COMMUNICATION OF SELF-OBJECTIFICATION AMONG UNIVERSITY FEMALE STUDENTS ON INSTAGRAM: A CASE OF TWO UNIVERSITIES IN NAIROBI, KENYA

BY

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DECLARATION

Declaration by the Candidate

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this Thesis to my late dad Peter Wandabwa who was a strong believer in educating the girl child and who encouraged his children to pursue education to the highest levels, my mother for her support and prayers, my husband for his full support and encouragement, my sisters and friends who kept cheering me on to ensure I completed this course, and to my children, whom I hope will be inspired to achieve more than what their mother achieved.

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Most importantly to the Almighty, for the gift of life, health, and sound mind.

ABSTRACT

Media has over time been seen to be a great contributor to sexual objectification and in turn self-objectification among women. Currently, social media has given users the power to be creators and distributors of content thereby contributing greatly to self-objectification. The study aimed at investigating self-objectification on Instagram and the nature of communication on physical appearance on Instagram and its relation to self-objectification. This study was guided by three research questions; how do young women use Instagram and what is their motivation behind the use? How do young women perceive the communication related to physical appearance on Instagram? How does the nature of feedback on images posted on Instagram result to self-objectification? The study was guided by cultivation theory that states that the more one is exposed to the socially formed truths that they interact with in the media the more likely they are to view it as a truth. The study was also guided by Social Constructionism Theory that states that meaning is constructed through social interactions in a group, but an individual can learn through various interactions within a group. This study used the qualitative approach with case study being the method of inquiry. Target population for the study was 200 female university students between the ages of 20 and 23. Using purposive sampling, a sample of 60 female students; 30 from Moi University and 30 from St. Paul's University was selected. Data collection instruments were in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. In-depth interviews were administered to 30 students and two focus group discussions with 15 students each held. Data collected was analysed using thematic analysis. The study revealed that the main motivation for the use of Instagram among young women was to keep up with what was trending, to imitate it and to seek validation. On communication related to physical appearance, the study revealed that content posted on Instagram validated certain standards of beauty that were deemed ideal. These standards showed perfectionism, and photos posted matched these standards. The study also found that in terms of feedback, photos that had these standards of beauty had the most positive feedback and encouraged frequent posting with the same characteristics. In conclusion, photos posted on Instagram communicate a certain standard of beauty that is deemed ideal. Positive feedback on images was also associated with internalization of these standards, frequent posting as well as self-objectified images. Based on the findings, the study recommended that the media and especially public figures on social media need to portray images as they are and to avoid manipulation to release pressure on young women looking up to them who end up engaging in self-objectification.

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OPERATIONALIZATION OF KEY TERMS

Body surveillance: constant focus on one's body and how other people will perceive it.

Culture: behaviours, values and symbols of a group of people.

Gaze: visual inspection of the body by someone else, usually done by men, inspecting a woman's body.

Instagram: a photo sharing social media application.

Objectification: treating a person as an object.

Self-objectification: internalization of the third person view as an object.

Sexual objectification: treatment of a person, especially a woman as an object of sexual desire.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

This chapter covers the background of the study, the context of the study which explains the setting in which the study will take place, the issue that the researcher aims to address, the research questions that will aid the researcher in collecting data, the boundaries within which the study will operate and the rationale of the study which brings out the need for the research.

1.2 Background to the study

While discussing objectification, media, and in the recent years- social media cannot fail to be mentioned. Media has over the years exposed women to sexually objectifying media, and promoted certain ideals that are deemed as the standards for beauty. Women have hence compared themselves against these standards and ended up internalizing these ideals hence engaging in self-objectification. Today, media sets the standards on what is beautiful and what should be adhered to. With technology and social media platforms such as Instagram being popular, the need to look good among young people has remained a pressing matter. With Instagram being a visually centred platform, the number of likes and comments a photo gets has become the new parameters of judging one's worth.

Self-objectification as described by Calogero, R.M (2013), occurs when the objectifying gaze is turned inward, such that ladies examine themselves through the viewpoint of a witness and participate in constant monitoring of their bodies. It is the

process where an individual internalizes and accepts the beliefs that society projects upon them.

Self-objectification comes about from sexual objectification which has been encouraged especially in the media. More studies have come out to show that young people have become cautious of how they look so that they can be accepted in the society and can fit into the standards.

Today the media has endorsed a thin body ideal, and those who conform to these standards are deemed to be beautiful. Before, fertility was a sign of female beauty, but this has since shifted to what Bonafini, B.A., & Pozzilli, P. (2011) describe as mathematically calculated proportions. The beauty standards of women portrayed in the media have always been set by the tall and thin models. Physical characteristics of women have been put on emphasis and focus has been on their faces, shape, and clothing. This portrayal by the media leads women to participate in activities that are dangerous to the body such as extreme dieting to fit in. In the same way, exposure to sexualizing media has led to the internalization of these ideals by women and thereby making them engage in self-objectification.

This internalization of beauty ideals is as a result of culture that has been born and emphasised in the media, and now even more on social media platforms. Culture as defined by Oysermann, D., & Lee, S. W. S. (2007) refers to a certain way of living that a group of people identify with. This way of living is guided by a set of values, ideologies, traditions, and beliefs which are passed down from one generation to the other. When one identifies with a particular culture, they adopt and internalize the norms of that culture. They are also likely to be part of activities that align to that

culture including the language they speak and the media they consume, Allen et al. (2008).

When it comes to beauty, standards of beauty are culture specific. They vary in different cultures and every culture plays a major role in establishing and enforcing these beauty ideals. Here, body size, skin colour, hair and even colour of eyes are considered.

Research shows that western society has placed more emphasis on women's physical attractiveness, compared to men. This culture encourages women to evaluate their value in terms of how they look to be able to fit in as per the norms. Research has also showed that since the 1960s, American women were considered beautiful if they were thin. Their culture emphasized thinness. For black women however, beauty was perceived as being bigger, thicker, and having a more voluptuous figure. Apart from the size, studies also show that cultural standards of beauty for black women would stem from men's perspective rather than their own. Women therefore felt pressure to adhere to these standards, as Poran, M.A. (2006). found.

When women are pressured to adhere to standards of another person then they start viewing themselves from the perspective of an observer, thereby engaging in self-objectification as Calogero, R. M. (2013) suggests. Self-objectification as defined by Calogero, R. M. (2012) is where people, and for the purposes of this study; women, are acculturated to internalize a third person view of their bodies as the main ways to think about themselves.

Fardouly, J., Diedrichs, P. C., Vartanian, L. R., & Halliwell, E. (2015), conducted a study where they researched on the relationship between appearance comparison in relation to use of different media outlets and self-objectification among young women. From their findings, they suggest that the media has often times portrayed women in a manner that is sexually objectifying. They go on to suggest that this constant viewing and interacting with objectifying media has led to the third person view among women, but especially among young women. In their study, they sought to find out the relationship that existed when people used various media platforms and their likelihood of objectifying themselves. They also examined if there was a connection between how people compared their features on Facebook and if this social media platform was responsible for the self-objectification observed. The results from the findings showed that when it came to the third person internalization, Facebook and Magazine usage played an integral role in this trait. The findings went further to show that the connection between the social media platform and objectification was as a result of the users comparing their looks with those on the platform. From their study, we can conclude that the users of the social media platform compare themselves and how they look, and in doing so end up engaging in the third person view of themselves.

In yet another study where women were diagnosed with eating disorders were observed, and this disorder viewed against self-objectification, Calogero, R. M., Davis, W. N., & Thompson, J. K. (2005) reported that incorporation of appearance ideals from the media was highly followed by self-objectification. This meant that in instances where women repeatedly interacted with sexually objectifying photos from their gender in optical media such as music videos, television shows and magazines

they were highly likely to engage in self-objectification. This is because women engaged in constant engagement and activities that made them appear as sexual objects, made these images become engrained in their minds and they ended up believing in what was perceived out there. In their findings, they suggested that self-objectification has a role to play in the quest for thinness and importance of one's appearance hence the disordered eating.

In a more recent study, Fardouly, J., Willburger, B. K., &Vartanian, L. R. (2018) examined how Instagram is consumed by its users, how the consumers relay their concerns regarding their body image and how self-objectification comes in play among young women between the ages of 18-25 in America and Australia. Their study sought to find out whether internalization of the societal beauty ideals or the likelihood of consumers comparing their looks with specific people on Instagram facilitated any relationship between Instagram use and the likelihood of one comparing their looks with another. In their findings, greater overall Instagram use was associated with greater self-objectification. They also found out that frequent viewing of *fitspiration* images which are images that show how fit someone is, or how someone is trying to keep fit by exercising led to body image concerns.

From the above studies, this is a rich area of study to explore, considering there are new social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat and Tik-Tok. There is need for more research and more literature on self-objectification especially in the age of the digital media, where individuals are not only consumers of information, but are creators of information as well.

1.3 Context of the Study

1.3.1 Academic Context

Social media, such as Instagram are used extensively for communication. One great advantage that social media has is the online sharing of knowledge and information among different groups of people. Today, we are not only receivers of information, but we also generate information which we then share with others on our social media pages. Social media, as Marshall, P. D. (2010) notes, has the ability to serve as a platform on which an individual can build a public representation of themselves, popularly known as a profile.

While Instagram focuses on photo and video sharing, it also uses written communication where one can put a caption of the photo or video they are sharing to let the followers have more details of the video or photo. Feedback is almost immediate depending on how many followers you have and how many are online. Feedback on Instagram can be in the form of a "like" or a "comment".

Media usage, as suggested by Aubrey, J. S., & Frisby, C. M. (2011), is associated with objectification of women. This is because media has for a long time been accused of placing focus on the physical appearance of women, compared to that of men, though recent research has shown that men's bodies are also being brought to the focus. There is a burden put on women by the media to be attentive to how they look, making them conscious of having the perfect body that is considered desirable and beautiful. This pressure put on women, leads them to objectify themselves, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

Many scholars have done research in this field, while trying to understand self-objectification, both in the traditional media and on social media. Bell, B. T., Cassarly, J. A., & Dunbar, L. (2018) sought to examine how much women exposed themselves in a manner where they are viewed as on social media. They also examined whether the more one posted content on social media and received positive feedback they are likely to engage in self-objectification. They analysed social media content of the users who were young adult women and observed how they engaged self-objectification in the content they shared on their profiles on Instagram. They suggested that young women who were highly likely to engage in self-objectification posted images about themselves that were objectifying and received more positive feedback. From their analysis, they found that 29.77% of the participants' Instagram images were objectified. They found out that a third of the young women's Instagram posts contained sexually suggestive poses and this was classified as the most frequent form of self-objectification. They also confirmed that the frequency of posting self-objectifying images was associated with their trait levels of self-objectification.

Cross-sectional correlational studies on self-objectification have shown that the use of sexualizing media such as television programs and magazines as well as the use of social networking sites such as Facebook are positively related to self-objectification, Aubrey, J. S. (2007).

While many of these studies found the positive relation between sexualizing media and self-objectification, there are exceptions. Morry, M. M. & Staska, S. L. (2001) in their study found that when it came to the male gender, the use of beauty or fitness magazines did not lead to any form of objectification. Fardouly, J., Diedrichs, P.C., Vartanian, L. R., and Halliwell, E. (2015) also did not find any relation with self-

objectification among women, yet other researchers, like Vandenbosch, L., & Eggermont, S. (2015) found the relation for both girls and boys. With appearance, Meier &Gray (2014) in their study discovered that it is only Facebook that users compared how they looked with other users on the platform and ended up engaging in self-objectification.

Aubrey, J. S. (2006) in his survey, found that regular interaction with television content that was sexual was a forecaster of self-objectification for both college-going ladies and men. He however also suggested that when it came to media exposure, body monitoring was only seen in men. Gender differences among adolescents were also identified. Doornwaard, S. M., van Den Eijnden, R. J., Baams, L., Vanwesenbeeck, I., & Ter Bogt, T. F. (2016) identified that with boys, use of internet content that was sexual, predicted the behaviour of boys' internal survey of their bodies. This is in contrast with girls who their internalization was more with the use of social networking sites.

Studies done in this field have shown that specific elements of media usage are associated with self-objectification, Fardouly, J., Diedrichs, P. C., Vartanian, L. R., & Halliwell, E. (2015). From their study, it was discovered that Facebook and magazine usage were associated with self-objectification among young women due to the tendency of women to compare their appearance with other women.

