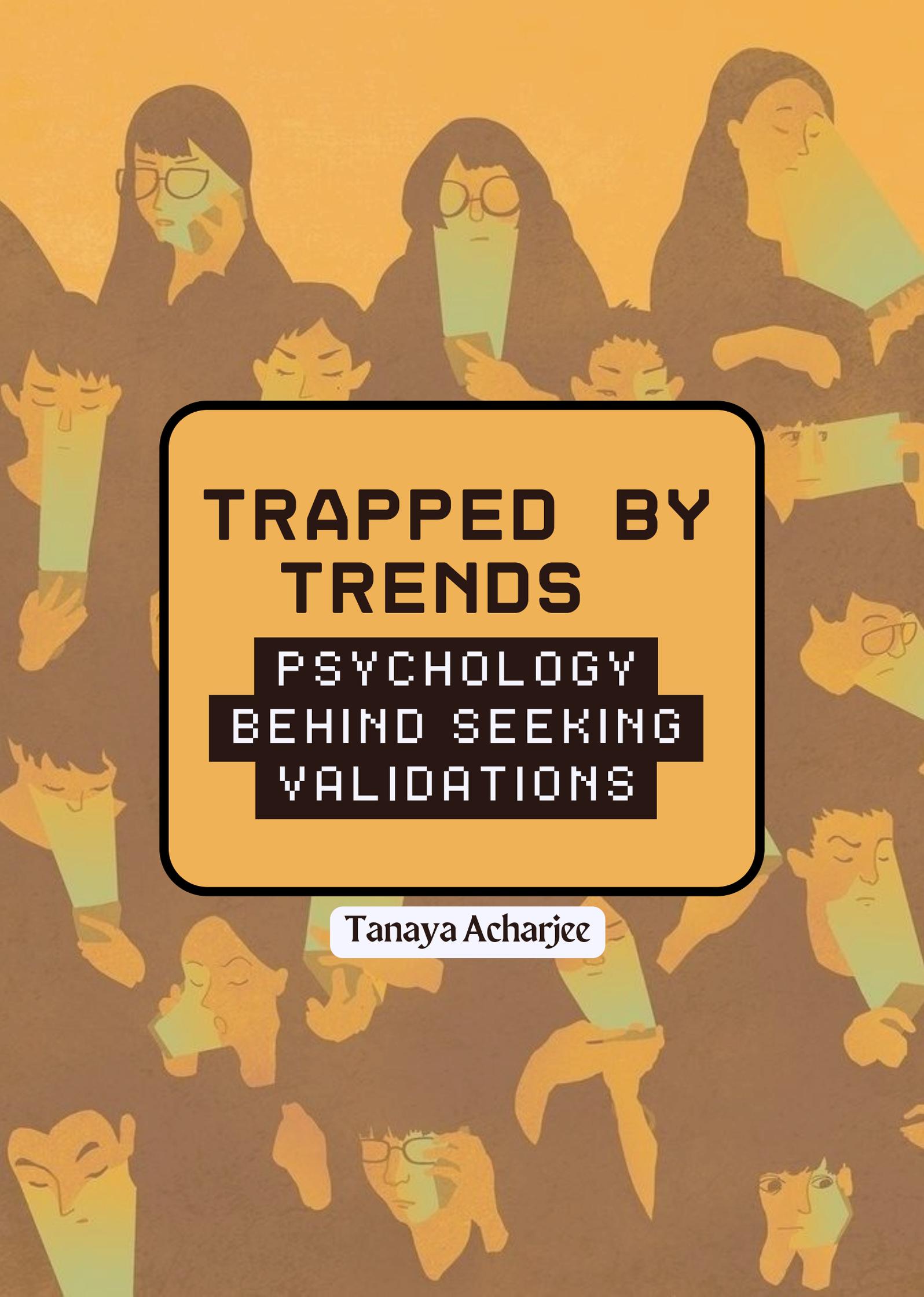
Individuals now search for validation online only to conform to the norms or standards set by society, influencers or even by the general audience. Thus, they fake themselves to get an appreciation for the image that they display to the outer world. The validation gathered from such platforms boosts the confidence of an individual for a short period, but when the curve of this sudden surge in confidence goes downhill, the person seeks more appraisal and therefore, gets stuck in a loop.

In this process, the real feedback that is actually needed to nourish the growth of an individual is missed. The role of the offline/real-world community is neglected by the rating culture, and because the individuals are grossly driven by the online world, it becomes difficult for them to accept the realities of the world, and they are not prepared to face the adverse side of it.

This leads to isolation and a dissolving sense of confronting realities. An increased urge gets formulated, which pushes people to seek constant validation by relying on likes, comments and shares to boost self-esteem. This can be termed as feedback sensitivity and creates anxiety and manipulation to blindly follow any sparking trend. Furthermore, external validation over self-worth creates unrealistic standards for oneself. Self-worth depreciates, and a high dependence on external approval to feel worthy takes over. The already lowered self-esteem is thus more weakened by this ambush.



As the positive bearers of the future, we play a crucial role in society. We are fundamental stakeholders in shaping its progress. It is vital for us to understand both the harms and benefits of online platforms. Seeking validation from external sources can be harmful. It often makes us forget our own individual journey. We may underestimate our potential in the process. Ignoring our growth journey can lead to self-doubt. Prioritising others well-being over our authenticity discourages our true selves, leading to detrimental, long-lasting impacts on our emotional well-being. To create a better future, we need to hold our individuality and growth with intention, not distortion.

The background of the entire image is a stylized illustration of a diverse crowd of people. Each person is depicted from the chest up, holding a smartphone. The color palette is monochromatic, using various shades of brown, tan, and beige. The people have different hairstyles, some wear glasses, and their expressions are neutral or slightly weary, suggesting a sense of being overwhelmed or 'trapped' by the constant presence of technology. The overall style is flat and graphic.

TRAPPED BY TRENDS

PSYCHOLOGY
BEHIND SEEKING
VALIDATIONS

Tanaya Acharjee

In an age where validation is often sought through likes, comments and ratings, people's perception of them is increasingly shaped by external approval. India, with its deep-rooted societal expectations and rapidly evolving digital landscape, has witnessed a growing obsession with looking or behaving in a manner deemed 'desirable' by prevailing cultural standards. The need for validation is deeply rooted in social and psychological factors, shaping self-esteem, lifestyle choices, and interactions. Teenagers, in particular, are highly influenced by social media trends and peer pressure, often altering their behaviour to fit in. The constant exposure to idealised online personas distorts self-perception, making external approval feel essential. Beyond adolescence, societal expectations and comparison culture further reinforce this cycle, pushing individuals to seek validation in both personal and professional spaces. Over time, this pursuit of approval manipulates self-identity, making many believe that their worth is defined by others rather than their true selves.



FAIRNESS CREAM AND BEAUTY PRODUCTS

The long-standing preference for fair skin in India has been exacerbated by marketing strategies that categorise beauty. Brands like Fair & Lovely (now Glow & Lovely) have thrived on the societal notion that lighter skin equates to attractiveness and success. While there has been pushback against colourism, fairness creams are still widely used. A report found that the skin-lightening industry in India was valued at over 500 million, reflecting the ongoing demand for products catering to a socially constructed beauty ideal. Many advertisements subtly imply that fairer skin leads to better job opportunities and social acceptance.

The widespread promotion of fairness creams and beauty products reinforces colourism and unrealistic beauty standards. Statistics indicate a high consumer demand for these products, driven by societal preference for lighter skin tones. Such advertisements not only perpetuate insecurities but also create a culture where self-worth is linked to appearance. This leads to long-term consequences, including lower self-esteem, discriminatory biases, and increased pressure to conform to unattainable ideals. The normalisation of these products in mainstream media further solidifies harmful stereotypes, influencing generations to equate fairness with success and desirability.

