

Image Promotion on Instagram by Female Students in some Nigerian Universities

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the Influence of Instagram Posts on the Body Image of Female Undergraduates in selected universities in southwestern Nigeria. It focused on the exposure of young females to “ideal” beauty standards portrayed on Instagram and the influence it has on them. The survey research design was adopted and questionnaires were used for data collection. The research instrument was administered on 285 respondents randomly drawn from five faculties of Afe Babalola University and Ekiti State University, both in Ado Ekiti, southwestern Nigeria. Social Comparison, Technological Determinism and Uses and Gratification Theories were used in the study. Three hypotheses were tested at 0.05 significance level. Chi-Square inferential statistics was used to determine results. With P-value $0.000126 < 0.05$, it was concluded that Instagram posts have a significant negative influence on the body image of the respondents. The influence of body related posts on Instagram encourage young females to desire to conform to the “ideal beauty standards”. Hence, Instagram or social media should give a fairer and realistic representation of female body images without necessarily creating “beauty standards” to be achieved by these young female students. However, young female students should be selective in adopting certain beauty standards on Instagram. Parents and other moral organizations should sensitize the young females to the negative consequences of body image dissatisfaction and objectification

Key Words: Instagram posts; Body image; Female undergraduates; Self dissatisfaction; Self objectification

INTRODUCTION

Social media especially social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have become a huge part of most youths' lives. They easily yield and take to heart things found on these sites. A person's appearance is determined or influenced by many factors including genetics, biology, behaviour, character, beauty or ugliness and several other cultural standards. Due to these diverse and complex influences, the appearances of human beings often vary greatly. An Instagram post is a photo or video that users share on the platform. Each post by a user appears on their followers' Instagram feeds and can also be viewed by the public when tagged using hashtags. Users can add a caption to each of their posts and use hashtags and location based tags to index these posts and make them searchable by other users within the app. They can also like, comment on and bookmark others' posts, as well as send private messages to their friends via the Instagram direct feature.

In Nigerian society today, young female students are especially pressured to conform to change their appearances or looks to conform to Instagram beauty standards and other social media networking sites. Consequently young Nigerian female students aim at adopting the body shape, size or complexion of some celebrities of their choice or their so-called role models and heroes and heroines on social media. The media has a way of prioritizing certain body image to look more attractive than some others such as extreme thinness, skinny, big breasts, buttocks and tiny waist for women and V-shaped muscled body for men. Hence, female undergraduates are on a daily basis confronted with the traditional and stereotypical ideals of social media beauty standards. For many of them who are just attaining the age of 18 it may be the first time they are allowed to make certain choices on their own. Such female youths are often faced with mixed messages regarding their value as students and the need to always look attractive. The pursuit to conform to distorted beauty ideals and body image is associated with different problems including lack of self-confidence and low self-esteem, among others.

According to Badero (2011), millions of people are constantly living with a dreadful feeling about how they look and that means they are not satisfied with their body image, which inevitably leads to making efforts to re-shape their looks. Even though, body dissatisfaction is a major concern amongst both genders, the phenomenon is however, more pronounced among females. The problem is not new after all. During the 1950s, women were encouraged to be of a different physique than nowadays. The ideal then was to be curvy with a small waist, and recently, these ideals have changed to one of thinness (Gorman, 2015). Social media together with other cultural forces have overtime given a highlight through the messages they deliver on what societal standards of an ideal woman should look like. If thin, light skinned or tanned, fashion models and celebrities are often dissatisfied with their weights and looks, then the average woman must be undoubtedly concerned. Besides the thin body ideal, there are other characteristics the society has noted to be what makes a woman beautiful.

A light skin is perceived as desirable just as the women of colour are in the Western world seen as 'exotic and deviant'. Other features for a beautiful, feminine western woman are blond, long hair, big symmetrical breasts, thin waist, light skin, pink lips, as well as the genitals, shaved in the right places (Mascia-Lee and Black, 2000) as cited in Alentola, (2017:20). These are some of the so-called beauty standards that a young Nigerian female imitates to be in vogue these days.

According to Tyer (2016), the three top accounts on Instagram belonging to Beyonce, Kim Kardashian and Ariana Grande are believed to be large influencers over women who use the application to reflect the society's "ideal woman". Most females respond to these visual stimulus on Instagram out of frustration, low self-esteem and inferiority complex because on this platform, the representation of the lighter the better and the thinner or curvier, the more likely you are to find your dream man, your dream job and your acceptance into the society's standard of beauty.

However, for some females, it boosts their morale to work towards getting the type of body shape, size or complexion of those celebrities in the quest to either become a celebrity as well or get the qualifications of a model. There are several other involvements ladies tend to get into that require certain body ideal standards such as fashion shows, beauty contests, advertising for a firm or company, brand/product ambassador, actresses and many more. This quest, when they succeed, could end up earning them fame and prosperity such as choice properties, huge amount of money among others.