Research has also shown that there are gender inequalities when it came to how media represented the third person view of oneself. Research goes further to suggest that females are portrayed by viewing of their faces and comparing their bodies, while for

a man, his head and face will be shown in greater detail that for a woman. For women however, importance is placed on their physique.

With this background on the academic studies done, there are different results from different studies conducted by the scholars in this field. With the changing landscape of social media, and with new social media platforms coming up, there is a great opportunity for more studies in this field to contribute to the body of knowledge.

1.3.2 Social Context

This study is situated in a social context where social networking sites such as Instagram are becoming increasingly popular among young people especially young women who are increasingly spending more time online.

Instagram allows users to create their personal profiles and to customize those profiles with photos and information about themselves. It is reported that on an average day, Instagram users post 95 million posts with over 4.2 billion likes that photos get, Instagram, (2018). Instagram not only allows us access to a more diverse vision of beauty but has also given users freedom to express themselves in ways they deem fit. With the many filters Instagram offers, there is pressure and also the opportunity to appear perfect, with the perfect body type and flawless skin.

Fredrickson, B. L., and Roberts, T. A. (1997) in the objectification theory, relate self-objectification to sexual objectification. They identified self-objectification as the first psychological consequence to occur among girls and women as a result of interaction in a highly sexualized environment. Sexual objectification which leads to

self-objectification occurs where women are viewed as objects that exist for sexual pleasure of others.

Objectification can occur through media exposure or through interpersonal and social encounters. Social and interpersonal sexual objectification is manifested through cat calling, gazing at women's bodies, giving sexual comments or even harassment.

Traditionally, women and men are socialized differently so as to conform to the prescriptions of gender as the society prescribed. The socialization helps a woman to shape her characteristics as defined by gender roles so that she can be accepted by the society. Women are also socialized to accept the less invasive forms of sexualisation as normal and even desirable as Smolak, L., & Murnen, S. K. (2011) assert. MacKinnon, C.A. (2007) asserts that men have been conditioned to find women's subordination as attractive while women have been conditioned to believe that being defined from a male perspective as being erotic. Being defined from a male perspective however, leads to a third perspective internalization as women will begin to view themselves as sexual objects that are for the sexual pleasures of the male species.

Self-objectification which is a consequence of sexual objectification occurs when girls and women treat themselves as objects to be looked at and evaluated. They therefore act as their own first examiners in anticipation of being evaluated by others. Their bodies therefore become the site of vigilant monitoring to manage the sexual objectification.

This constant monitoring has had a negative effect on women and young girls with regards to their mental health as well as their physical health. Tiggemann, M., & Williams, E. (2012) in their study on the role that self-objectification plays in disordered eating, depressed mood, and sexual functioning among women associated self-objectification to several psychological consequences such as body shame, appearance and safety anxiety, reduced concentration of mental tasks and a diminished awareness of the internal state of the body.

As Harper, B., & Tiggemann, M. (2008) assert, media have continued to portray women as highly sexualized. The media have portrayed images of males gazing at or touching women, as well as showing images of only parts of women's bodies without showing their faces.

When young women are continuously exposed to objectifying media, they tend to adopt this as the culture and compare themselves, especially in appearance to others, Leahey, T. M., Crowther, J. H., & Mickelson. K. D. (2007). When these young women compare themselves to others, they give attention to their own appearance. This perhaps explains why many young women who are active on Instagram will post photos that ensure their physical appearance is as appealing as possible.

1.3.2.1 Geographical Context

Social media has become one of the most active platforms for communication and networking in Kenya. According to a report done by CNN, in 2014 there were 100 million people using social media, and in particular Facebook, across Africa, with over 80% via mobile. In 2016, reports show that the figure is now over 120 million.

From the study, four and a half million of the users are Kenyans. This shows the great extent to which social media is popular in Kenya.

According to a report done by Capital FM on the most followed Instagram accounts, Huddah Monroe tops the list with over 2.3 million followers. This report attributes this great following to her physique, which she normally shows off on her account. The other top account is that of Avril, which is attributed to her beauty. Another top followed account is that of Vera Sidika. She is well known for her curvaceous body and her skin lightening which she claims cost her millions of shillings, YouTube (2014).

The above accounts that have many followers are attributed to the physical attributes of a person rather than their abilities. This brings about the aspect of the gaze which eventually leads to self-objectification. Today on Instagram in Kenya, we see a lot of young women showing off their bodies in revealing clothes or in poses that will make them appear attractive. We also see many young women sharing their photos on Instagram while at the gym, perhaps to show that they are working towards that perfect body that has been defined by the society. In doing so, they end up observing themselves from a third person perspective.

We also have television programs that focus on weight loss. A good example is *slimpossible*, a program that aired in one of the local TV stations that put women on a weight loss program so that they can go back to being healthy but also attain the perfect body that has been created by the society.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

1.4.1 Social Problem

Objectification as defined by Fredrickson, B. L., & Roberts, T. A. (1997) in the objectification theory posits that the female gender is cultured to believe and act as an object usually for pleasure of men. This internalization leads to constantly view and survey how they look, especially their physique. They therefore end up placing greater importance on how they look rather than their general well-being.

Searching for that ideal body is not something that is new. For years, people have been trying to achieve the ideal look as per what their culture dictates. The difference between then and now, is that now we have the internet which has now become the principal determinant of cultural change. With the internet, a society can spread its cultural beliefs on what beauty is, not just to their own people but to the rest of the world.

Struggling to fit in to the cultural standards of beauty set, and self-objectification, which is the habit of viewing oneself from the eyes of an observer has implications on women's psychological well-being. Research has shown that many women who subject themselves to these habits face increased feelings of anxiety and shame. They are also immersed in a mental or physical pursuit thereby making them focus less on what is of importance, as Fredrickson, B. L., & Roberts, T. A. (1997) posit. These psychological consequences can result in health complications including disordered eating so as to fit into this ideal body created, depression and even sexual dysfunction.

Appearance comparisons have also led to rise in self-objectification among women. With Instagram being a strictly photo and video sharing site, women tend to compare themselves to others. We see socialites, such as Vera Sidika and Huddah Monroe who are considered popular and beautiful showing off their bodies on Instagram. Consequently, those photos end up with many likes that young women would want to get. This comparison to other friends and socialites who are popular makes the young women emulate and try to fit in to this ideal standard of beauty that has been set by the society.

Research has established that while engaging in self-objectification, participants reported disordered eating, Tiggemann, M., & Kuring, J. K. (2004). Calogero, R. M., (2005) found that self-objectification leads to the drive for thinness. This drive for thinness among young women has pushed them to high-risk dieting so that they can achieve the body they feel is perfect. The media has also been on the fore front in encouraging the high-risk dieting with the kind of messages being relayed. Women used on advertisements are of a lean size, which is considered as the perfect body shape. We have weight loss programs that particularly target women. This pushes many women, especially young girls to struggle and attain the body that society has prescribed as perfect. While struggling to attain this perfect body created by the media, they end up engaging in high-risk dieting that is of more harm than good.

Just like Noll, S. M., & Fredrickson, B. L. (1998) who postulate that the link between self-objectification and disordered eating is mediated by internalizing symptoms such as body shame, Tiggemann, M., & Williams, E. (2012) also conducted a study which agrees with their findings. In their study, they examined young women in their college years who completed a report that talks about them and assesses their bodies against

self-objectification as well as despair, disordered eating and social anxiety. From their study, it emerged that being in the know on matters with self-objectification and worry brought about by what people will say were mediators in the connection between self-objectification and eating disorder. This eating disorder was to enable them attain a set standard of body image that is considered ideal.

Body shame, which is defined as a sense of worthlessness when one tries to match up their bodies with that of another and especially where the comparison is an unattainable standard of beauty. This makes them engage in disordered eating and in so doing, engage in self-objectification, Greenleaf, C. (2005).

When it comes to physical and sexual functioning, self-objectification has been blamed for the way women feel and think about their bodies, Tiggemann, M., & Williams, E. (2012). It is argued that with self-objectification, it is easy to tell the tendency of physical activity for women, in that women who want to be viewed in the third person view, are less likely to be physically active. This means that those women who highly objectify themselves will avoid activities that could give their bodies attention and therefore an opportunity to be looked, evaluated, and even judged, Melbye, L., Tenenbaum, G., & Eklund, R. (2007).

Self-objectification as Sanchez, D. T & Kiefer, A. K. (2007) put it, promotes various sexual issues for women. Those who engage in viewing their bodies as objects are also likely not to be interested in sexual activity because they feel their bodies are not as appealing. Fredrickson, B. L., & Roberts, T. A. (1997) suggest that when they engage in sexual activity, because of their lack of interest due to their physical appearance then the likelihood of getting pleasure from the experience is highly

unlikely. Steer, A., & Tiggemann, M. (2008) also suggest that women who self-objectify themselves are less likely to derive pleasure from sexual activity because they are constantly attending to the body. They are also constantly thinking about how the body is seen by a partner, leading to more awareness of the body, sometimes feeling inadequate and being extremely nervous during sexual activity.

1.4.2 Academic Problem

Cultural studies, where this study is situated in the field of communication, is a rather new but presents interesting areas of study. There have been few studies in this field and this presents an opportunity to contribute to this particular field of cultural studies within communication. When it comes to sexual objectification and self-objectification, a lot of research has been conducted with focus on traditional media. Social media presents a new and interesting perspective of looking at sexual and self-objectification because of the changing environment and new upcoming social media platforms. As Castells, M. (2007) puts it, unlike traditional media which is reception oriented, the new media allows users to create and distribute their information, therefore having a high chance of causing self-objectification. With the internet, how one portrays himself/ herself to others will influence how people view them, De Vries, D. A., & Peter, J. (2013). While there have been studies on objectification and social media, focus has been on Facebook, which is a popular networking site. Not much research has been done on Instagram, which is purely a visual networking site, yet objectification is all about visual representation.

When looking at this study from a global perspective, studies done on self-objectification have primarily focused on the western world. This might be because a lot of these beauty ideals stem from the west. There is scarce evidence of research

from the sub-Saharan Africa on how new media, and specifically Instagram contributes to self-objectification. This is a gap that my study will fill as it is based in Kenya.

1.5 Aim of the Study

This study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge on cultural studies that have been conducted on cultural ideals regarding beauty which have been passed down from the western world to sub-Saharan Africa, and Kenya in particular. I am to understand why young women post the photos they post, and how this relates to self-objectification. I also aim to push the theoretical debate on self-objectification as I focus more on social media and specifically Instagram which is a photo sharing application.

1.6 Research Questions

i)   How do young women use Instagram and what is their motivation?

ii) What is the perception of young women on Instagram regarding the cultural standards of beauty?

iii) How does the nature of feedback on images posted on Instagram relate to self-objectification?

1.7 Scope of the Study

1.7.1 Content Scope

In terms of the content scope, this study was confined to social media and in particular Instagram, which is a photo sharing platform. The study also focused on the cultures that exist in different communities, from years back and how those cultures have

evolved especially with the birth of social media that has made consumers have access to other cultures. The study also looks at what has been positioned as the ideal culture on Instagram, analyses some of the prominent people that have promoted these set standards and how this relates to self-objectification.

This study also brings in the gender perspective and how gender roles and the conditioning from birth play a role in the objectification of women by the media, and in turn the objectification of women by themselves.

1.7.2 Context Scope

This study was conducted in Nairobi city and targeted young women of between 18 to 25 years, college, or University students. The choice of Nairobi city was because Nairobi is a cosmopolitan city. We have various cultures and the liberalization that comes from the exposure in the city makes it an ideal location for my study. Nairobi women, as reported by Daily Nation (July 26, 2022) claims that Kenyan women are willing to go all out in search for the perfect body. They are willing to undergo surgeries for Brazillian butt lifts, liposuction, hip-dips and thigh gaps- all in the search for the ideal and perfect body.

In Kenya, one of the doctors interviewed by Daily Nation revealed that in his clinic, he receives between 500 to 800 patients per month, with the clinic performing over 200 procedures every month to give these women the perfect body. Kenyan female public figures have not been left behind in these procedures. Joan Murugi revealed that it cost her close to KSH 600,000 for liposuction. Vera Sidika disclosed having spent KSH 15 million to lighten her skin, with Huddah Monroe spending KSH 1 million for breast enlargement, although she revelaved that this was not successful. The above examples of female public figures who command a huge following on

Instagram and who are looked up to with many young women trying to attain the perfect body.