PLAYING 'NAIVE' AS A NEW COOL

Instagram trends have popularised the act of playing naive, where women pretend to be clueless about basic things to appear cute or relatable. This behaviour is deeply tied to validation culture, where individuals are often reduced to marketable traits that cater to audience expectations. Naivety, in this case, is not just a personal act but a response to a system that rewards perceived helplessness over confidence. The focus should not be on those adopting this trend but on the larger societal framework that encourages and normalises such portrayals. Reels often show influencers struggling with simple technology, mispronouncing words, or acting surprised at common knowledge.

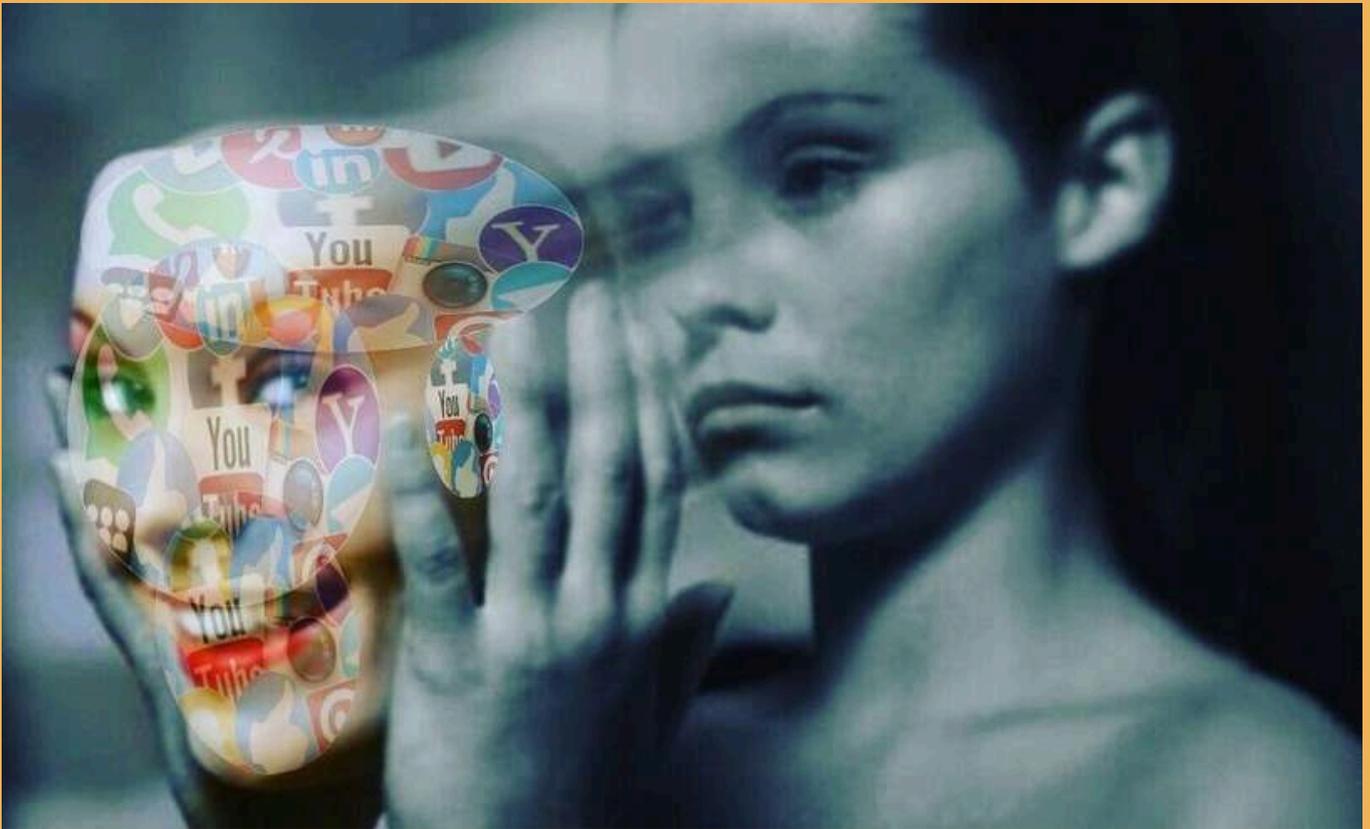
This performance garners engagement, as social media rewards exaggerated innocence with likes and comments. The trend also allows creators to deflect criticism by claiming ignorance. However, it reinforces outdated gender stereotypes, making confidence and intelligence seem less desirable in women. As more influencers adopt this persona, it shapes unrealistic expectations, pressuring young girls to mimic artificial cluelessness for social validation.

THE ILLUSION OF LUXURY: HOW FASHION INFLUENCERS SHAPE TEENAGERS' SHOPPING HABITS

Fashion influencers on Instagram frequently showcase lavish shopping hauls, flaunting luxury brands and endorsing fast fashion. Many exaggerate their purchases or collaborate with brands, creating the illusion of an endlessly stylish wardrobe. Teenagers, eager to fit into Instagram's trend-driven culture, blindly follow these influencers, chasing expensive fashion without realising the hidden realities-exploitative labour, unsustainable production, and manipulative marketing that fuel overconsumption. Whether it's a Gucci handbag or Nike sneakers, brand names have become social status symbols. In an attempt to keep up, many young individuals overstretch their budgets or resort to fast fashion alternatives to mimic influencer aesthetics.

Social media significantly influences teenagers' purchasing behaviours, often leading them to buy luxury brands to gain online validation. For instance, a study highlighted that ten-year-old Naiya White from Colorado follows a detailed skincare routine using high-end products, influenced by social media trends and 'skin-influencers' in an attempt to look youthful. Prioritising appearance over financial security, some even go into debt or pressure their parents into buying luxury goods. The constant need to maintain a curated online persona fuels impulsive shopping, creating a cycle where looking fashionable takes precedence over financial responsibility or ethical awareness. This illusion of effortless luxury distorts young consumers' perception of fashion's true cost.

PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS AND SOCIAL IMPACTS



The psychological consequences of rating culture are profound. The constant pursuit of social validation leads to increased anxiety, low self-worth, and body image issues. Social media platforms create an environment where individuals feel the need to curate a version of themselves that aligns with popular trends, often at the cost of their mental well-being. This fosters a cycle of comparison, where people measure their success and attractiveness against unrealistic online portrayals. A study found that a significant percentage of Indian youths experience heightened stress and self-doubt when their online engagement falls below expectations. This pressure to conform can result in identity crises and dissatisfaction, particularly among young people still developing their self-concept. Consequently, authenticity often takes a backseat to digital approval. On a societal level, the normalisation of filtered beauty standards and curated lifestyles establishes unrealistic benchmarks for success. The compulsion to adhere to such ideals influences career choices, relationships, and social interactions, reinforcing a culture where self-worth is gauged by external validation rather than intrinsic confidence. Over time, this erosion of individuality and creativity leads people to prioritise conformity over self-expression.

