



PORTFOLIO- REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA COMMITTEE- UNCSW2

**Agenda: Regulating the Impact of
Beauty Filters and AI-Generated
Imagery on Youth Mental Health and
Body Image Standards**

Position Paper

"From Pythagoras' symmetry to Kant and Hegel's truth and spirit, beauty was once human. Today, it is increasingly algorithmic."

1- Introduction

The Republic of South Africa recognizes the growing impact of beauty filters and AI-generated imagery on mental health, body image and the dignity of women and girls. South Africa supports a balanced international framework that protects human rights, promotes responsible innovation, and prevents the misuse of digital technologies.

2- Why This Belongs in UNCSW

This agenda belongs before UNCSW because beauty filters and AI-generated imagery do not affect society in a gender-neutral way. The Background Guide correctly frames the issue as a meeting point of technology policy, mental health, gender equality, freedom of expression and business regulation, with women and girls bearing the sharpest harm pattern. The evidence shows something more serious: repeated exposure to idealised, edited and synthetic images pushes adolescent girls toward upward comparison, body surveillance, and self-objectification. **A 42-country adolescent study found that intensive and problematic social media use were associated with distorted body feeling, especially among girls, with problematic girl users up to 80 percent more likely than active users to perceive themselves as "too fat."** Studies on young people also show that image-based social media use and appearance-based motivations are positively associated with body dysmorphic symptoms.

3- Legal Foundation

South Africa has a mixed legal system that includes constitutional rights, legislation and common law protections. The Cybercrimes Act 19 of 2020 is especially relevant because it criminalises evil communications and the online disclosure of compromising images without consent, including deepfakes. A 2021 case in Johannesburg showed why this law was implemented before the age of AI: a man used AI generation to create a compromising image of his ex-girlfriend and circulated that image. That woman's reputation was damaged, and she got fired from her job. She received her justice when a man was charged for the Cyber Crimes Act. Hence, this case study shows why this law was implemented beforehand in 2020. Other such laws include the Films and Publications act 65 of 1996, the Electoral Act 73 of 1998

4- Racial and Mental Impact on South African women and Minorities

For South Africa, the issue is also cultural and racial. A country predominantly consisting of African, Colored, Indian, white, and mixed communities go through an experience that is described as "Eurocentricism" on a daily basis: -

Most beauty filters rely on **facial landmark detection**, mapping the eyes, nose, jaw, and skin before digitally reshaping them according to patterns learned from datasets that often privilege narrow ideas of attractiveness. The result is **algorithmic Eurocentrism: lighter skin, thinner noses, sharper jaws, poreless skin and features that do not respect African diversity**. This causes a sense of racial difference, where internalized racism and "more respect" for the euro image is given. Leading to crushed self worth and an internalized inferiority complex in the minds of race.

A 2023 study by the University of Cape Town's Center for Research found at 58% of black and colored teenage girls in the West Cape reported feeling "less beautiful" after using filter filters that altered their official features. The described feeling that they had to choose between looking "professional" and looking "African". The minority is such as the LGBTQ plus community or disabled women, especially from lower income, backgrounds face this problem, the most. The Gauteng Department of Health reported in 2022 that women with disabilities are three times more likely to experience online harassment, including non-consensual image manipulation, he had they are rarely included in digital literacy programs around the world.

5- Other

South Africa can draw from global practice without copying any model blindly. Norway's retouched-image disclosure law is useful for commercial transparency, the European Union's AI Act provides a serious⁶ benchmark for synthetic-content labelling, and South Korea's response to sexual deepfakes shows why criminal law is necessary for the worst harms. Japan's debates around hyper-idealised virtual and anime-style female figures



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also prove how unrealistic digital femininity can move from entertainment into body-image pressure. South Africa's contribution should be balanced and principled: protect innovation, protect expression, but protect women and girls first when consent, privacy and mental health are at stake, it also strives to create a unified effort with the sector A countries as a bloc.

A) Medical Affects and Efforts

The medical impact is especially serious in South Africa because the country is quite racially culturally linguistically and ethically diverse for black African women, Colored women, Girls from low-income households, LGBTQ+ youth and specially, able people, the pressure is not to look better, but it is also to look **“normal “, where normal is defined as light skin, thin and fully abled. Our country cannot support a system where our own culture is portrayed as “abnormal” after years of struggle against apartheid.**

The medical concern is equally direct. Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) they are defined as abnormal eating behaves and excessive preoccupation with body weight, negatively, impacting physical and physiological functioning leading to high immortality rates a study published by PubMed Central by the United States. A Johannesburg based therapist told a local news outlet that she had seen a 300% increase in body image complaints among teenage clients between 2020 and 2024 indicating that social media is the highest cause for these mental issues.

The terms 'Instagram Face' and “Snapchat Dysmorphia” show how deeply technology has entered the medical world. Instagram Face refers to the increasingly normalized digital beauty ideal of porcelaine skin, a narrow waist, “doe” eyes, and other features that are biologically impossible... Snapchat Dysmorphia describes patients seeking cosmetic procedures to resemble filtered selfies rather than realistic human anatomy.