On Instagram, its mostly the standard beauty that gets the highest 'likes' and most young females want their pictures to have high number of likes even at the expense of altering the pictures to appear perfect. Although there are other media forms that promote this body ideal through their representations, social media especially Instagram continues to gain more attention because young people are exposed to as many as eight to ten hours of social media per day (Irving, 2008 as cited in Wynn, 2012:15). Instagram has exploded over the past few years with the development of smart phone technology, allowing users to post pictures with edited effects, from their supported smartphones to their Instagram account (Sanvenero, 2013). Each day, millions of images are posted online through social media. Some 55 million of them alone are shared daily through Instagram (Thornton, 2014). Thus, visual platforms such as Instagram are becoming increasingly popular with some industry analysts positing that Instagram is the fastest growing social media platform (Smith & Sanderson, 2015).

When a user posts a photo or video on Instagram, it will be displayed on your profile. Other users who follow them will see the posts on their feed. Likewise, the users will see posts from others who they choose to follow. Instagram allows you to follow celebrities and other famous people to see what they post about their day-to-day lives, whether it is selfies at their modeling photo-shoot, or pictures of their luxurious vacations in foreign beautiful countries.

Body image is an individual's perception of his or her body. It is the beliefs and attitudes of individuals about their bodies and mostly their appearance while body dissatisfaction refers to an individual's negative perception about his or her body. Body image issues are of global relevance and importance because there is abundant evidence that women suffer from body image dissatisfaction in numerous countries and regions around the world (Zhang, 2012). The self-evaluation process has been highly linked to outside influences such as the mass media exposure e.g Cultivation Theory (Shanahan and Morgan, 1999) and societal standards (Van Vonderen and Kinnally, 2012). Media outlets, be it traditional or new, share a large amount of unrealistic images of idealized bodies which might trigger upward social comparison in many people thus resulting in an increase in body image dissatisfaction (Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). The pursuits of appearance and beauty have become prevailing among young female students in the Nigerian societ. Thus, Instagram's portrayal of ideal beauty has facilitated the distortion of body image in the

lives of young females in Nigeria. However, for female students in Nigerian Universities, more emphasis is placed on appearance which leads them to desire by all means to have a 'perfect' body image. They are most likely to engage in certain steps seen on Instagram that would enable them to achieve their desired goals. Studies in the past focused on exposure to beauty ideals through social media platforms in general, but no study addressed specifically how Instagram has influenced young females' perceptions of their body image being the cause of body dissatisfaction.

Also noted was a past study that focused on just one case study unlike this study which focused on different case studies. This study therefore sought to examine the influence of Instagram posts on the body image of female students of Afe Babalola University and those of Ekiti State University, both at Ado-Ekiti in Southwestern Nigeria. This study was concerned with finding out the extent to which young Nigerian female students are conscious of their body image, to check if young Nigerian female students take measures in changing their body features, and to what extent they patronize the products advertised on Instagram to acquire their ideal beauty standards, and finally to identify the psychological effects that Instagram posts have on the body image of Nigerian female undergraduates.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

An appraisal of three theories listed here captures the essence of this study in relation to the use of Instagram posts on the body image of young Nigerian female University students in Southwestern Nigeria. Most of the female youths have series of postings on Instagram as if they have been bitten by the social media bug. There is the general notion amongst them that if you do not have daily posting on Instagram you have lost touch with fashionable ideas. Instagram posting has suddenly become a status symbol, without which you are considered not civilized and anti-social.

Social Comparison Theory

The social comparison theory was developed by Leon Festinger in the 1950s. The theory suggests that individuals compare themselves to people who hold the preferred and desired social and cultural features such as beauty, in an attempt to evaluate or enhance their physical look. These individuals then engage in untoward behaviours to achieve the societal ideals (Festinger, 1954). The theorist also suggests that people are constantly seeking truthful self-evaluations, and therefore begin to compare themselves to those around them to gain more clarity. This often builds their sense of identity. By comparing themselves to the universally accepted standards of beauty, they negatively affect their own body image (Morrison, Kalin, & Morrison 2004)

Uses and Gratification Theorg

Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch pioneered the uses and gratification theory in 1974. The theory emerged in response to the needs of explaining why people use certain media and the benefits derived. The basic assumption of this theory is that people use mass media for different reasons and seek to derive various gratifications (Gallion, 2010; Wimmer and Dominick, cited in Asemah, 2011). The uses and gratification theory of communication explains what people do with the media of their choice. With the emergence of social media the theory has become more popular.