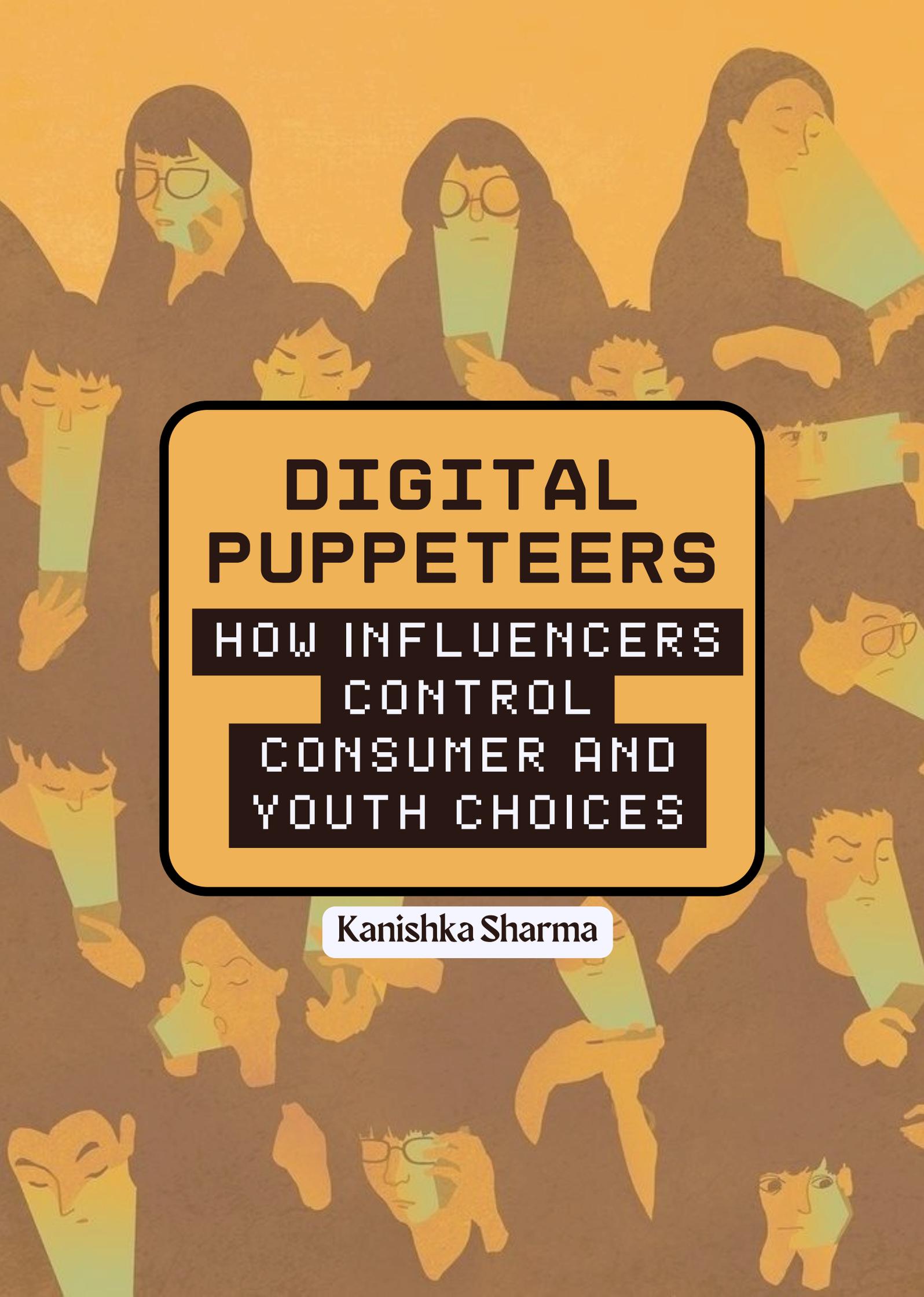


THE OBSESSION WITH TRENDS: SEARCHING FOR MEANING EVERYWHERE

In the age of viral content, people tend to search for trends in every possible context, even when they are unrelated. Social media creates an environment where once a concept gains popularity, users start seeing it everywhere, often forcing connections that don't exist. A recent example is the rise of dark comedy, where audiences, obsessed with the trend, attempt to label any sarcastic or controversial statement as dark humour regardless of its intent. This compulsive need to categorise content under trending themes reflects how social validation and digital culture shape perception, often blurring the line between relevance and forced association.

THE NEED FOR SELF ACCEPTANCE

While seeking validation is a natural human tendency, excessive dependence on societal approval can lead to anxiety, low self-esteem, and dissatisfaction. Social media and beauty standards constantly reinforce unrealistic ideals, making individuals feel pressured to conform. However, initiatives like the "body positivity" movement promote healthy body images and self-acceptance, encouraging individuals to embrace and celebrate their bodies regardless of shape, size and appearance. In India, the culture of rating and external validation significantly impacts self-perception, shaping behaviours and appearances. While external approval may offer temporary satisfaction, fostering self-acceptance is the most impactful way to mitigate the negative effects of social pressure.

The background of the cover is a stylized illustration of a diverse group of people, including men and women of various ages and ethnicities. They are all depicted in a similar artistic style, using flat colors and simple lines. Many of the individuals are holding and looking at their smartphones, suggesting a focus on digital technology and its impact on society. The overall color palette is warm, dominated by shades of orange, yellow, and brown.

DIGITAL PUPPETEERS

HOW INFLUENCERS
CONTROL
CONSUMER AND
YOUTH CHOICES

Kanishka Sharma

In today's digital age, social media influencers have become modern-day celebrities, shaping opinions, trends and even lifestyles. From fashion to fitness, from financial advice to personal growth, their impact is undeniable. But beneath the glamorous filters and meticulously curated posts lies a darker reality- one where influencers exploit the vulnerabilities of young, impressionable minds for their personal gain.

THE ILLUSION OF PERFECTION

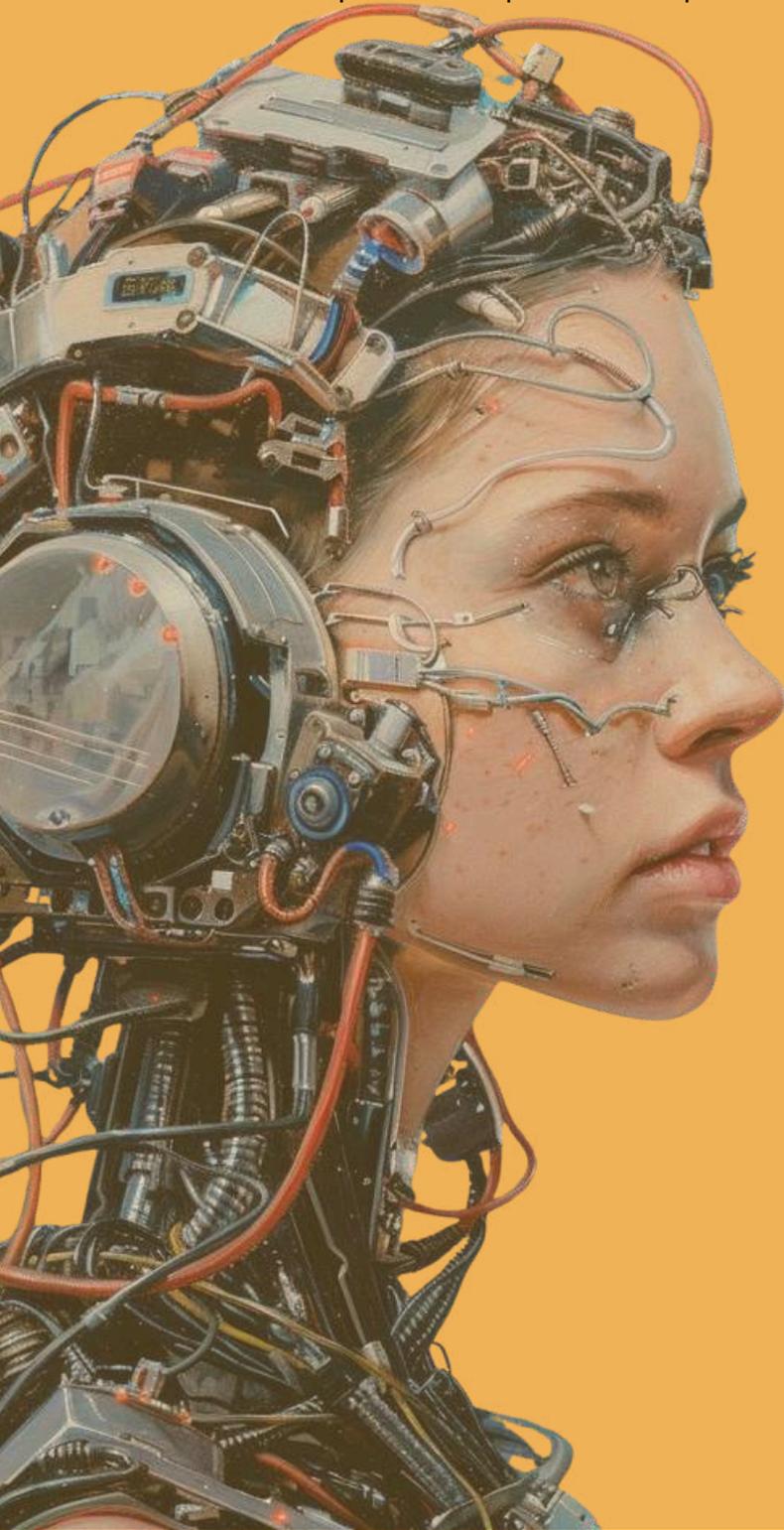
Scrolling through Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube, one might feel as though everyone else is living a dream life- exotic vacations, flawless skin, luxurious lifestyles, etc. This illusion of perfection is carefully crafted to engage young audiences, making them believe that they, too, can achieve this ideal existence if they follow certain trends, buy certain products, or adopt certain behaviours. But what is often hidden from view is the heavy editing, staged content, and sometimes, outright deception behind these seemingly effortless lives.