While many women cannot afford these expensive procedures, many resort to high-risk dieting to lose weight, and skin lightening with counterfeit products which The Standard, (January 31,2023) reports contain high levels of mercury that blocks the production of melanin, and can cause damage to the kidneys and the nervous system.

1.7.3 Methodological Scope

This study adopted the qualitative approach. This is because my study aims to understand the multiplicity of interpretations that exist when it comes to self-objectification. I sought to discover meanings that my participants have attached to their Instagram behaviour and how they perceive the matter at hand. It used the case study method, with my study focusing on two universities in Nairobi. The study also employed in-depth interviews and focus group discussion being the data collection techniques. More on methodology has been discussed in the methodology chapter.

1.8 Rationale for the Study

This research is important because it has implications for the wellbeing of young adults and especially young women. Implications that will be dealt with will include narcissistic behaviour among young women, and how this leads to depression and low self-esteem. This research should therefore be of interest to public figures, parents, scholars and communicators, especially those in the media.

This research also has implications for the development of sex and gender roles and how they are affected by exposure to online content. It explains how self-objectification comes about with continued use of social media among young women.

Finally, this research contributes to the growing cultural studies within communication studies. This study reveals important aspects to culture and gender socialization and its evolving nature in this age of social media. This study also contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the uses of Instagram as a social networking site and the effects it has among young people.

1.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented the content, context, and academic background of the study. I have also discussed the problem statement in two contexts: the academic and social problem. I have also outlined research questions that the study will answer, and I have given the scope of the study. Finally, I have explained the rationale of this study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will define the key terms and concepts used in this study. I will also situate the study within the field of communication studies. In this chapter, I will also review theories and concepts related to this study as well as previous and similar studies done on this topic which will help justify this research.

2.2. Definition of Key Concepts and Terms

2.2.1 Self-Objectification

Before defining self-objectification, it is important we look at objectification. In defining objectification, Calogero, R. M., (2012) describes objectification as the process where one takes something, most cases a human being and treats is as an object for one's pleasure. In looking further into objectification, Nussbaum, M. C. (1995) gave seven qualities that represent common attitudes and treatment toward objects and things that when applied to a person constitutes objectification. The first quality in instrumentality which she describes as the act of treating someone as a tool for one's purpose. Here, an agent of objectification is keen to know how one can be of benefit; being used as an instrument to achieve the goals of the agent. The second quality is denial of autonomy. This refers to treating someone as lacking self-determination. In essence, a person is viewed as an object which cannot make decisions on their own. Just as an object has no free will or the capacity to make a decision, objectification does the same to a human being; an agent of objectification

makes the decision for you. The third quality is inertness. This refers to treating someone as though they lack in agency and activity. The fourth quality is fungibility which she describes as treating another person as interchangeable with others. This can mean being interchangeable with another object of the same type or an object of another type. The fifth quality is violability which is treating others as permissible to break or break into. The sixth is ownership, which the author describes as treating another like something owned. Finally, Martha describes the last quality as Denial of subjectivity which refers to treatment of another as something whose feelings and experience do not need to be considered.

Van Diest, A. M. K., & Perez, M. (2013) relate self-objectification and especially regarding women to being in regular contact to circumstances that place one as an object to be viewed. Being exposed to these circumstances make one view themselves as objects.

Fredrickson, B. L., & Roberts, T. A. (1997) asserts that the practice of sexual objectification leads to self-objectification which in turn will lead to self-surveillance causing psychological consequences and mental health risks in victims.

Sexual objectification means that women are widely seen as sex objects for male sexual pleasures. Rousseau, A., Eggermont, S., Bels, A., & Van den Bulck, H. (2018) conceptualizes it as the separating of one's body, body parts or sexual function from his or her person and reducing them to the status of mere instruments. Sexual objectification also describes instances in which the focus is on isolated body parts such as a bare stomach, buttocks, cleavage, or a bare chest, in the absence of a focus on the rest of the person, Nelson, J. (2019). This objectification can occur in two

areas. First being through interpersonal or social encounters where females are catcalled or gazed at. The second way is through media exposure where media exposes women's bodies while depicting them as the target of a non-reciprocated male gaze as well as portraying the relationship between the body and sex. With the media, conforming to the standards set, which include a thin body ideal, light flawless skin and long hair, is crucial to sexual attractiveness. As Ward, L. M., Reed, L., Trinh, S. L., & Foust, M. (2014) put it, most teen and women magazines regularly feature articles that attract the opposite sex, bringing about the aspect of women being victims of sexual objectification by the media.

2.2.2 Instagram

Instagram is a free social networking site that allows users to share their updates by taking photos and more recently one-minute videos then uploading them. It was founded in 2010 and started off as an application where one could share just photos but also had the option of editing the photos through use of filters.

It is primarily designed for mobile devices though one can use a computer to access the site and follow on updates. Before one can use the application, one must register and create a unique username that followers will use to identify him/her. This application also allows users to create tags and link their photos or videos to other social networking sites. This means that one can upload a photo on Instagram and have it shared to Facebook as well. Instagram has features that allow users to tag friends on a photo as well as disclose the location they are at when uploading the photo. It is important to note that the location one uploads does not have to be the exact location.

They can use filters while uploading the photos to maximize the appeal. Instagram provides users an instantaneous way to capture and share their life moments with friends. Since its launch in 2010, it has attracted 200 million active users with an average of 55 million photos uploaded by users per day, and more than 16 billion photos shared, according to Instagram, (2013). It has been rated as the fastest growing social media site worldwide especially among the younger demographic, Duggan, M., & Brenner, J. (2013). This growth can probably be attributed to portability, as the device is accessed on mobile devices.

Rainie, L., Brenner, J., & Purcell, K. (2012) report that photos and videos have become key social currencies online. This probably explains the success that Instagram has received so far especially with its growing numbers. While Instagram started off as a purely social networking site, over the years, it has evolved to be an important marketing tool for many businesses.

When it comes to uploading photos that bring out the maximum appeal, Instagram gives options of editing the photo to one's liking. One can choose the contrast option that brings out the depth of colours as well as brightening features that originally were in shadow. There is also the option of blurring a background. This puts and area or object in focus. Filters are also an important editing tool found in the application and will be of importance to this study. Filters can enhance colour and create vivid images. One can also create a vintage look, making a photo appear as though it was taken in the olden days when it is a recent photo. For selfie lovers, one can also enhance the appearance and the tone of their skin.

2.2.3 Gender Roles

Scholars purport that the objectifying of women is an act that we have been immersed into through the socialization of gender roles. Sinnott, J. D., & Shifren, K. (2001) in their discussion on gender roles, identify two approaches by which gender roles develop. These are: *cognitive* and *learning*.

With the cognitive approach, gender functions come about because a child's awareness of their identity comes before they know how they are expected to behave. This means that a child will discover its gender and will then engage in that socially reinforced behaviour repeatedly. Kolberg, L. (1996) suggested that in understanding development of gender roles, a child goes through stages. As the child moves through the stages, they begin to have a deeper understanding of gender. The first stage is *gender identity*. A child attains this stage at age two. Here, a child is able to point out their sex. The next stage is *gender stability*, which happens at the age of four. Here, the child relates to external features like clothing and hair to a certain gender. At this stage, a boy might say that he will become a girl if he wears a certain hairstyle or puts on a dress. The third stage is *gender constancy*, where a child begins to understand that its gender is has nothing to do with what is determined by what is seen on the outside like hair. This is attained at the age of seven. Kohlberg, L. (1996) goes on to suggest that gender development is primarily driven by maturation. It is at this stage that a child makes a decision on how they want to think of and understand gender.

With the learning approach, Sinnott, J. D., & Shifren, K. (2001) state that an individual comes to the knowledge and acceptance that will make them flourish in the society they are in. With this approach, gender roles then form the basis of stereotypes about the personal attributes of women and men. Gender roles are learned from the

environment through observational learning. A child observes the people around him behaving in a particular way, some of which relate to gender. At a later time, the child might end up imitating the behaviour they have observed. This is especially if the behaviour is modelled by people of the same sex as the child. It is in this learning and imitating that we acquire stereotypes. As Koenig, A.M., & Eagly, A. H. (2014) state, we acquire stereotypes as we acquire information about the world and our roles in it. These stereotypes exist on a cultural and personal level.

2.2.4 Culture

In defining culture, anthropologists view it as a complex system that needs an in-depth analysis while studying its components and their relationships. Birukou, A., Blanzieri, E., Giorgini, P., & Giunchiglia, F. (2013) define culture as a set of agents at a moment in time. Eliot, T. S. (2010) in discussing culture posits that we have to look at culture from the perspective of the individual, group or a society. The culture of an individual is dependent on the culture of a group, which is then dependent upon the culture of the whole society. Kluckholhn (1951) also studied culture and defined culture as a particular method of thinking, emotions and behaviour that is also passed down by signs to groups of people who attach meaning to these symbols. From the above definitions, the common denominators are values, symbols and people. We can therefore look at culture as a way of life by a group of people that hold on to certain values that are passed down through symbols. Scholars of culture in their quest to understand the phenomenon better have classified it into various categories. These categories include; subjective culture where culture is viewed as something invisible that resides in people's minds, Hofstede (2001). Another category is the objective culture where culture is viewed as being created by individuals and residing outside

them. These include art objects, institutions such as marriage systems and laws. The third category is where culture is viewed as a system of behaviours. Brown (1991) looks at culture to consist of the conventional patterns of thought, activity and artefact that are passed on from generation to generation. The fourth is Culture as a set of meanings. Geertz (1973) proposes that meanings are central to the concept of culture. Culture then becomes shared meanings that are encoded into the norms that constitute that culture. Finally, culture as an independently existing phenomenon where cultural anthropologists look at culture as a phenomenon that can be studied independently from its carriers who are human beings. For example, one can study language as a concept of culture without studying the people.

2.3 Situating the Study in the Communication Field

The field of communications is wide and it entails various issues. One of the issues is cultural studies, where my study falls. Cultural studies focuses on the manner by which a people come together to make out an understanding and meaning that they relate certain objects to O'sullivan, T., Hartley, J., Saunders, D., Montgomery, M., & Fiske, J. (1994) while studying key concepts in communication and culture define communication in two ways. The first definition views communication as a process where a message is sent from one person to another and where the message has an effect on the recipient. The second definition views communication as a negotiation and exchange of meaning. In this second definition, there is an interaction to ensure that a meaning is produced and understood by the parties involved. They go further to suggest that with this second definition, there has to be a relationship between constituent elements for a meaning to occur. These elements, they propose, fall into three groups. The first group is the text, its signs and codes. The second is the people

who read the text, the cultural and social experience that has formed both them and the signs and codes that they use. The third group is the awareness of an external reality to which both text and people refer. They summarize their definition of cultural studies by focusing on the relations between social relations and meanings. Cultural studies focuses on the socialization of specific groups and institutions with an attempt to understand how messages shaped, and how meanings are formed through the communication process.

From my study, I seek to find out meanings that are placed or understood from interactions on social platforms and in particularly, Instagram. I seek to understand what certain photos mean, what poses mean, what filters mean, and most importantly what beauty means to my participants. From this, I will get to understand why my participants post the photos they share and how their interaction with the platform makes them change their behaviour and act in conformity towards an 'acceptable' standard, with conformity being an internalized agreement with norms or rules that are established by other groups. I seek to understand the culture that is being communicated and reinforced, I seek to understand my participants and why they interact with the platform as they do, and if there is a standard that my participants refer to as they interact.

2.4 Review of Related Theories

2.4.1 Cultivation Theory

Cultivation theory, as suggested by Gerbner (1994) suggests that the images, attitudes and themes presented in the media build up over time in the minds of consumers. This in turn leads to influence of perceptions of what is real and normal. This theory suggests that the more one is exposed to the socially constructed realities that they

experience in the media the more likely they are to perceive it as a reality, Morgan (2010).
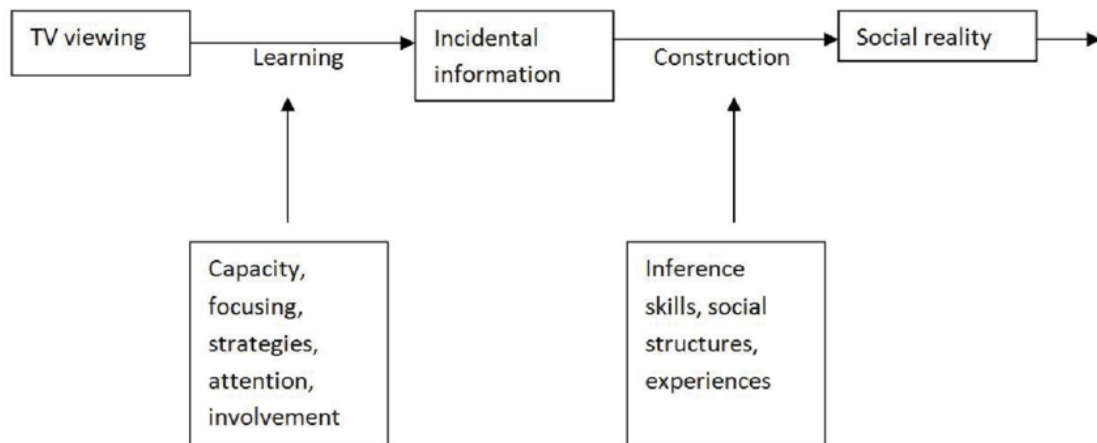
Figure 2.1: Cultivation Theory Model

When it comes to body image, many images that we see on the media feature a very narrow range of body sizes. This exposure contributes to the individual belief about normal, ideal and desirable body shapes.