Hence, South Africa recognizes adult autonomy over lawful cosmetic choices, medical associations should therefore adopt ethical guidance and properly educate the patients first beforehand to ensure they are doing the cosmetic surgery with a stable mind.

Eating disorders and body-image harms must also be treated as part of the same continuum. “Fitspiration” and “thinspiration” content often presents extreme thinness or rigid body discipline as wellness, while filters and editing tools make these bodies appear more common and attainable than they are. School should include digital body image literacy from grade when many girls first begin using social media actively platform should provide visible warnings before altering tools are applied to minors and government platforms will be created in order to take down deep fix that are posted online.

South Korea shows why explicit deepfake abuse, especially involving school-age victims, requires a criminal-law response. Japan's debates around hyper-idealized virtual girls and commercialized animated femininity show how synthetic beauty can affect real expectations of women and girls. Norway and the European Union offer disclosure and transparency models, but South Africa's position must remain constitutionally balanced.

B) Economic Perspective

The Republic of South Africa recognizes that artificial intelligence stays an important contributor to national digital transformation and economic development through initiatives such as the Presidential Commission on the Fourth Industrial Revolution (PC4IR) and the Artificial Intelligence Institute of South Africa (AIISA). South Africa therefore supports proportionate regulation that protects women and girls from digital harm while preserving innovation, entrepreneurship and investment within the countries growing economy.

C) Legal Framework of the Republic of South Africa

I- Constitutional Protection

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa provides the legal foundation for addressing the harms associated with AI-generated imagery and beauty filters. Section 9 guarantees equality before the law and prohibits discrimination, while Section 10 recognizes every individual's inherent right to dignity. Section 14 protects privacy, particularly where personal information and biometric facial data are manipulated without consent, and Section 16 safeguards freedom of expression.



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II-Cybercrimes Act 19 of 2020

South Africa has already established one of the continents, strongest legislative responses to malicious digital content to the cyber crimes act 19 of 2020. **Demonstrated by the 2021 Johannesburg case mentioned earlier, the actor realizes the electronic publication of intimate images without consent and empowers the code to issue, protect protection, orders, and impose, criminal pencil penalty upon offenders.**

III-Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA)

The Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) further strengthens responses by regulating the lawful processing of personal information, including facial images and biometric identifiers. Through Sections 3 to 6, the Act shows the rights of data subjects while requiring that personal information be processed lawfully, fairly and with consent wherever applicable. This means that a beauty filter app cannot scan a South African user, face and stored that data without their consent. Companies that violate this can face finds of up to R10 million or imprisonment.

IV-Films and Publications Act 65 of 1996

The Films and Publications Act supports these protections by prohibiting the online distribution of private sexual photographs or videos intended to cause harm. Although enacted before the development of modern AI, its emphasis on protecting victims of falsely generated, non-consensual intimate imagery remain the same. The act is currently under review to fit the now AI dominant world.

V-Electoral Act 73 of 1998

Beyond individual harm, South Africa also recognizing that synthetic media present wider social risks. The electoral act of 73 of 1998 prohibits the publication of false information and then need to influence elections demonstrating that South African legislation already acknowledge the dangerous post by fake digital content. This principal provides an important foundation for addressing AI generated misinformation beyond Scope of beautiful as a loan, particularly as deepfakes becomes more common in politics.

VI-Common Law and Recent Developments

South African common law continues to provide civil remedies through actions related to defamation, invasion of privacy and infringement of personality rights. In a case from 2023, the Johannesburg regional court, highlighted the legal risks associated with artificial intelligence when legal representative relied upon fabricated case citations generated by ChatGPT. The court concluded that the conductor resulted from negligence rather than intentional deception, but it became a wake up. Call to have AI literacy across all sectors.

D) International Cooperation

South Africa believes that no nation can regulate beauty filters, AI generated imagery, cruel, deep, fix on its own these advancements of technology across borders affect millions of women and girls globally for that reason, South Africa supports greater corporation through United Nations, UN, women and UNESCO.

Learning from Global Models

South Africa appreciates the progress made by Norway and the European Union. Norway's requirement to show digitally altered public images has encouraged public awareness of unrealistic beauty standards, while the European Union's AI Act has introduced important



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transparency obligations for AI-generated content. However, reports show that some influencers opt for cosmetic surgeries to resemble filter, appearances and bypass the AI level proving just transparency, isn't enough.

So, to create a more comprehensive system the republic of South Africa would like to collaborate internationally by doing the following:-

- 1) establish a Global South Working Group on AIN gender, led by South Africa in Brazil, to ensure that African developing country perspective are represented in a global AI governance.
- 2) Develop minimum global standards for beauty, filter, transparency, including visible, watermarks, age, gating form, and mandatory user education on the health impacts of altered imagery.
- 3) Ensure that women with disabilities, especially minors and LGBTQ plus youth, are represented and explicitly included in all international research and policy design.
- 4) Partner with UNESCO to expand digital literacy curriculum in African schools, ensuring that young people learn spot AI generated content.