Social media platforms thrive on engagement, and influencers know exactly how to keep their audience hooked. The constant bombardment of polished images and perfect moments reinforcing these ideals can be overwhelming, pushing many towards excessive consumerism, unhealthy lifestyle choices, or even mental health struggles.



MANIPULATION THROUGH MARKETING

One of the biggest concerns is how influencers push products and services onto their followers. Many young people fail to recognise that their favourite content creators are often paid, sometimes exorbitantly, to promote certain brands. Whether it's a new skincare routine, a weight-loss tea, or an investment scheme, influencers package these promotions as genuine recommendations, blurring the lines between personal opinion and paid advertisement.



The fear of missing out or FOMO plays a significant role in this manipulation, as young audiences feel pressured to keep up with trends, believing that owning the latest product or adopting a promoted lifestyle is the key to social acceptance. In this process, teenagers and young adults, eager to emulate their idols, end up spending money on products that may be ineffective or even harmful.

The fear of missing out or FOMO plays a significant role in this manipulation, as young audiences feel pressured to keep up with trends, believing that owning the latest product or adopting a promoted lifestyle is the key to social acceptance. In this process, teenagers and young adults, eager to emulate their idols, end up spending money on products that may be ineffective or even harmful.

Beyond product endorsements, influencers sometimes promote lifestyles that are neither practical nor attainable for the average person. The idea of financial independence, luxury travel, or overnight success is often exaggerated,

leading young audiences to believe that they are failing if they do not achieve the same results. What many don't realise is that much of this luxury is not self-funded—many influencers wear designer clothes that are rented or gifted, stay in lavish hotels through brand collaborations, and dine at exclusive cafes or restaurants that invite them for promotional purposes. They are not spending their own money, yet their curated content makes it appear as if they are effortlessly affording these luxuries. This deceptive narrative fuels unrealistic aspirations, leading young followers to make poor financial decisions, chase unattainable lifestyles, and feel immense pressure to succeed in ways that may not even be real.

UNREALISTIC BEAUTY AND LIFESTYLE STANDARDS

Influencers set unrealistic beauty and lifestyle standards, leaving young minds feeling inadequate and dissatisfied with their own lives. With photo-editing apps and cosmetic procedures at their disposal, many influencers create an unattainable image of perfection, leading their followers down a dangerous path of self-doubt, insecurity, and in some cases, mental health struggles. The pursuit of these unrealistic ideals leads to eating disorders, anxiety, and depression among teenagers who feel pressured to look or live a certain way.

The rise of cosmetic procedures among influencers further fuels this toxic culture. From lip fillers to drastic body transformations, young people are constantly exposed to impossible beauty ideals. The normalisation of these enhancements, coupled with the glorification of "before-and-after" transformations, can distort self-image and encourage unhealthy behaviours.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND AWARENESS

While not all influencers exploit their audience, it's crucial to cultivate media literacy among young people. They must learn to question what they see online, differentiate between genuine content and paid promotions, and understand the manipulative tactics used in influencer marketing. Parents, educators, as well as social media platforms must take responsibility for fostering awareness and promoting ethical content creation.

While educating kids is important, fostering a culture of honesty and transparency is even more crucial. Education is a privilege, but honesty isn't. Influencers must be held accountable for their content, and social media platforms should enforce stricter transparency guidelines. Brands, too, must adopt ethical marketing to ensure authenticity. By promoting honesty, we can create a digital space that informs rather than deceives.

CONCLUSION

Influencers wield an undeniable power over their followers, but with great power comes great responsibility—something many fail to acknowledge. Young minds must be encouraged to think critically, question the authenticity of online content, and prioritise their own well-being over social media validation. Only then can we create a digital space that empowers rather than exploits.

The rise of influencer culture is not inherently negative, but it demands scrutiny. The key lies in awareness, self-regulation, and most importantly, in empowering young individuals to see beyond the filters and facades. Real life is far richer, deeper, and more meaningful than any perfectly edited social media post could ever portray.

By fostering a culture of critical thinking and self-awareness, we can ensure that social-media remains a tool for inspiration rather than manipulation. Young individuals deserve to engage with content that uplifts and educates, rather than deceives and exploits.