As Grabe at al. (2008) puts it, exposure to media that depicts sexual objectification is related to how people then view themselves in the perspective of the third person, how they constantly monitor their bodies, how they judge their bodies and get feelings of nervousness when depicted as sexual beings.

As young women begin to think and act according to the images they receive which promote sexual objectification, they begin to participate in their own self-objectification. This is because exposure to sexually objectifying media makes the audience conscious of their physical selves in terms of how the body appears rather

than what it can do, Aubrey (2006). As Kroon & Perez (2013) assert, regular exposure to objectifying experiences socialize girls and women to engage in self-objectification whereby they internalize the view of themselves being objects or collection of body parts.

When it comes to Instagram, this theory becomes applicable where young girls follow celebrities on Instagram. Many of these celebrities have what the society deems as the 'ideal body". They are either thin, or well curvaceous, with very smooth skin and light complexion. These images that are constantly posted by these celebrities construct a false feeling of reality where they perceive the beauty and bodies of these celebrities as a reality and attainable in their own lives.

One will therefore post photos of themselves which are attractive, for the purpose of being seen and being admired as well as marching up to the expectations and standards of these celebrities. And where one does not match up to these 'ideal' standards, then they manipulate their bodies to fit into a description. This is probably why we have skin lightening creams, to make one's complexion lighter and therefore 'beautiful'. There is also the use of filters on Instagram that alters ones look to match a certain description. We have filters that can make the waist appear thinner, while others will make the skin appear smooth and devoid of any blemish. We also have clothing that is sold to give women the ideal body that is prescribed by the society. We have body shapers that make the waist appear smaller, while others give the illusion of larger hips and buttocks.

2.4.2 Social Constructionism Theory

Social constructionism theory examines how realities are constructed in a culture or a society. There is the belief that life exists due to social and interpersonal influences, Gergen (1985). It goes further to investigate how communal and individual lives are influenced socially. Gergen&Gergen (2012) also stress that with social constructionism, meanings are socially constructed through the interaction of people, and meaning therefore becomes very dynamic as it can change depending on further interaction with other groups of people. There is meaning constructed through social interactions in a group, but there is also the aspect of an individual learning through various interactions within a group.

Cojacaru (2010) suggests that people who are constantly interacting with each other in a group, over time form mental representations of each other's actions. These concepts, he says, become habituated into reciprocal roles that can be played out by other members of the society and end up being institutionalized. Knowledge and people's conception of reality then becomes embedded in the institutional fabric of society as Berger and Luckman (1996) suggest.

In my study, there is the belief of what is considered to be beautiful in a society. Our perception of beauty is guided by cultural influences and ideas. In Thailand for example, long necks are considered as sign of beauty. This leads women to wear brass rings around their necks as these rings give visual illusion of a longer neck.

Today, there is the construction of what is beautiful. This has been emphasised by the media by creating a reality of what is perceived to be acceptable. Celebrities, who many young women look up to, have constantly posted photos on Instagram. These

photos have certain characteristics that many people deem to be the ideal beauty. The kind of feedback they get from these photos then give a validation that indeed that is the ideal beauty. The result is that many young women 'learn' from observation and then imitate what has now been constructed as the ideal beauty.

2.4.3 Relationship of the Theories

As previously mentioned in this study, social media, and in particular to this study, Instagram has today given users the power to be creators and consumers of news. This is unlike traditional media that only allows us to be consumers of what is given.

In Cultivation Theory, suggested by Gerbner (1994), with media interaction, there is a build-up of themes and images over time in the minds of consumers which leads to the influence of what is considered real. In Social Constructionism Theory, there is the creation of reality but here, it is through social interaction with a group of people, Berger and Luckman (1996).

In my study, these theories are relevant because with Instagram, there is a construction of what is deemed as the ideal beauty that women today should adhere to. These perceived standards have been championed by public figures who command a huge following on this social media platform. Young women who follow the celebrities tend to emulate what is portrayed so as to be in line with what is socially accepted in the society. There is therefore the part where the images posted on social media meet certain standards, and we have many public figures who conform to these perceived standards. With these images constantly being posted and receiving positive feedback, there is a perception that that is what is normal. The more young women interact with these images (cultivation theory), they end up believing this is reality.

The more they interact with positive or negative feedback, received from the images posted, then they form their reality of what is accepted and what is not accepted as beautiful (social constructionism theory).

2.5 Review of Related Research

Research has shown that today, the way women are portrayed in the media is very unfair. This is because women, as shown in the media are exemplified as objects for use by someone as they please, Swami et al. (2010). Research has also shown that media has set the standard for what is beautiful thereby creating a basis by which women have a comparison to see if they match the standard. This definition of beauty has in turn led to an increase in young women viewing themselves as objects of pleasure. Advertisements for example, feature thin and beautiful models, and as Hendriks&Burgoon (2003) assert, there is a refereed standard for body-image in today's culture which is characterized by bodies that are extremely thin. As Hesse-Beber, Leavy, Quinn &Zoino (2006) postulate, women who engage more frequently with this media that glorifies the thin body as ideal end up internalizing this and believing that indeed thinness is ideal. The risk with is that there is a higher possibility of judging their bodies and engaging in behaviours that are they believe will make them achieve these standards.

When it comes to the influence media has on beauty ideals, research shows that men are more satisfied with their bodies than women are, Miller and Halberstadt (2005). Miller and Halberstadt (2005) also found that women felt more pressured from the media to look a certain way and that they also used the images in the media as a standard for fashion and attractiveness.

Morry&Staska (2001) investigated the relationship among magazine exposure, self-objectification, the shape of their bodies and how their eating habits can play a role in achieving this ideal body in men and between 18 to 42 years. This study found that women who interacted more with beauty magazines and men who constantly read magazines that glorified fitness were most likely to try and fit into the societal pressure of what is the ideal body.

Rousseau, A., Eggermont, S., Bels, A., & Van den Bulck, H. (2018) in their study of self-objectification found that constant interaction with television shows that depicted or promoted sexual objectifying content made viewers more conscious of their looks. According to this study, the explanation for this finding is that this constant interaction encourages people to be more cautious of their physical appearance. In his study, Fardouly, J., Diedrichs, P. C., Vartanian, L. R., & Halliwell, E. (2015) propose that media's portrayal of women is often sexually objectifying and greater exposure to objectifying media is associated with higher levels of self-objectification among young women. This is to mean that if the exposure to sexual objectification cultivates self-objectification over time, it is highly likely that the consumer of that particular media will show behaviour aligned to self-objectification.

In their study of the role of self-objectification in the experience of women with eating disorders, Barzoki, M. H., Mohtasham, L., Shahidi, M., & Tavakol, M. (2017) reported that viewing and trying to adopt to the standards set by the media on how one should look has been a great determinant of self-objectification. The more one views images that depict self-objectification, the more likely one starts to believe these images as the true representation of what is real and accepted.

In their study, they also reported that internalized medial ideals were a catalyst to women wanting to be thin. They also reported that with self-objectification on the search for the thin ideal, consumers were highly likely to harshly judge their bodies, focusing on the negative aspects. Generally, their study showed that self-objectification was present in women who were very cautious with their eating habits and even engaged in high-risk dieting. It also showed that self-objectification negatively influenced their feeling and inspired women to strive towards achieving unrealistic cultural body ideals.

Vandenbosch, L., & Eggermont, S. (2012) investigated the online self-portrayal and self-objectification, where their study showed that adolescent girls who spend more time using social media were more likely to engage in self-objectification. In their study, they tested the relationship between exposure to sexually objectifying media both traditional and new media, and the belief of what is beautiful among adolescent girls. In yet another study on what is considered beautiful from reality shows, Vandenbosch, L., & Eggermont, S. (2016) looked at how these reality shows are encouraging women to alter their skin tones through tanning, and they end up risking contacting skin cancer. They looked at whether belief in the accepted skin tone depicted in the media and self-objectification were related. They found out that there was indeed a relationship between constant exposure to reality television and the exposure to skin tanning procedures such as UV exposure.

Although a lot of research done on self-objectification has focused on women and girls, there is evidence that more and more researchers are interested in exploring the possibility of self-objectification among men. With men, there is evidence that the ideal of men with muscles as being attractive is considered a factor in encouraging self-objectification. In their study, Michaels, M. S., Parent, M. C., & Moradi, B.

(2013) found that exposure to sexually objectified images of men that gave priority to having muscles engaged in negatively judging their bodies and for men who were gay, it led to anxiety. Their study revealed that it was highly likely that gay men would engage in self-objectification.

Research has also been carried out on sexual objectification, which is an antecedent of self-objectification. In their research, Smolak, L., & Murnen, S. K. (2019) have suggested that messages that showcase sexuality in the media are now considered as the reality and this makes it acceptable for women to be viewed as objects of pleasure. For the duo, the repeated exposure to these messages validate the accepted ways to view men and women. Research has also shown that experiences of interpersonal sexual objectification such as cat calling made women respond more and faster compared to their male counterparts, Aubrey.

In a research of content analysis of daily diaries of students, findings revealed that women of between 18 to 44 years experienced cases of sexual harassment weekly. The study also reported that over 80% of women had been in situations where sexually degrading jokes were made. In this study, it was revealed that sexual objectification experiences played an important part in how men and women were socialized to fit into their roles in the different cultures, and reveal that for women, their role was to be sex objects for the man's pleasure. Winn, L., & Cornelius, R. (2020) also postulated in their study that the more frequently a woman is exposed to surroundings and happening that expose them to sexual objectification, the higher the chance of engaging in self-objectification.

2.5.1 Cultural Standards of Beauty

Rathakrishnan, B., & Chuen, L. Y. (2011) suggests that our body images involves our emotions, imagination and physical sensations of our bodies in relation to values that are mostly leaned or are expected of us due to our different cultures.

Oliver, M. B., Raney, A. A., & Bryant, J. (Eds.). (2019) argue that black women are particularly vulnerable to the effects of European standards of beauty. She goes further to explain that the reason for this is because these standards emphasize skin colours and hair types that many black women do not possess. Her research also shows that these European standards of beauty have proved to have damaging effects on the lives of those who do not attain these standards in the form of internalized self-hatred. Some women and sometimes men have deliberately altered their appearances to fit in the beauty ideals. In some cultures, women would use rings to elongate their necks, others would constrict their waists with corsets, while other would bind their feet as small feet was deemed beautiful. In the modern world, we have had celebrities undergo expensive surgeries to change their skin colour, others to make their lips bigger, others to enlarge their hips and breasts so as to attain an ideal beauty set by society.

Research has shown that women have over the years been bombarded with information in the media which reinforces their values and ideals of fashion and beauty through images of models and female celebrities Polivy, J., & Herman, C.P. (2004). Research has also proved that mass media has a lot of influence on appearance norms. Previously done research has suggested that increasing exposure to mediated beauty enhances internalization and makes young women go to great lengths to attain the body portrayed in the media. Sinnappan, S., Yee, Y. J., Nair, G.

V., & Wilson, S. (2020) suggest that girls and young women in particular are extremely affected by images showing thin female models and this has led to destructive behaviour in order to achieve the images portrayed. Some of these destructive behaviours include low self-esteem, body image dissatisfaction, and extreme dieting that often times leads to health complications.