Technological Determinism

Technological determinism (TD), simply put, is the idea that technology has important multiplier effects on people's lives. Technological determinism is a reductionist theory that presumes that a

society's technology drives the development of its social structure and cultural values. The term is believed to have been coined by Thorstein Veblen an American sociologist. (1857–1929), The first major elaboration of the theory came from the German philosopher and economist Karl Max, whose theoretical framework was based on the idea that changes in technology and productive technology are the primary influence on the organization of social relations, and that social relations and cultural practices ultimately revolve around the technological and economic base of a society.

METHODOLOGY

The Survey Research Design was used to gather data from a population of Instagram users among female students of Afe Babalola University and the Ekiti State University, both in Ado-Ekiti, Southwestern Nigeria. The two Universities have a combined population of about 35,000 students. The female students number about 20,000.

A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to select 500 or 40% respondents out of the 20,000 female student population of the affected Universities.

1. Stratified sampling technique was employed to select 250 female students each from the two Universities
2. Stratified sampling technique was equally used to select 50 students each from the five faculties of the two institutions
3. Random sampling technique was finally employed for administering the instrument on the fifty respondents from each of the five faculties.

However, only 285 or 57% copies of the 500 research instrument distributed were retrieved for analysis.

Table 1: Measures taken through Instagram posts to change body features.

Products for Changing Body Features	YES	NO	Mean	Std. Dev.
Body Whitening Creams	190 66.7%	95 33.3%	1.67	.472
Skin Whitening Treatments	232 81.4%	53 18.6%	1.81	.390
Exfoliation	126 44.2%	159 55.8%	1.56	.498
Bleaching	56 19.6%	229 80.4%	1.80	.398
Body Whitening Treatments	41 14.4%	244 85.6%	1.86	.352
Body Shape and Size	219 76.8%	66 23.2%	1.77	.423
Slimming Pills	74 26.0%	211 74.0%	1.74	.439
Slimming Tea	190 66.7%	95 33.3%	1.67	.472
Regular Workout	158 55.4%	127 44.6%	1.45	.498
Dieting	161 56.5%	124 43.5%	1.56	.497
Fat Burning Program (Keto)	75 26.3%	210 73.7%	1.74	.441

Source: Field survey, 2019

Table1 reveals that 67% of the respondents used body whitening creams to achieve desired body image, while 33% did not use body whitening creams to achieve desired body image (Mean=1.67, SD=0.472). Again, 81% of the respondents used skin whitening treatments while 19% did not use skin whitening treatments to achieve desired body image (Mean=1.81, SD=0.390). Furthermore, 55% of the respondents engaged in regular workout to achieve desired body image while 45% of the respondents did not engage in regular workout (Mean=1.45, SD=0.498). Finally, 26% of the respondents engaged fat burning program to achieve desired body image while 74% did not engage in fat burning program to achieve desired body image (Mean=1.74, SD=0.441). From the result, inference could be made that Nigerian students employed most of these measures found on Instagram to achieve their desired body image.

Table 2: Extent of Patronized Body Image Products Advertised on Instagram?

Body Image Products	Regular	Sometimes	Never	NA	Mean	Std. Dev.
Body Whitening Creams	166 58.2%	41 14.4%	68 23.9%	10 3.5%	2.41	.890
Skin Whitening Treatments	26 9.1%	73 25.6%	176 61.8%	10 3.5%	2.60	.704
Skin Toning Soaps	164 57.3%	55 19.3%	56 19.6%	10 3.5%	2.45	.844
Body Whitening Pills	25 8.8%	42 14.7%	208 73.0%	10 3.5%	2.71	.672
Exfoliation Scrubs	134 47.0%	79 27.7%	62 21.8%	10 3.5%	2.32	.852
Flat Tummy Products	168 58.9%	59 20.7%	48 16.8%	10 3.5%	2.49	.812
Slimming Pills	44 15.4%	43 15.1%	188 66.0%	10 3.5%	2.58	.791
Weight Loss Products	174 61.1%	54 18.9%	47 16.5%	10 3.5%	2.52	.807
Slimming Tea	160 56.1%	64 22.5%	51 17.9%	10 3.5%	2.45	.824
Body Shaping Diet Pills	33 11.6%	56 19.6%	186 65.3%	10 3.5%	2.61	.736

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 2 reveals that 72% .2% of the respondents agreed that they patronize body whitening creams advertised on Instagram.. Again, 76%.5% of the respondents agreed that they patronize skin toning soaps advertised on Instagram. Only 30% of the respondents agreed that they patronize slimming pills advertised on Instagram, while 66.0% said they never patronize slimming pills advertised on Instagram In the same vein, 78. 6 % of the respondents agreed that they patronize slimming tea advertised on Instagram, . Finally, 32 %of the respondents agreed that they patronize body shaping diet pills advertised on Instagram, while 65.3% said they never patronize body shaping diet pills advertised on Instagram. From the result, it is obvious that students patronize body image products advertised on Instagram to acquire their ideal beauty standards.