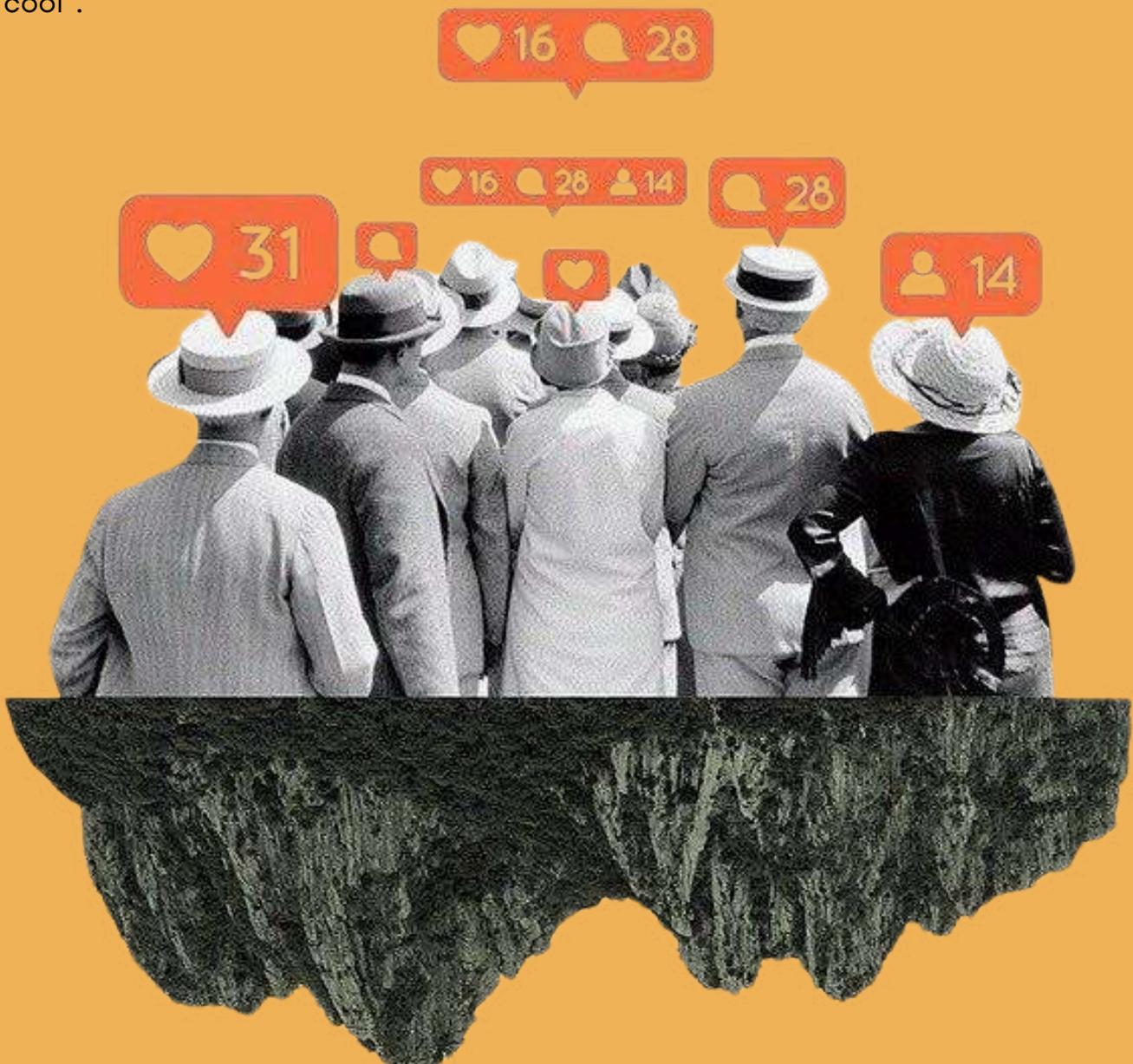
The background of the entire page is a stylized illustration of a diverse crowd of people. The figures are rendered in a flat, graphic style with a color palette of muted greens, yellows, and oranges. Many of the individuals are holding and looking at their smartphones, suggesting a focus on digital technology and social media trends. The overall composition is dense and layered, with people of various ages and ethnicities visible.

THE GOLDEN CAGE OF TRENDS

Agamyra Chandra

Influencers today don't sell products; they sell a sense of belonging. For children and teens trying to navigate the turbulent years of adolescence, fitting in feels like a full-time job. And in today's digital world, influencers are the gatekeepers of what's trendy, desirable, and socially acceptable.

At the heart of influencer culture is a simple yet powerful psychological force: social proof, the tendency to take on the behaviours, beliefs, or choices of others, especially in uncertain situations, as a form of validation. Adolescents instinctively look to others for cues on how to dress, talk, and behave. The social comparison theory says that people measure and evaluate themselves based on the people around them. And in the age of social media, this process has been amplified to an extreme, where influencers don't just set trends, they dictate what it means to be "cool".



For kids and teens, social acceptance isn't just about personal preferences; it is about acceptance. Research suggests that during adolescence, self-worth is more often than not tied to extrinsic approval. The more an influencer presents a product as a status symbol, the more young audiences see it as a ticket to social inclusion. Because for them, the chaos of crowds is much better than the silence of exclusion. You see, nowadays it's no longer just about liking a product; it is about using it as a means to fit in.

Influencers have mastered the art of persuasion, making advertising feel less like a marketing gimmick and more like a personal recommendation, that too by your friendly neighbourhood "popular" girl, boy or anyone else.

A beauty creator won't just promote a makeup brand; they'll apply it casually in a "Get Ready With Me" video, making it feel essential to achieving their look. A gamer won't just review a headset; they'll wear it in every stream, making it seem like a must-have for serious players. These tactics blur the line between genuine passion and paid endorsement, making young audiences more likely to buy in, literally.

A 2019 study in *Frontiers in Psychology* showed that 70% of teenagers now trust influencers more than traditional celebrities. Why? Because influencers feel relatable, accessible, and real- even when they're not. As social media researcher Crystal Abidin explains, "Influencers thrive on the illusion of intimacy; their followers feel like friends rather than consumers". This parasocial connection, a one-sided bond where followers feel personally invested in influencers, makes their product recommendations far more persuasive than a scripted ad ever could.





The engine behind every trend is FOMO, ie. The Fear of Missing Out, which isn't just a passing feeling, but rather a powerful and very real psychological tool that influencers use to push engagement. Exclusive discount codes, limited-edition drops, and viral trends create an urgency that makes teens feel like they have to participate in these or risk being left out, and the speed with which all others replicate these trends online does not help the feeling of being irrelevant. And for many, social exclusion isn't just inconvenient—it's devastating.

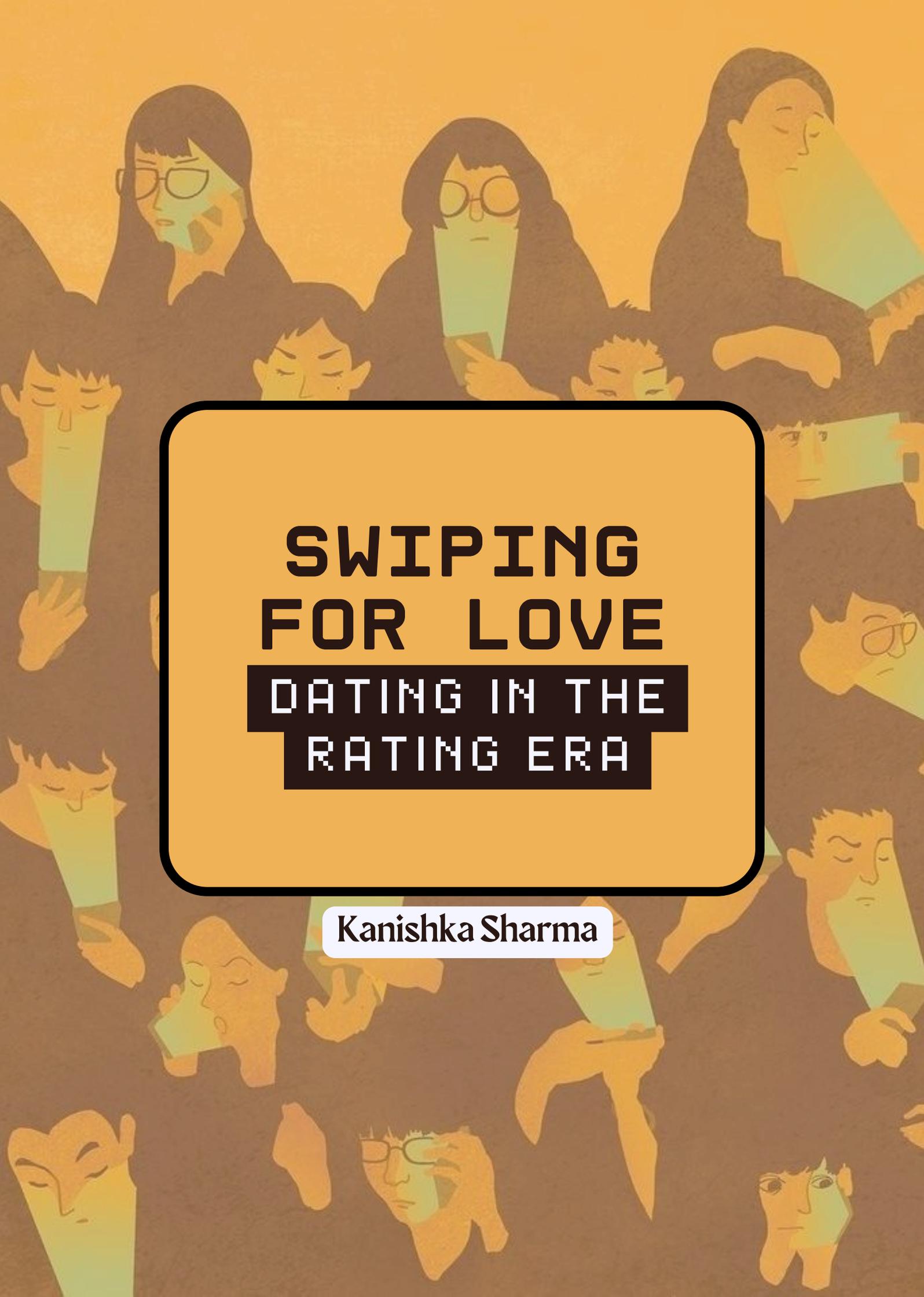
While influencers are entertaining, their impact isn't always harmless. The constant exposure to curated, idealised and more often than not, inauthentic lifestyles does lead to unrealistic expectations. For teens still figuring out who they are, the message often becomes: your worth is measured by the brands you wear, the gadgets you own, and the trends you follow. The approval they receive for aligning with these standards, through likes, comments, and social validation, drives the belief further that such behaviour is essential for acceptance and self-worth. Studies have linked excessive social media exposure to higher levels of anxiety, dissatisfaction, and financial stress among adolescents. But it's not all negative. Many influencers use their platforms to raise awareness, support social causes, and create communities based on shared interests rather than materialism. The challenge is distinguishing between genuine, true content and carefully crafted, hidden marketing.