The internalization of these beauty ideals usually stem from comparison. It id also reported that discussing social comparison theory suggests that human beings have a drive to evaluate their own opinions and abilities by making comparisons with others who they deem to be similar to them. Ibanga (2017) while discussing the concept of beauty in African Philosophy suggests that the only way one can appreciate personal beauty is if they compare themselves to someone else.
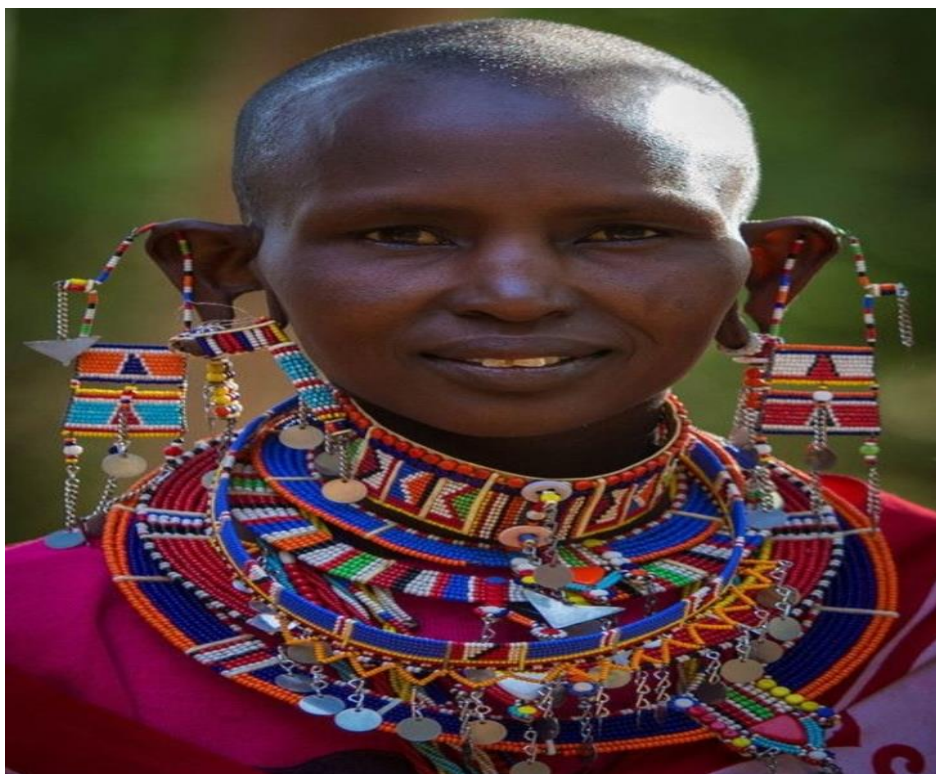
Figure 2.2: Beauty in Maasai land

He explains that the other individual will mirror the beauty of the person either negatively or positively and it is the only way that one can affirm their beauty. Young girls and women will therefore compare themselves to these images of models and celebrities they are constantly looking at, as they see them to be the ideal goal of an image.

It is also important to note that technology has improved communication and has made the world share ideas that couldn't be shared before. Before the age of the internet, each culture had its own unique beauty ideal.

Figure 2.3: Woman from Myanmar wearing brass rings on her neck

With the internet and information sharing, beauty ideals have been shared globally, thereby making women and men in their case, have an ideal standard that they look at

achieving. In Korea for example, the ideal beauty was average or overweight in size as this represented abundance, Cavusoglu, L., & Atik, D. (2022). In China and Japan, beauty was perceived as having a round face and mild plumpness, while Hispanic culture valued curved and oversize bodies.

In Africa, beauty is associated with women. He goes further to suggest that every use of the word beauty is usually constructed to celebrate womanhood or the feminine spirit. Research also notes that the idea of beauty in the African context goes beyond just external qualities, and considers internal qualities as well. These internal qualities refer to the morals that a woman holds. He goes further to say that while internal beauty (morals) is important, a woman who lacks physical attractiveness will not be desired by the opposite gender and will not even be recognised or given a special seat during functions. It is for this reason that a woman with internal beauty but who lacks physically attractiveness will get accessories and oils for her body in order to appear as being a complete beauty, both inwardly and outwardly. Some African cultures believe that a woman is beautiful when she has stripes on her face. While others might look at it as a form of violence, to that culture it is a sign of beauty. Fuleru in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) would believe that a fair skinned girl would never be bankrupt and would get married faster compared to a dark skinned girl. While this might not be true, it has led to usage of cosmetics to turn skin from dark to fair complexion, causing serious health conditions as they work to achieve this ideal.

Figure 2.4: Tattooed chins among the Maori women of New Zealand

These different ideals depending on the different cultures are however slowly fading away as these cultures are being integrated to a global standard of beauty that are characterized by thin body, flat stomach, narrow faces and round eyes some of which are inborn, but can be achieved using makeup.

2.6 Rationale for the Study

Many studies done in this field have focused on the causes and consequences of self-objectification among young women with results showing effects such as disordered eating and sexual dysfunction. Many other studies have focused on traditional media especially the television and magazines. With the new media, a lot of research has been done on Facebook and Twitter, with recent platforms such as Instagram being

ignored. While there is a lot of literature on the traditional media and self-objectification, there is very little done on the new media. The new media is in fact important when studying self-objectification because unlike traditional media which limits us to recipients of information, the new media has given us the freedom to be creators and distributors of information. This is something that literature does not cover when it comes to self-objectification, a gap that my study hopes to fill.

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I discuss my key concept which is the cultural standard of beauty and the promotion of self-objectification on Instagram among young women. I then reviewed theories and related studies that will guide me to establish the justification of the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methods that the study used to achieve the set objectives. It then discusses the philosophical paradigm that will guide this research. In this chapter I also explain and justify the choice of the qualitative approach and the case study method. This chapter will also entail the data generation techniques, the trustworthiness and ethical consideration of this research.

3.2 Research Philosophical Paradigm

Kivunja, C., & Kuyuni, A. B. (2017) look at a paradigm as a representation of the researcher's beliefs and values about the world. The researcher's thoughts and their view of life and issues in the world would subsequently guide what they do. What this means is that whatever paradigm the researcher adopts, it will guide their methodology, data collection and analysis in their research. Jwan, J. O., & Ong'ondo, C. O. (2011) explain that a philosophical paradigm constitutes a way of viewing and understanding the world and making meaning of what is under research. My research is inclined towards the Relativist ontology and Interpretivist epistemology.

The relativist ontology as Richards, G. (2018) explains, holds that there is no single reality that is not dependent on human understanding and that people construct meanings and behaviour in different ways. Richards, G. (2018) also explains the interpretivist epistemology as a school which believes that reality is socially constructed and therefore the focus of research should be on understanding the construction of the realities which develops as the research proceeds.

I chose to use this paradigm because it allowed me to produce a unique explanation of the situation, thereby allowing me to strive for depth.

The choice of the relativisit-interpretivist paradigm guided my approach, method and in turn, the data generation techniques that included interviews and focused group discussions.

3.3 Research Approach

The study took a qualitative approach. Qualitative research as defined by Pathak, V., Jena, B., & Kalra, S. (2013) focuses in understanding people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behaviour and interactions. Qualitative research gives voice to the participants in the study. It allows them to share their experiences to various aspects of the world. Jwan, J. O., & Ong'ondo, C. O. (2014) define qualitative research as an emphasis on the richness of the aspects under study and the way in which meanings are assigned. They go on and assert that qualitative researchers believe that there is no one meaning, and that in fact meaning is reached upon from the interactions and relationships that exist between groups.

This approach was relevant to my study because I sought to get a better understanding of the subject matter, which is the role that cultural standards of beauty play in self-objectification among young women. This approach was also relevant to my study because it is participant oriented and therefore allowed me to understand the perspective of the participants' world.

Jwan, J. O., & Ong'ondo, C. O. (2014), postulate that using this approach, the researcher aims at discovering the meanings that participants attach to their behaviour.

It also seeks to discover how they interpret situations and what their perspectives on particular issues are.

Qualitative approach enabled me to understand different phenomena of my study. First, there are many reasons why people are on social media. Talking to my participants on their motivation of being on social media enabled me to understand this. I also sought to understand what they thought about the photos that were posted on Instagram, this was done through photo elicitation, both of my participants and some of public figures.

This approach therefore enabled me to an in-depth understanding of the subject under study which is how self-objectification is communicated and portrayed among female university students.

3.4 Research Method

This study used the case study method. Case study is a qualitative method, and it encompasses multiple streams of data usually combined in creative ways. With a case study, there is richness and depth which helps readers understand the case as well as help in applying the findings. Yin, R. K. (2018) defines case study as a qualitative approach where the researcher explores a real life, contemporary bounded system or multiple bound systems over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information.

This method was effective for my study because I sought to take a detailed look at young women's use of Instagram and the connection between cultural standards of beauty and self-objectification.

As Yin, R. K. (2018) asserts, case studies offer the opportunity to explain why certain outcomes may happen. They go further than just finding out what those outcomes are. This is important to my study as I sought to understand the use of Instagram among young women as well as how cultural standards of beauty are manifested in the use of the platform.

A case study is useful in revealing the causal relationships between the phenomenon and the context in which it takes place. In this study I sought to understand the relationship between self-objectification and the cultural standards of beauty as portrayed on Instagram.

In my study, I had two cases, that is two universities. The universities I picked were Moi University, Nairobi campus, and St. Paul's University town campus. St. Paul's University represented the private universities while Moi University represented the public universities. The cultures of the two universities vary. St. Paul's being a private institution is more reserved, with students adhering to a code of dressing. Moi University on the other hand is a bit liberal, without a prescribed and strict dress code. While the dress codes differ between the universities, this does not necessarily mean that the students adhere to these dress codes and cultures ascribed at school. The social setting in school and the social setting away from school differ. My interest was in the setting away from the school.

3.5 Population and Sampling

My research site was Nairobi County. This is because it is my town of residence and therefore represented a reasonable budget. The choice of Nairobi was also ideal because Nairobi is a metropolitan area with many universities. Many universities that

have their main campuses in other towns have satellite campuses in Nairobi. Nairobi was therefore ideal for my study as it enabled me easily access participants.

This study used purposive sampling which allowed me to handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of my judgement of their particular characteristics that I was seeking hence helping me build a sample that was satisfactory to my specific needs. For my study, purposive sampling enabled me recruit female participant who are university attending students, who would then provide me with in-depth and detailed information about the phenomenon I was studying, which is the communication and their understanding of self-objectification on Instagram. My sampling criteria was specific to, young women, university attending, Nairobi based and active social media users, specifically on Instagram. In my sampling, I approached the university students and asked them whether they were active on social media platforms. I then narrowed down to those who had Instagram accounts and those who were active.

My target population was 60 young women from Moi University and St. Pauls University. 30 from Moi University and 30 from St. Paul's University. The universities represented the whole population of young women as it sampled ladies from both a public and private university and was therefore a representative of all young women. While a public university has a larger student base compared to a private university, the number of participants is equal in both universities because I used Nairobi campuses which are satellite campuses of the two universities.

3.6 Data Generation Techniques and Process

The data generation techniques used for my study were in-depth interviews and focus group discussions where photo elicitation was used to guid our discussion during the focus group discussion. As Yeo, A., Legard, R., Keegan, J., Ward, K., McNaughton Nicholls, C., & Lewis, J. (2014) postulate that the use of in-depth interviews in my study allowed me achieve breadth of coverage across key issues. In-depth interviews also ensured that I got detailed information about a person's thoughts and behaviours on the subject of study which is communication around self-objectification as portrayed on Instagram.

In-depth interviews was also important in my study as it was interactive in nature and allowed me to have clarity and deeper understanding, since it allowed me to ask follow-up questions to responses. In-depth interviews also allowed me to explore fully the feelings, opinions, and beliefs of the participants.

The steps used in conducting the in-depth interviews included planning, where I identified the participants, and identified what information I am looking for from them. I then developed an interview guide which lists the questions I was interested in exploring during the interviews. These questions were open ended and I used probing to collect as much information as possible from my participants.

For the in-depth interviews, I had a sit-down with the participants, and I used guided questions, to help start the conversation. Where I had doubts or I did not fully understand the response, I sought clarification which elicited more discussion. The interviews entailed a one-on-one discussion with the participants where I had planned to have 15 interviews from St. Pauls University and 15 from Moi University. I however reached a saturation point, having interviews 8 from Moi University and 6

from St. Paul's University. The timing of each interview was not fixed, this is because some participants had a lot to say while others had a few things to say.