Table 3: Level of Psychological Effects that Instagram posts have on body image

Psychological effects of Instagram Posts	Highly	Minimal	Low	NA	Mean.	Std. Dev.
I derive inspiration through Instagram Posts	111 38.9%	115 40.4%	49 17.2%	10 3.5%	1.85	.826
I derive inspiration through Instagram Models	63 40.0%	114 22.1%	98 34.4%	10 3.5%	2.19	.819
I receive encouragement through Instagram models	74 33.3%	95 26.0%	106 37.2%	10 3.5%	2.18	.861
I receive encouragement through Instagram posts.	87 30.5%	123 43.2%	65 22.8%	10 3.5%	1.99	.822
I derive confidence through Instagram Posts.	63 40.0%	114 22.1%	98 34.4%	10 3.5%	2.19	.819
I derive confidence through Instagram Celebrities.	52 18.2%	91 31.9%	132 46.3%	10 3.5%	2.35	.816
I build my self-esteem through Instagram posts.	42 14.7%	100 35.1%	132 46.3%	11 3.9%	2.39	.783
I build self-esteem through Instagram Models	39 52.3%	87 30.5%	149 13.7%	10 3.5%	2.46	.771
I desire to have the look of Instagram models.	64 43.2%	87 30.5%	123 22.5%	11 3.9%	2.28	.856
I feel oppressed with the body of Instagram models	38 58.2%	70 24.6%	166 13.3%	11 3.9%	2.53	.772

Source: Field survey, 2019

Table 3 shows that approximately 79%, while 62% agreed that they derived inspiration from Instagram Models. Also, another 80% of the respondents build their self esteem on Instagram Models., while 75% desire to have the look of Instagram models, while another 80% feel oppressed by the Instagram Models. All these go a long way to show that the young Nigerian female undergraduates do not feel fulfilled until they compare their body looks to the Models posted on Instagram platform

Hypothesis Testing

H₀: Students do not change their body features through Instagram posts

H₁: Students change their body features through Instagram posts.

Test Statistic	Gender * Instagram posts	Decision Rule	Conclusion/Interpretation
Chi Square test (P-value)	0.000126	Reject H ₀ if P-value < α -value, otherwise do not reject H ₀	Since P-value < α -value. i.e. 0.000126 < 0.05, we reject H ₀ and conclude that Students change their body features through Instagram posts at 5% level of significance.

H₀: Students do not patronize products advertised on Instagram

H₁: Students patronize products advertised on Instagram

Test of Statistic	Gender * patronized products on Instagram	Decision Rule	Conclusion/Interpretation
Chi Square test (P-value)	0.00000019	Reject H ₀ if P-value < α -value, otherwise do not reject H ₀	Since P-value < α -value. i.e. 0.00000019 < 0.05, we reject H ₀ and conclude that Students patronize products advertised on Instagram to acquire ideal beauty standard at 5% level of significance.

H_0 : Instagram posts do not have psychological effects on students' body image

H_1 : Instagram posts have psychological effects on students' body image.

Test Statistic	Gender * psychological effects	Decision Rule	Conclusion/Interpretation
Chi Square test (P-value)	0.000000006	Reject H_0 if P-value < α -value, otherwise do not reject H_0	Since P-value < α -value. i.e. $0.000000006 < 0.05$, we reject H_0 and conclude that Instagram posts have psychological effects on students' body image at 5% level of significance.

RESULTS

The study shows that body image of young female students are greatly affected by what they see often on Instagram.. It is also noted that the influence of body related posts on Instagram encourages young females to desire to conform to the "ideal beauty standards" being portrayed on Instagram by society such as thinness and light skinned, among others.

This can eventually lead to dissatisfaction and oftentimes measures are taken to alter their body image to conform with the so-called ideals. These body change behaviours are done by young female undergraduates in order to achieve the 'perfect' body so as to fit into the society in the likes of becoming a model, beauty pageants, face of a brand or brand ambassadors and several other social media driven programmes.

Recommendations

1. The Nigerian female youth should be mindful and selective when adopting certain beauty standards from social media such as Instagram and the likes. They should not solely look to Instagram body related posts as a benchmark of what ideal beauty standards are acceptable or not in the society.
2. On moral grounds, parents and especially female organizations should sensitize young females about the negative consequences of body image dissatisfaction and the danger that may occur when trying to alter their body features. Sensitization on how to boost their self-confidence and worth should be encouraged regardless of how their body maybe.

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