Even with advertising regulations, many influencers do not clearly disclose paid partnerships, making it almost impossible for younger audiences to differentiate between authentic recommendations and strategic persuasion. A study in *Current Psychology* found that when influencer ads are not labelled explicitly, teens are far less likely to recognise that they're being marketed to.

In India, the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) has issued guidelines requiring influencers to disclose paid partnerships through clear labels and hashtags like #ad, #sponsored, or #collab. However, enforcement for this remains a challenge, and disclaimers are often hidden in winding captions or overlooked by young audiences.

As social media evolves, so do the ways influencers define what it means to belong. For kids and teens, fitting in comes with a price tag—attached to the latest sneaker drop, foundation, multivitamin or viral gadget. Social acceptance has become something you can purchase, packaged neatly in exclusive releases and influencer-approved must-haves. Trends will shift, influencers will change, but the need to feel valued will always be there, and in this pursuit of value, we must question—are young people shaping their identities, or is the market shaping it for them? The answer, perhaps, lies not in rejecting the market altogether, but in reclaiming agency, where the young choose to engage not just as consumers, but as conscious creators of self.



The background of the cover is a stylized illustration of a diverse crowd of people. Many individuals are depicted holding and looking at their smartphones, suggesting a focus on digital technology and social media. The color palette is warm, consisting of various shades of orange, yellow, and brown. The people are rendered in a simplified, graphic style with flat colors and no shading.

SWIPING FOR LOVE

DATING IN THE RATING ERA

Kanishka Sharma



If we had been looking for our 'ideal match' in the early 2000s, we would have been waiting for a dreamy Bollywood-like chance encounter in a cafe, college fest, marketplace or a party. Or we could have been serving tea and samosas to our 'potential in-laws' in the living room while stealing glances with our future partner. However, we are in 2025, and gone are the days of family members or mutual friends setting couples up. A simple date with dinner and a movie has been replaced by fake 'candid' profile pictures, quirky and witty bios, and millisecond decisions made with the swipe of a finger.

This evolution of digital dating has got urban millennials and Gen Z-ers embracing dating apps like Tinder, Bumble, or Hinge. This shift is also noticeable through Bollywood movies transforming from old romances like Dil waale Dulhania le Jaayenge and Vivaah to new-age love stories like Indoo ki Jawani, Yogi and Jaya, and Loveyappa.



The modern landscape of love functions at the node of technology and human connections. Such engaging digital innovations not only laud modern technology but also provide new avenues to the youth to explore love, intimacy and relationships, often in stark contrast with the traditional norms.

BETWEEN 0 TO 10: WHAT IS MY RATING?

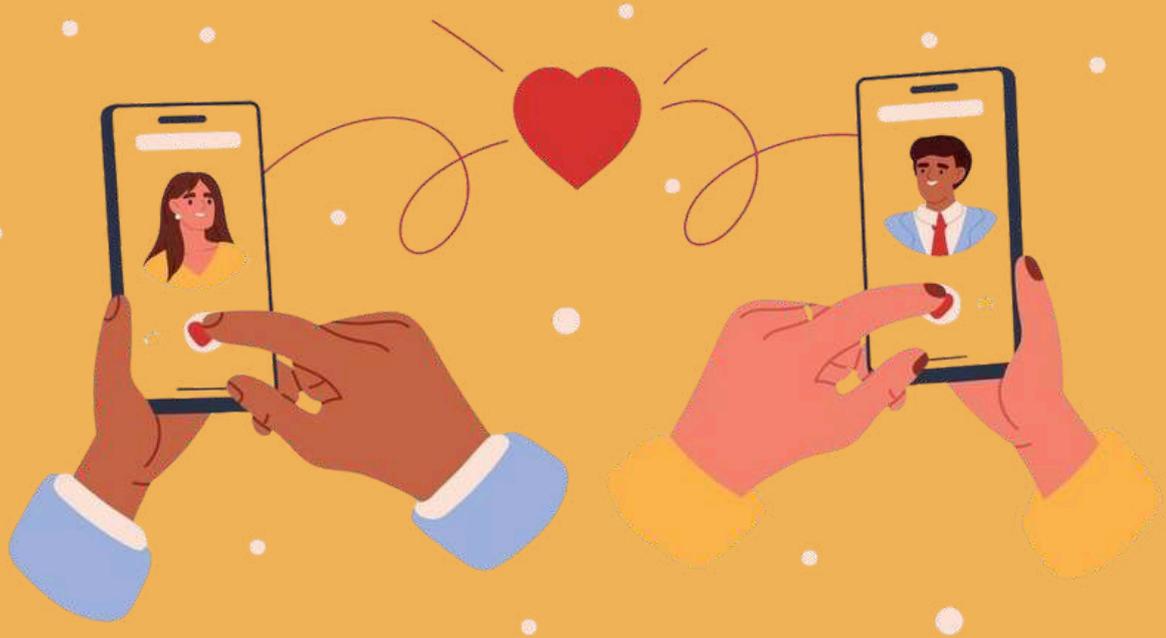
Much like a vegetable market, where we select (swipe right) or reject (swipe left) a vegetable by looking at it and evaluating its shape, size and colour, one can choose a 'potential partner' on a dating app. This revolution in the social landscape of romantic relationships has also brought into light what can be termed the 'rating era'. This is marked by the quick classification of individuals as desirable or undesirable through a swipe, based on limited and superficial information about the individual. This culture of instant gratification, being ingrained into modern dating, overlooks the value of deeper and genuine connections.



Rating, by its literal meaning, is a quantitative assessment of things. One can rate the food at a restaurant or a new Bollywood masala movie, but to rate human appearances and what they portray themselves to be, underlines a complex psychological and social attribute of judging a book by its cover. An individual is deeper than their profile, they have their personalities, journeys and lives that are conveniently overlooked by the rating algorithm of a dating app.

The rating algorithm creates an obsession to constantly evaluate one's physical appearance, the number of matches on the app, and the attractiveness of the profile. This hampers the self-esteem of an individual. According to a study by the Norwegian University, dating app users not only experience lower levels of self-worth

battle body dysmorphia more than others. This tendency of promoting shallow standards of attractiveness by dating apps eventually blinds the individual from what truly matters in a romantic relationship.