I also used focus group discussions, both at St. Paul's University and Moi University. Focus Group Discussion involves gathering a group of people with similar background, in my case social media users who are active on Instagram. With the focus group discussion, I sought to understand their perception, beliefs and understanding about self-objectification ad portrayed on Instagram. The focus group discussions was done both at St. Paul's University and Moi University. Each group had 15 participants although only 8 were active during the discussion. The focus group discussions were informal, with the questions unstructured to help the participants open up and disclose their behaviour and attitudes. What I sought from these focus group discussions were the spontaneous reactions as well as observing some group dynamics, Sim, J., & Waterfield, J. (2019). The group dynamics from these focus groups included the facial expressions from some discussions, the tones and sometimes the body language from different participants. To get the discussion going, I used photo elicitation. I got photos from some public figures, and asked my participants what they thought about the photos. From there, we got to discuss more on the dress code, poses, filters as well as standards of beauty. I also used photos from some of the participants' Instagram pages. I only used these from those I got consent from. Also known as photo elicitation, I was able to use these photos to generate verbal discussion among my participants which enabled me to get rich data,

3.7 Data Analysis

According to Ong'ondo, C., & Jwan, J. (2020) data analysis in qualitative research is a systematic process of transcribing, collating, editing, coding, and reporting the data.

The goal of this analysis, as Mezmir, E. A. (2020) assert, is to reflect the complexity of human interaction by portraying it in the words of the interviewees and through actual events and to make it understandable to others. These interactions might include the lived experiences of a group of people, it might focus on the interplay of several cases and what it is they have that is common. The analysis might also mean, looking at the differences observed during data collection as the researcher looks for an explanation.

The data I collected was analysed using the thematic analysis method. Maguire, M., & Delahunt, B. (2017) define thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analysing and reporting themes within data. They go further and add that thematic analysis minimally organizes and describes data in rich detail as well as interpreting various aspects of the research topic.

In analysing my data, I first read and listed the patterns of experience from the field notes followed by identifying all the data that illustrate the patterns. All the related patterns were then be combined into themes.

3.8 Trustworthiness of the Study

As Rossman, G. B. & Rallis, S. F. (2011) explain, trustworthiness in qualitative research is an important concept because it allows researchers to describe the virtues of qualitative terms outside of the parameters that are typically applied in quantitative research. Ong'ondo, C., & Jwan, J. (2011) also insist that the utility of a study is dependent on the trustworthiness and give four aspects of trustworthiness in qualitative research. The four aspects of trustworthiness include: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. They explain the four aspects as below:-

Credibility is explained as the extent to which a study investigates what it actually claims to investigate and reports what exactly occurred in the field. This brings confidence in the truth of the findings.

Transferability implores the extent to which the findings of a study can be generalized to other cases and contexts.

Dependability refers to the extent to which the research procedure is reliable to enable other researchers to replicate study and get similar results.

Confirmability refers to how objective the researcher is. It refers to the degree of neutrality of the findings of a study.

I ensured trustworthiness of my study by spending enough time in the field so as to understand the phenomenon under study. Spending time in the field also helped me observe various aspects of the study as well as allowed me to speak to participants and to develop relationships that were important in my study. I used the established methods of data collection to ensure accurate data findings. I also described my findings in sufficient detail to enable me to evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn had external validity. I ensured dependability by subjecting my findings to member checking to ensure all details have been captured.

3.9 Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations in qualitative studies are very crucial in research because it involves a very intrusive way of collecting data. It involves being part of the participants' lives. There is also a lot of interaction, and it is therefore very crucial to observe ethical interaction.

The study ensured that honesty was upheld. The findings of this study are my original work. I have also ensured that referencing is done to avoid copyright infringement. I ensured respect for my participants by addressing them respectfully. I also ensured that all participants are well informed of the purpose of the research that they were asked to participate in. I allowed them to make independent decisions without fear of negative consequences. I also ensured protection of my participants through informed consent process. Informed consent was not only important to the participants but also for me as the researcher as it enabled formalized interaction between the participant and me.

I ensured that no identifiable information about my participants was disclosed so as to maintain their anonymity and confidentiality. I did this by not discussing the issues arising from the interview with others in a manner that was likely to identify any participant. I also ensured that I do not disclose what an individual had said in an interview so as to maintain confidentiality.

When it comes to avoidance of harm, I took all the necessary measures and ensured that my participants were physically, emotionally and psychologically protected. I also ensured that I was sensitive and careful with words and ensured that I did not cross the line in a manner that was likely to cause harm to the participants.

3.10 Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the philosophical paradigm that my study leans towards. It also discussed the research approach that my study followed which is qualitative. I also discussed the method, which was a case study as well as the data generation

techniques that included in-depth interviews, content analysis and focus group discussion. In this chapter I also discussed the research site which was Nairobi, purposive sampling that my study used and thematic data analysis. I also discussed way that I ensured that my study was trustworthy and upheld ethical standards.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter deals with the presentation, analysis and discussion of data collected from the field. The analysis followed the order of research questions. In collection of data, I used in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and content analysis that helped elicit discussion in the focus group. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted to all the participants, whereas content analysis was conducted for key participants who were regular users of the social media platform (Instagram).

The first part of this chapter discusses data analysis procedure. The second part discusses the use and frequency of social media platforms, particularly Instagram. The third part discusses the cultural standards of beauty and the fourth part focuses on feedback and its relation to self-objectification.

4.1 Data analysis and presentation procedure

After data was collected, the exercise of data analysis began, editing was done to detect and correct errors. Thematic analysis which is the method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns from data generated was used. All responses were then coded to facilitate their use and compatibility with the themes under study. The selection of the participants was purposive as I sought to work with participants who were on Social media, and specifically, Instagram.

4.2 Motivation in the use of Instagram

In my first research question, I sought to understand why my participants are on social media platforms, how they consume social media and what motivates them to be active or inactive. In answering this question I sought to find out the following: a)if they are on social media platforms and which specific platforms with a specific focus on Instagram and b) frequency of social media use.

4.2.1 Use of social media platforms

I sought to find out how much participants knew about social media, how they used social media and which platforms were popular among them. This study being inclined to Instagram, I was particularly interested in knowing how popular Instagram was and how many had the application installed in their phones as well as how frequently my participants used the application.

A report on Social media consumption in Kenya released by USIU-Africa in 2019 reported WhatsApp to be the most dominant platform closely followed by Facebook, with Instagram coming fourth.

According to the report, the use of social media in Kenya is as follows:

Type of Social Media		Percentage
Facebook		88.5%
Twitter		27.9%
WhatsApp		88.6%
Instagram		39.0%
Snapchat		9.0%
YouTube		51.2%
LinkedIn		9.3%
Google+		41.3%
Yahoo		18.6%
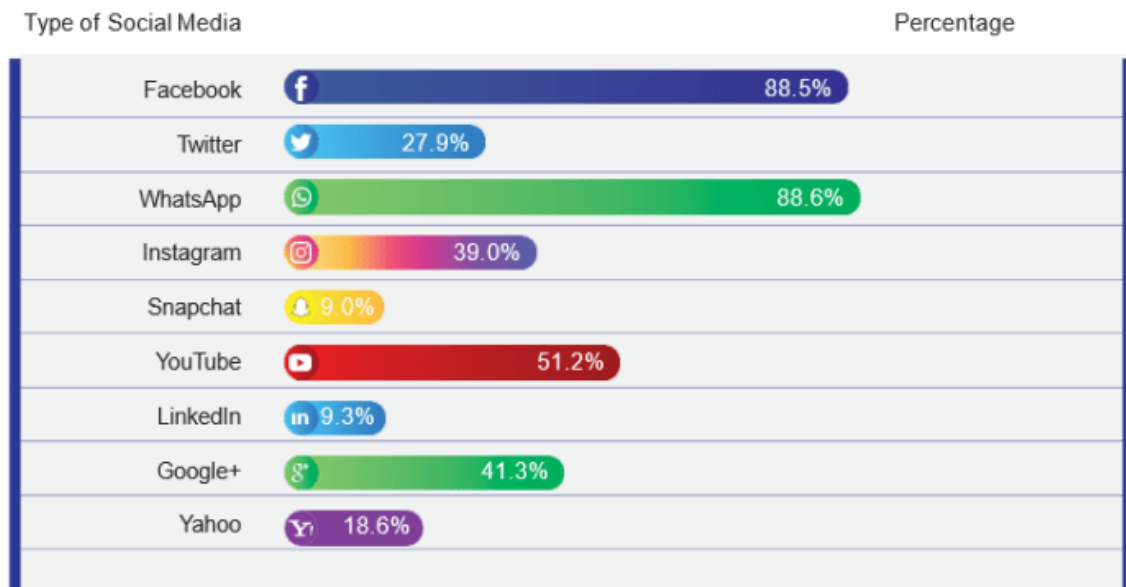
Figure 4.5: Social Media use in Kenya

All respondents confirmed being active on major social media platforms. The most popular social media platforms were Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, with a few mentioning Snap chat and Pinterest. Unlike the report by USIU-Africa that reported Youtube to one of the popular social media platforms, many respondents did not consider Youtube to be a social media platform. While they sought content from Youtube, many of my respondents claimed Youtube was not user friendly and was used mainly for music.

Napoleoncat, another social media analytics platform as at January 2021, reported that Instagram had 2,184,000users in Kenya which accounts for 3.9% of its total population, with majority being men at 52% while ladies are at 48%. The analytics also reported that people aged 18 to24 were the largest user group, hence my focus on this age group.
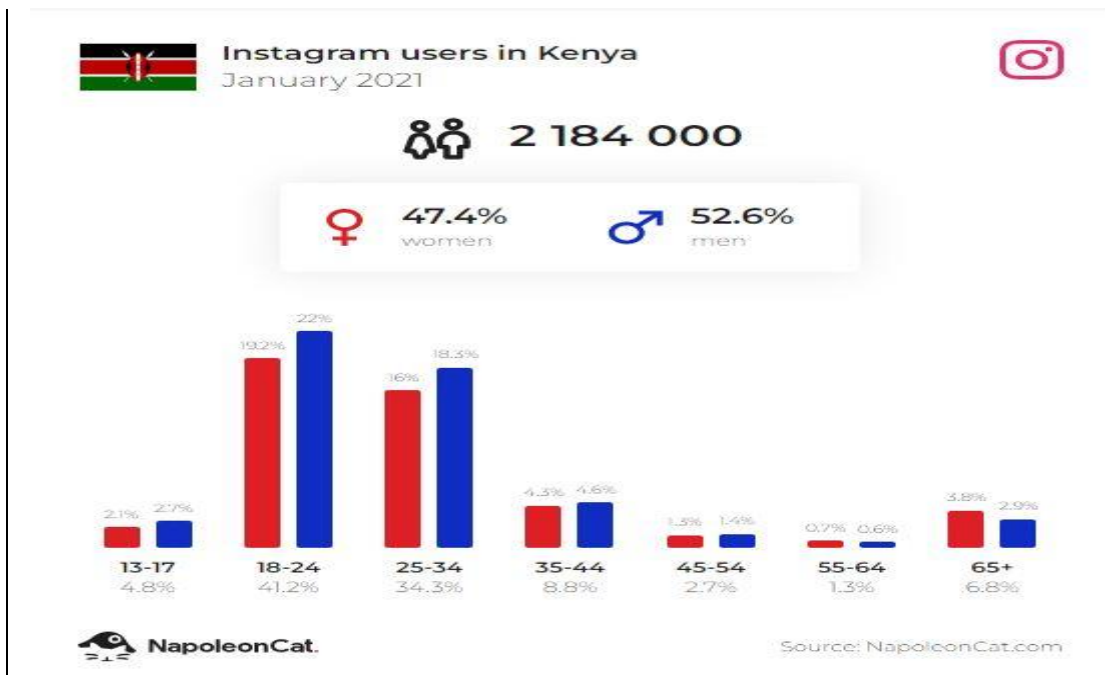
Figure 4.6: Instagram users in Kenya

4.2.1 Motivation of social media use

Being a photo sharing platform, Instagram was popular for a number of reasons from the responses from my participants. With Instagram, participants got to know what was trending, from fashion to restaurants and even holiday destinations. Instagram was also popular as it was a good networking platform with friends as well as a good platform to meet new people with similar interests such as cooking, fashion, travelling or sports. Being majorly a photo sharing application was also one of the reasons that Instagram was popular.

From the responses, some of my participants enjoyed using Instagram as it gave them an opportunity to share photos of any event or stories that they wished to make known to their followers. From the responses, the photos shared also helped in socializing. Instagram was also found to be a good platform to gain influence from the stories shared as well as photos and videos posted. Some of the participants also interacted

with Instagram to "catch up with celebrity news or gossip" such as what they were doing new in their lives, what products they were using, places they visited, which became part of the goals that some of my participants were interested in pursuing. Others also used Instagram for business. They used Instagram to purchase products and get services while still others used it to advertise their businesses.

Some of the responses:

> *Participant 1: I like Instagram as it is a great platform for me to share my photos and socialize*
>
> *Participant 2: I am on Instagram because I am able to know what is trending especially in terms of fashion. I will try and see what celebs are putting on, and the products they use, and depending on the kind of feedback they receive from those following them, I will adopt the style and fashion.*
>
> *Participant 3: I never want to be behind news especially trendy fashion and latest gossip. I get all that on Instagram. I also follow celebrity news a lot. It is one of the biggest motivation for me to be on Instagram.*

The report by USIU-Africa also reported on the motivation of social media use to be as follows:
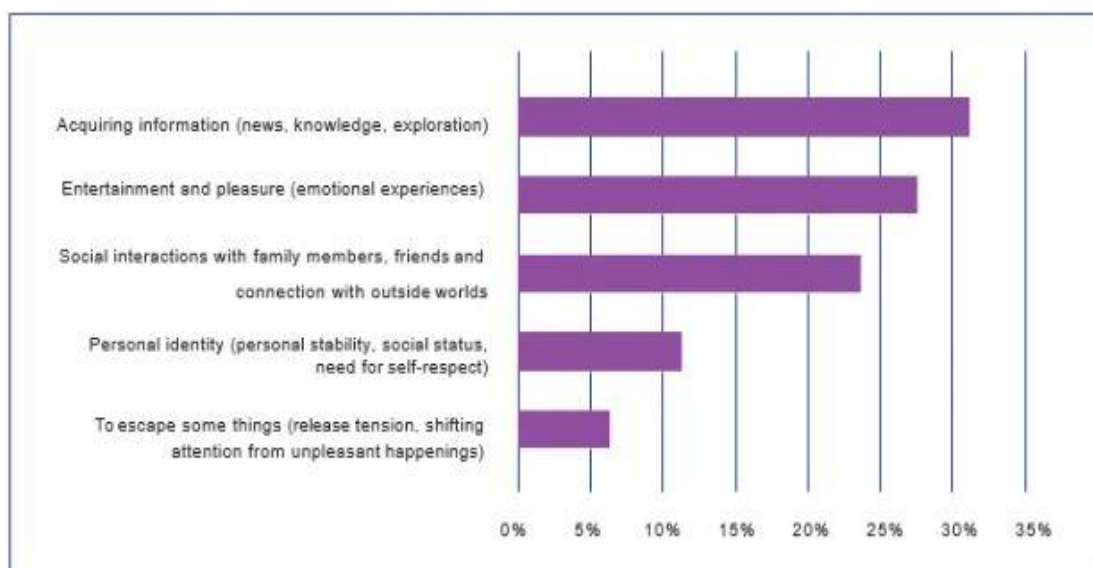
Figure 4.7: Motivation of social media use

Facebook, unlike Instagram and Twitter was popular among my respondents as it enabled them to stay connected to people they knew personally. The connections on Facebook were mostly among friends and family. Apart from connections among friends and family, Facebook was also a preferred platform among my participants as it did not have any word limitations, unlike Twitter that has word limit. Facebook was also viewed to have a personal touch to relationships and life's milestones. This is because one gets alerts of important milestones such as birthdays, friends' anniversary and other moments.
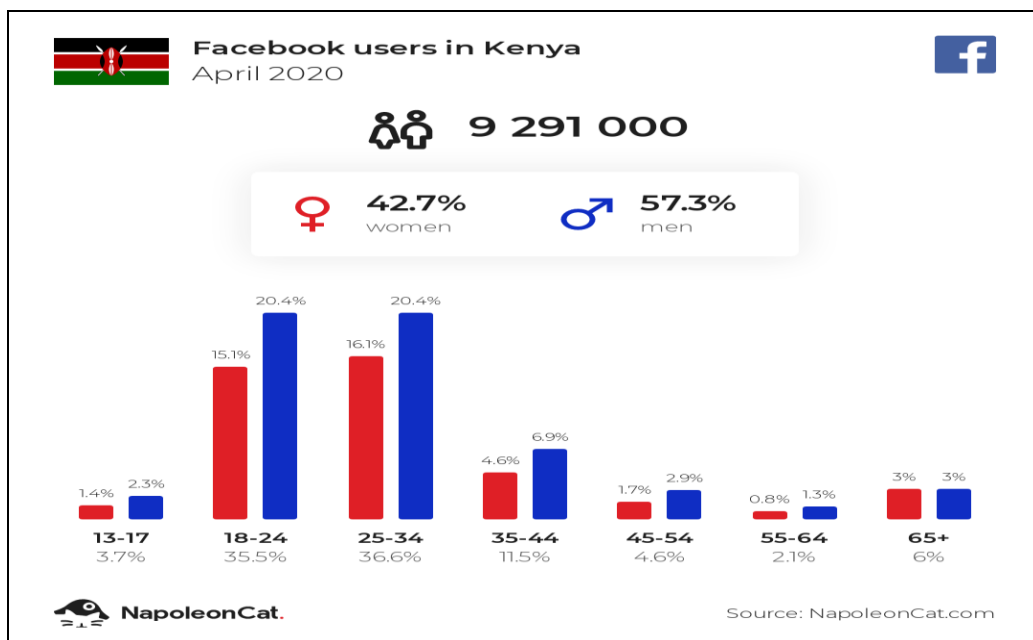
Figure 4.8: Facebook demographic in Kenya

Twitter on the other hand, was not a very popular platform for interaction. While few respondents were on Twitter, those on the platform reported to find twitter a bit formal, even though some light moments could be shared such as memes. Other users found Twitter to be important during crises as information on Twitter is real time, precise and to the point since it only allows for only 280 characters. Others enjoyed

being on Twitter as it helped them connect with people they admired especially in terms of those they looked at as being successful. Twitter was looked at as a platform for serious people who were working towards a certain goal in life and were not all about interacting and making friends. For some participants however, they stayed away from Twitter because they found it to be a good avenue for cyber bullying. When probed further on Cyber bullying, respondents answered that it was easy to be bullied on Twitter because Hashtags are easily created and people can follow through every conversation that has the hashtag and even contribute. A research by Sterner, G., & Felmlee, D. (2017) on "The social networks of cyberbullying on Twitter" found cyber aggression on Twitter to be extensive and often. Celebrities were also perceived to be the biggest target of cyberbullying as they sought to establish their brand online and to interact with their fan base. This is according to Hand, C. J., Ingram, J., Glover, K., Brodie, Z. P., & Scott, G. G., (2020) in their study of celebrity abuse on twitter when studying the impact of tweet valence, volume of abuse and dark triad personality factors on victim blaming and perceptions of severity.

When asked which platform they preferred, respondents used various platforms for different reasons. Instagram was popular with my participants who were a younger population because many respondents felt that the audience on Instagram was in their age group and could easily relate with each other. This is unlike Facebook and Twitter, where some respondents reported to find older audiences who they can rarely relate with their experiences and also find it hard to create a connection with. Instagram also proved to be popular as participants preferred to interact with visual information rather than written texts since images were more appealing.

4.2.2 Frequency on the platform

I sought to find out how frequently my participants used the platform. This would help me understand the motivation behind its usage as well as understand what exactly they look for every time they log on to the application.

From the responses, many of the participants spent their free time on social media. Some acknowledged using social media even during classes or serious sessions as it acted as a "break". In terms of daily consumption, each participant acknowledged using social media daily, and especially when caught in traffic, before lessons begin or before bedtime.

> *Participant: I never want to be behind in news. I actually feel that I am addicted to my phone because of social media. I am always looking at my phone to see what is new. A day cannot go by without me being in social media.*

Frequency on the platform was also driven by what kind of followers the participants had, what the followers shared and how frequently they shared content. Where someone you follow is constantly updating their photos or stories, then there is a high possibility that the participant will constantly be checking the platform to see what is new in their life.

> *Participant: some of the people I follow on Instagram are always updating new content. With new content always being shared, I find myself constantly checking the feed to ensure I miss nothing.*

Others frequented social media as long as they were free as this was an opportunity to share their world with others as well as get to know other people's world. In terms of getting news, the participants were inclined to Twitter as it gave them real time information. In terms of socializing, the participants frequented Instagram as they would easily follow stories and happenings of a person or group of interest.

I also asked my participants to share with me how often they uploaded their personal photos on Instagram and their reasons. From the responses received, some uploaded at least two photos weekly. Others a photo a week, yet others as long as they had a new photo that they thought would be appreciated. Asked why this frequency in uploading the photos, those who responded to uploading as frequently as they could, said they wanted to be remain relevant to their followers as well as keep sharing the happenings in their lives. Some responded by saying that the frequency of their photo uploads depended on the quality and kind of photo they had. Where they felt the photo was good and was likely to get good and desired feedback, then they would upload as frequently as they could.

> *Participant: I gained many followers because I was constantly uploading photos. This meant people were always on my timeline, and if the photos are appealing they will definitely follow me.*

4.2.3 Photos uploaded to the accounts (target and fillers)

When it came to the kind of photos participants shared on the platform, many preferred personal photos that not only showed their achievements, but also those that brought out the best in them. Photos of participants winning, or hitting a milestone were likely to be uploaded on the platform.

Participants also preferred to upload photos that show their competitive nature. These included photos during activities such as participating on go-kart or zip lining.

"I post a lot of personal photos and sometimes 'memes'.

'I am always posting photos of me, and mostly selfies. Family will also feature in my posts once in a while, and those friends I consider to be really close'

'I love nature photos. I see photos of beaches and nice places, then I would definitely post them when I go there.'

My personal photos feature the most. Photos of myself in different places, in new attires, at events and once in a while social photos.

 Other participants also uploaded family photos during family gatherings or when doing activities together. These photos they say bring out the aspect of community and show a sense of belonging. Travel and location photos were also popular. Participants loved to show new places visited especially if the place is highly recommended such as the beach or parks. For those who use Instagram for business related activities, personal photos rarely featured in their accounts. They were more inclined to post about the products and services that they offered. They would also post client appreciation photos which also helped validate their products and services.

I also inquired about use of filters in the photos, and these are the responses I got:

> *'I love to use filters. They give photos an edgy look that it would otherwise not have.'*
>
> *'It depends with the photo. If it is just a meme or a business photo, then I would post it as it is. But for my personal photos, I use filters to brighten them.'*
>
> *I don't use filters all the time. But when I use filters, it is to enhance the beauty of the photo. Filters have a way of enhancing photos, brightening them and giving the photo a better look'*
>
> *'Filters help cover a lot of blemish for me. It's like what makeup does. It makes you look amazing, almost perfect. And that is what I want my followers to see; perfection.'*

From the personal photos uploaded, many participants while looking uploading a photo that brought out the best in them also used filters. These filters serve the purpose of enhancing "beauty" by either making their skin fairer, hiding the blemishes that might be seen, such as acne or even appear slimmer. Filters are used to influence the perception of the user's followers.

4.2.4 Instagram Followers

I sought to find out what kind of accounts my participants were following and their reasons. While my respondents followed those they knew, such as friends and relatives, they also followed individuals they deemed to be interesting. From the main characteristics of those they followed, many respondents followed users who had a huge following, particularly public figures. They also followed fashion icons, or those viewed as models when it comes to dressing.

> *Participant: I like to follow public figures who have a high sense of fashion and a great following. It helps me stay in trend.*

> *Participants: Unless I know you personally, I wouldn't follow anyone with few followers. I want to know what these people with huge followings post so I can also get a huge following like them.*

Some participants also confessed to following peers who they compared themselves with, as this would help them gauge where they stood and how they can be better than the peers. When asked what they admired from those they followed especially in terms of physical qualities, my participants responded to the following:

> *When it comes to physical qualities, a beautiful body, clear skin, neat long hair   is what I admire the most.*

> *Hot body and good hair always does it. Well, thankfully, these days we have nice wigs, so even on bad hair days, someone can still look attractive and we also have body shapers that will still ensure you have that attractive body.*

On probing further what having a beautiful/hot body meant:

> *Participant: If you have an hourglass body, then you have a very attractive body. It is what we all aim for though we have different body types that are sometime due to genetics*

> *Participant: beautiful body for me means having a small well-defined waist, and be the right size- even though we are trying to advocate for plus soze bodies, the small bodies are still considered the beautiful ones. You can tell even from the media and many of the public figures; they are constantly working out to lose weight and would even come to give us an update of how much they have lost.*

While talking about physical qualities, dressing also came up as a way to bring out beautiful bodies. I sought to further understand what attractive dressing meant, to which my participants responded to mean dressing that accentuated their bodies. Short dressing that showed off their legs, or bellies was deemed attractive. 'Crop tops, tights, body cons' were some of the clothing mentioned that were deemed to be attractive.