PERFORMANCE PRESSURE: SAVING YOURSELF FROM BEING GHOSTED

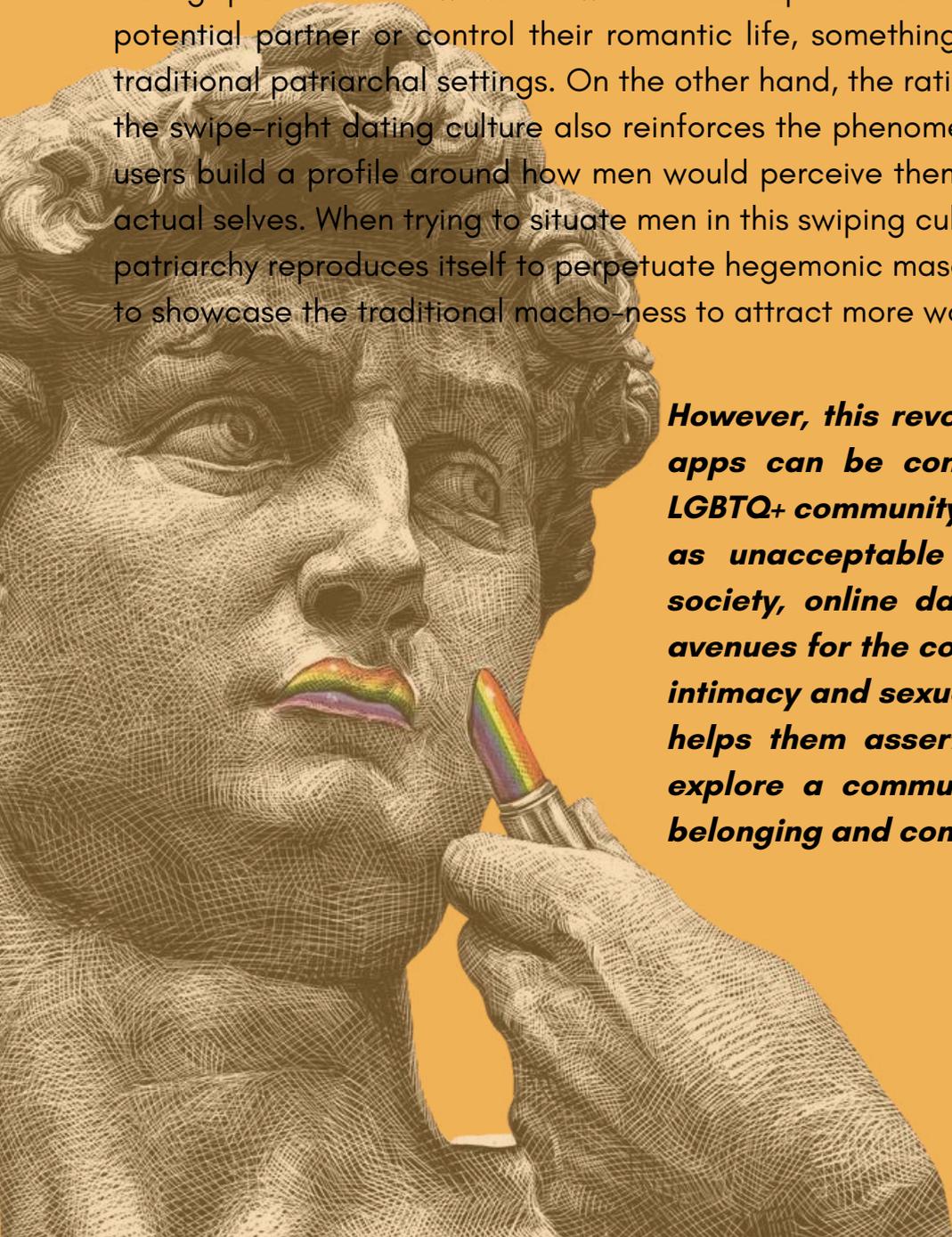
With so many options constantly popping up on our screens, swipe after swipe, one also develops the fear of missing out on someone better, and thus entraps oneself into the toxic cycle of swiping, matching, and ghosting. Research by the University of Michigan shows that about 50% of dating app users have experienced ghosting- the phenomenon where one person abruptly stops all communication. This practice not only causes emotional distress but also instils unaccountability between potential matches as it allows easy accessibility to evade a relationship without ever 'talking it out'.

Moreover, the persistent hope of accessing someone new and better has created a culture of disposable relationships, as one doesn't find it worthy enough to be deeply invested in a relationship that requires work. Thus, this reinforces the rating culture, as the individuals then become commodities to be consumed and discarded.

PERFORMANCE PRESSURE: SAVING YOURSELF FROM BEING GHOSTED

Though the aspects related to online dating are as endless as the number of profiles one can swipe, a critical analysis of the same cannot be comprehensive without taking gender into account.

As with the new feature of a few dating apps, to only allows women to make the first move, the phrase 'women first' is taking a new turn in this contemporary context. The dating platforms allow some women to experience the freedom to choose a potential partner or control their romantic life, something that has been missing in traditional patriarchal settings. On the other hand, the rating culture ingrained within the swipe-right dating culture also reinforces the phenomenon of the 'male gaze' as users build a profile around how men would perceive them, rather than sharing their actual selves. When trying to situate men in this swiping culture, one also notices how patriarchy reproduces itself to perpetuate hegemonic masculinity. Men are expected to showcase the traditional macho-ness to attract more women.

A detailed engraving of a classical male bust, likely representing a philosopher or leader. The bust is shown in profile, facing right. A hand is visible, applying a vibrant rainbow-colored lipstick to the lips of the bust. The background is a solid yellow color.

However, this revolution of dating through apps can be considered a boon to the LGBTQ+ community. Traditionally perceived as unacceptable and ostracised within society, online dating platforms open up avenues for the community to explore love, intimacy and sexuality safely. This not only helps them assert their identity but also explore a community to feel a sense of belonging and companionship.

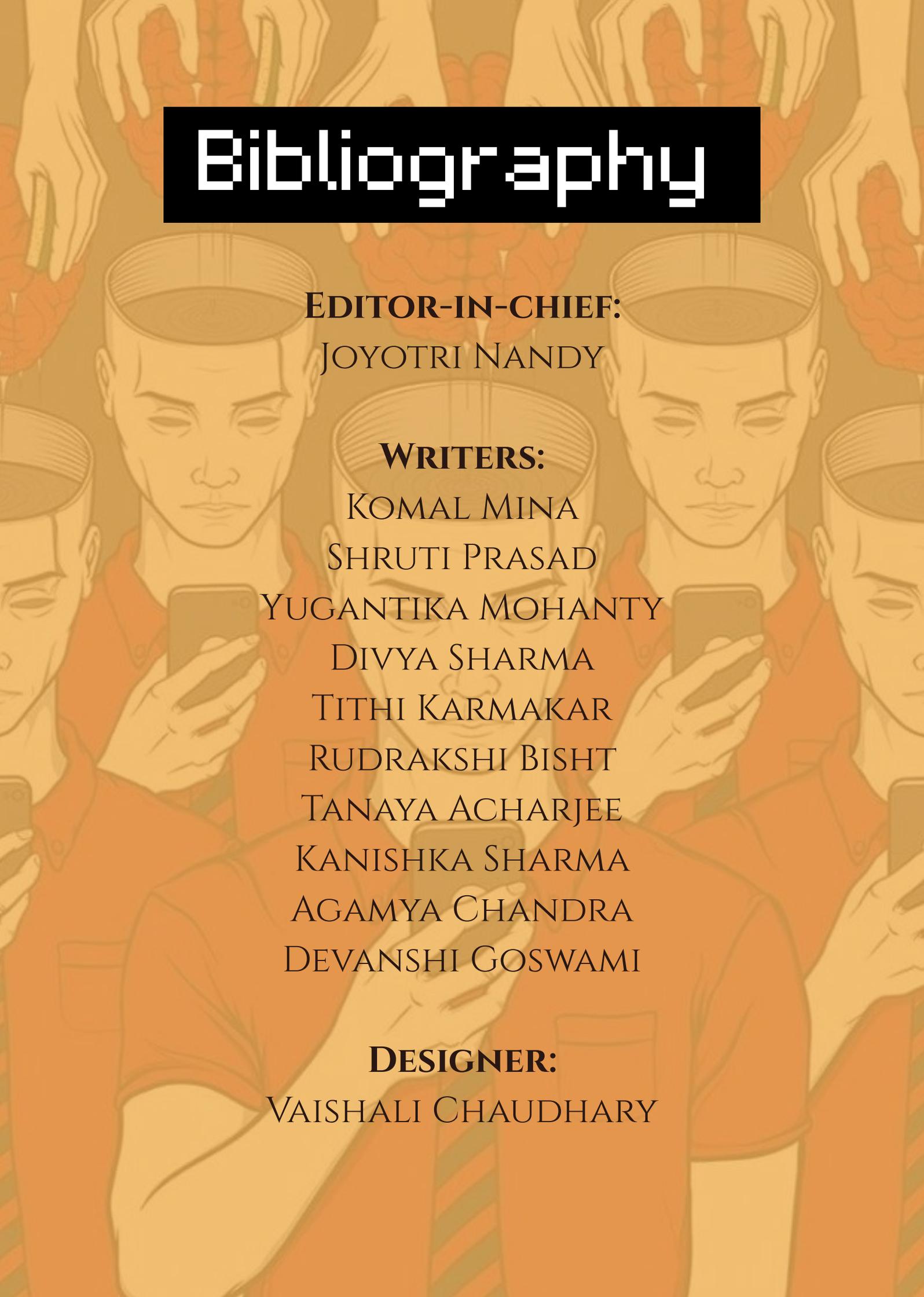
THE GAMIFICATION OF LOVE

The game-like features of dating apps might seem to be helping when finding a new match, but they also act as catalysts for developing addiction. The constant flow of matches makes an individual want to be engaged on the app, to look for someone more interesting. Playful features like Bumble's 'Question Game' act as a sword to manipulate user behaviour patterns to interact not only with potential matches but engage with their apps as well. Such an overwhelming usage of the platforms and swiping constantly leads to option paralysis- when a person feels no choice is sufficient. With this, an individual gets so involved in swiping left and right that most people don't invest in interacting with a good potential match or actually going on 'in-person' dates to explore the connection further. Moreover, with compulsive swiping, an individual experiences emotional fatigue and burnout. At the same time, the addictive urge to want more features like 'unlimited swipes, or liking different profiles' needs premium models and thus also demands financial investment.

CONCLUSION

To be in 2025 and wanting to date means to explore and embrace the ways of online dating. While online dating has made it easier to connect with people and explore relationships of love and intimacy, it has reduced the value of commitment in human connections. As technology advances, dating will become technologically more efficient and accessible. Yet the heart of a connection or a relationship will always remain the same as ever- trust, healthy boundaries, meaningful conversations, acceptance of one's strengths and faults, and shared offline experiences. To summarise, rather than letting dating apps and rating algorithms dictate one's romantic life, one needs to utilise digital tools to find genuine human connections that allow an individual to thrive emotionally.



The background of the entire page is a stylized illustration in shades of orange and yellow. It depicts a crowd of people, primarily men, from a top-down perspective. Many of the individuals are looking down at their smartphones, which they are holding in their hands. The style is graphic and somewhat abstract, with a focus on the repetitive action of checking mobile devices.

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THE LANTERN TRIBE

WE THE BEARERS

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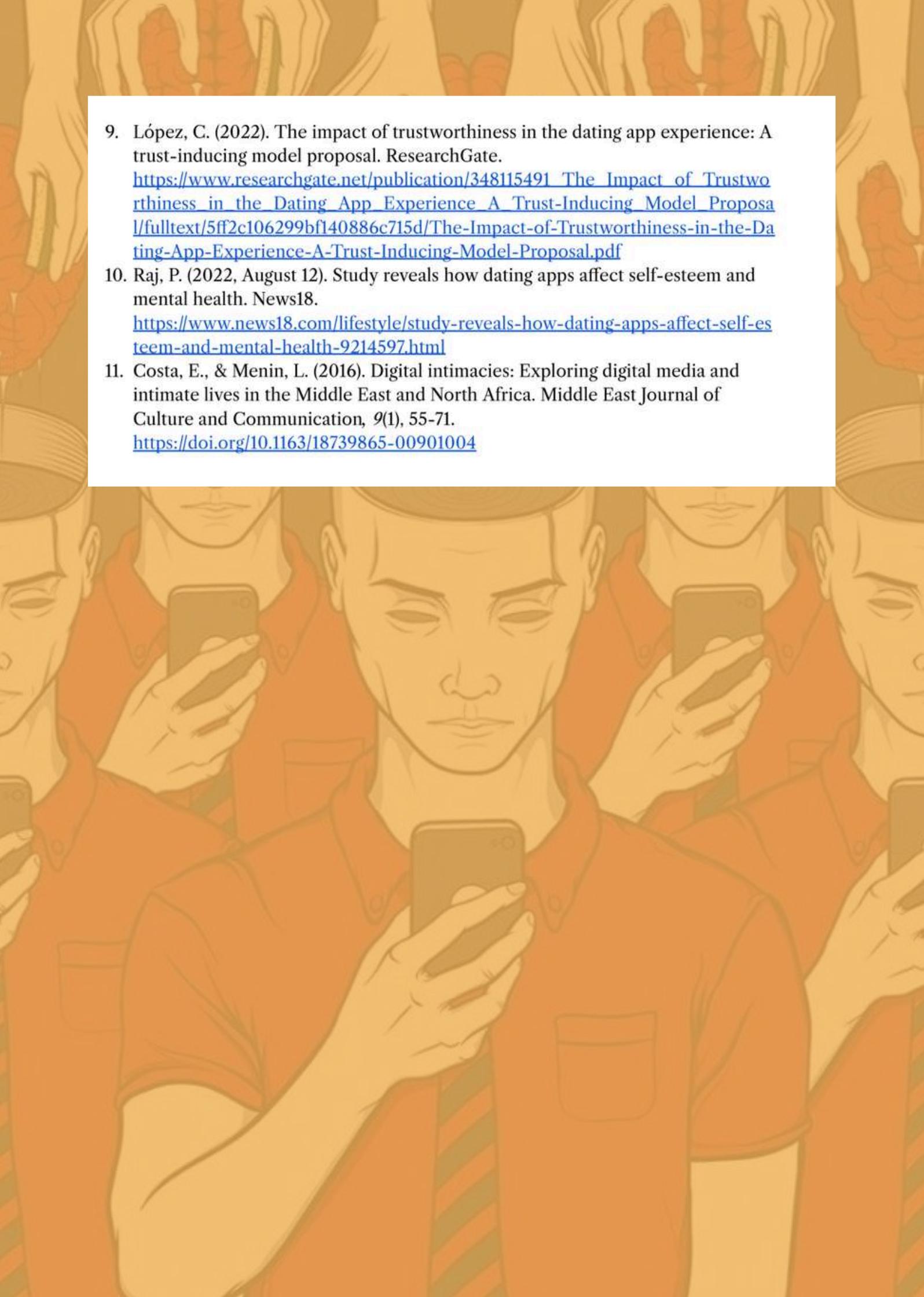
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- The background of the page is a stylized illustration in shades of orange and yellow. It depicts a dense crowd of people, primarily men, all looking down at their smartphones. The style is graphic and somewhat uniform, suggesting a collective behavior or a social norm of constant connectivity. The illustration is layered behind a white rectangular box that contains the text.
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