> *Participant: You can't compare me in a 'dera' and someone else wearing a fitting dress. The one in a fitting dress that brings out her curves is definitely more attractive.*
>
> *Participant: Attractive dressing is dressing that brings out your positive physical attributes. For example, if you have nice legs, then wear short dresses to flaunt the legs. If you have a lean and hourglass body, then it will be of no use to wear baggy clothes, put put fitting clothes that show off your good physique.*

4.3 Feedback

On these social networking platforms, feedback is real time. I therefore sought to understand what feedback on Instagram meant for my participants.

Feedback was very important to all participants. Feedback on Instagram comes in two forms; either through likes or comments. Generally, a like would mean someone appreciated your photo or video, while a comment meant other that liking, they actually took time to give you a written feedback on what they liked or disliked about the photo. Feedback on Instagram, in this case-a like or a comment- can be looked at as a way of evaluating a subject's appearance.

When asked of their expectation after posting photos on Instagram, here are some responses;

'I honestly expect likes and positive comments. It is why I post'

'I will not lie and say I expect nothing, because then there would be no reason for posting the photo. I always look forward to positive comments and likes'

'I expect reaction. If there's no reaction then I know the photo failed and maybe I need to pull it down.

Participants were also asked what not having likes meant. For some it was actually "devastating" not to have likes.

Participant: Gosh, I can't imagine posting a photo and not getting any likes. I can deal with not having comments. But likes? I need to get likes.

Participant: It would be a disaster not to have any likes or very few likes on my photo when I think the photo is really good. I would actually delete it and maybe look for another one that would get likes.

Participant: Not having likes tells me my photo is not appealing enough. Or maybe they were not my target audience. Sometime if I post a very nice photo of me and my followers are just women, then I would understand why they did not give me any likes. I know men would give me likes and even comment on the photos.

When asked who the target was when posting photos, participants had different target for different photos.

Participant: when it comes to personal photos and especially those that bring out the best physical qualities, then my target is the opposite sex.

Participants: Photos that show achievement are targeted towards my peers. People who I feel I am in some sort of competition with. I want them to see how much I have achieved.

4.4 Standard of beauty on the platform

I analyzed the participants feelings on the standard of beauty on the platform by asking what meant to be beautiful with what they observed on Instagram, who they would compare themselves with, if they do, and who is it that they would like to

emulate or be like as they see on Instagram. On what is beautiful, my participants

believed certain traits meant one is beautiful:

Participant*:* beauty especially on Instagram means having a good body. If you have huge hips and a defined waist like Vera Sidika or Huddah Monroe then you are beautiful.

Participants: I think beautiful on Instagram is being petite, but you can get away with it if you are a bit big but have very huge hips. Like Vera Sidika. She is considered beautiful, and this can be seen from the number of followers she has, the number of likes she gets and comments all commenting how beautiful she is.

Participant: To be considered beautiful, ensure you have good body, and this you can enhance from the way you pose, or you can get a body shaper to give you a flat tummy and enhance your hips a little, then have clear skin and preferably be light skinned. Then have a good taste in dressing and have good makeup done to hide away any blemishes you might have on your skin especially the face.

Figure4.9: Vera Sidika, one of the personalities with the highest followers on Instagram

When participants were asked if they felt they were beautiful, many answered to the affirmative, but had reservations. This is what I gathered:

"Participant: I don't know… I would want someone to tell me that. If at all they find me beautiful"

"I believe I am but not perfect, but when posting, I ensure I post a photo that makes me feel and look beautiful."

Asked how they know of an accepted beauty standard, the participants go back to the feedback received. They look at other Instagram users, either their friends and family or celebrities. They look at the photos posted, and the kind of feedback received, and they conclude there is indeed an "accepted" standard of beauty.

Participant: When I look at the kind of photos female celebrities post, where they have the perfect body, then I conclude that that is the accepted standard of beauty. If they just posted how they looked like in the morning without makeup, and well-dressed or hiding their blemishes, maybe they wouldn't get the positive feedback they get.

Participant: You know if you post your photo and you get certain comments like 'hot' 'pretty' then you know your photo is well received, and you will actually keep posting such photos. But if I post and no one likes or comments then maybe I have not really achieved the beauty ideal that is out there.

4.4.1 Photos Posted

From our focused group discussion, I engaged my participants in analyzing and getting their thoughts on photos from their accounts as well as from public figures whom I randomly picked due their huge following.

I showed my participants photos from famous female celebrities and asked them what they thought about the images, and how they would compare themselves with the personalities from the photographs.

Figure 4.10: Selena Gomez, an American musician

From the above photo:

Participant: Well, Serena here is decently dressed, but see her skin? She is showing off her legs and her cleavage from her posture.

Participant: She didn't have to sit like that, but sitting that way brought out her sexiness. It showed of her legs. Maybe her dress is long and if she took a photo while standing, we would never see the legs. But by posing that way, then she shows off her legs.

I went further and asked if they would dress like that and post such photos, most

participants responded to the affirmative.

Participant: I would. I mean, look at how flawless she looks. I would only add some makeup. In this photo she is natural with no makeup, but I know something like the red carpet she would complete the look with makeup.

Participant: If I had the courage, I would. I think she looks beautiful and I wish I could post such photos, but I am scared. What if they don't get likes? What if

someone sees a flaw? If I considered myself perfect, I would definitely post such a photo.

Participant: Well, my weight currently doesn't allow me to post such photos. I actually avoid posting my photos because I consider myself to be a bit big. So when posting, I am just more focused on selfies. I just show my face especially with well-done makeup. But when I lose weight, I will definitely be posting such photos.

I went further to ask the participants if there was anything they were doing to achieve

these "perfect" or "beautiful" bodies. Here are the responses I got:

Participant: I might never achieve the perfect slim body, but I try to just keep fit. At least If I have my flat tummy though I am not a small size, I am still good to go.

Participant: I am keeping off wheat. I eat very little wheat. I have read in many blogs that wheat is the number one recipe for a big tummy and adding weight.

Participant: With school ongoing, I can't work out. But if I was out there working and could afford to pay for a gym, then I would make the gym my friend to ensure I tone and have a good body.

Participant: If I am able to afford, then I would definitely buy a body shaper. No one would ever now I have a big tummy because the body shaper would give me the perfect hourglass figure.

Participant: Being dark skinned, I try to ensure they lighting is good before I take photos. Somehow with good lighting, the photo will brighten. But makeup also helps. Just a shade lighter, or I use filters to brighten or make it black and white.

Participant: You know there is also beauty in having nice long hair. I realized a lot of men love long hair in ladies, but being African, we can't achieve the long hair that Europeans or Asians have. So wigs do it. There are good wigs that look like your natural hair and you can tie it however you want to bring out the best in you.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter I present the summary of findings, followed by a discussion. I also present the conclusion and the recommendations on the improvements, possible solutions and a way forward on the issues pertaining this research.

5.1. Summary of key findings

The purpose of this research was to establish how cultural standards of beauty portrayed on Instagram play a role in self-objectification among young women. I sought answers from three research questions. First, I sought to understand the motivation behind the use of Instagram among young women. Secondly, I was interested to know the perception of beauty among young women in their use of Instagram, and finally, find out the correlation between feedback that is received on Instagram and self-objectification.

The table below illustrates some of the key findings:

KEY FINDINGS
a) What is the motivation behind the use of Instagram? • Know what is trending especially in terms of fashion • Share pictures and socialize • Catch up with celebrity news • Make new friends, network and get new ideas • Get informed and entertained • Advertise products
b) What is the perception on the cultural standards of beauty? • Standards of beauty exist • Beauty as portrayed on Instagram meant having long hair, a fair skin complexion, a defined waist line and curvy or large hips • Filters were used to enhance beauty and achieve this standard portrayed • Choice of dressing also helped to enhance beauty • Certain poses helped to accentuate beauty
c) How does the nature of feedback on images does posted result to self-objectification? • Feedback comes in two ways: likes or comments • Having likes means being appreciated • Not having likes means photo was not good enough • Likes and positive comments resulted to more photos of the kind posted • Photos that were deemed sexually appealing got more likes and comments and therefore were posted more

5.1.1 Motivation behind the use of Instagram

Many young women are on Instagram to be in the know and to get entertained. Instagram is always up to date with what is trending in terms of fashion, celebrity gossip, new places to visit or things to do in town. The platform is also popular as it offers a good networking base for friends as well as meeting new people. I also found out that most young women are on Instagram to keep up with celebrities. They want to know what they celebrities are doing, what brands they are using, which many say, they end up using those brands as well. They are also keen on fashion trends that these celebrities are portraying. There are those who use instagram to share their world. They want to share the places they visit, share their successes and milestones that they have hit, as well as compare themselves with others, especially where they feel they are doing better. For some, they use Instagram for business; either to buy or sell services or products.

I also studied the frequency of usage. I found that those who used Instagram more frequently internalized the beauty standards portrayed on Instagram. They were more likely to imitate what they saw in their dressing and the kind of poses which were sexual.

5.1.2 Perception of Beauty on Instagram

Beauty ideals on Instagram are a reflection of what they see celebrities or those they admire have. From the responses the photos the celebrities post, have many likes which they translated to mean, that is what is deemed beautiful. From the responses, beauty as portrayed on Instagram meant having long hair, a fair skin complexion, a defined waist line and curvy or large hips. From my study, I found that to achieve this

beauty standard, young women were engaged in dieting that is at times high risk. I also found out that the photos they posted matched the description of what is perceived to be beautiful. Use of filters played a big role in achieving these standards, as well as the poses. From the kind of photos shared on the platform, my participants acknowledged that photos that got most likes included photos that showed the arms, legs, cleavage, buttocks, and the belly. I also found that the kind of dressing mattered. The more revealing the dress, then the more the likes that one would likely get.

5.1.3 Relationship between feedback and self-objectification

Feedback on Instagram comes in two ways; through likes and comments. From the responses, having likes meant being appreciated; it also meant that the photo was of good quality. Having likes, which is seen as having positive feedback also meant validation of ones beauty from the society. For some, it meant that their target audience had been reached. The likes and positive comments had a good impact on self-esteem and encouraged my participants to post more photos of that kind. Not having likes or having few likes on the other hand meant that people did not like the photo. It also meant that a target audience was not reached and would make one go back and relook at the photo and see why it did not garner the likes as anticipated. From my study, I found that where there was positive feedback, then more photos were posted. I also found that where photos that were deemed sexual had more likes and comments, then there was a high possibility of internalization of these photos. Where a sexually appealing photo is posted and gets positive feedback, then the same kind of photos were most likely to be posted. Where photos were posted and comments on body parts experienced, then there is a high possibility that the participants would post photos showing those particular body parts over and over.

5.2 Discussion of key findings

In this section I will present a detailed discussion in relation to the literature review of the standards of beauty on Instagram and its relation to self-objectification among young women in Nairobi.

5.2.1 Motivation behind the use of Instagram

From the study, Instagram is a very popular social media platform. Its popularity is especially because it is a photo sharing application. The motivation behind the use of Instagram is seen in how active someone is. While we have those who will only go to Instagram to see what others are posting, there are those who will actively participate in posting their photos. From my study, I found that the more one used Instagram, the higher the likelihood of internalizing beauty standards as seen on the platform. I also found that the more one used Instagram, the more likely they were to compare their appearances to those they saw on Instagram, whether celebrities or peers. This confirms the Cultivation Theory suggested by Gerbner, G., (1944) that suggests that the images, attitudes and themes presented in the media build over time in the minds of consumers.

From my findings, many people want to be aware of what is going on. Many of my participants were on Instagram because their friends are on Instagram or because they want to seek some form of motivation, from people who are viewed to be popular or who seemed to better than them. While it is a form of entertainment, entertainment is not the biggest motivator of its usage. There is the aspect of comparison, where one will compare what they have and what they see and strive to achieve it. There is also the aspect of being part of what is trending. The kind of dressing that is appreciated on Instagram is what will be internalized and seen as beautiful. Where fair skin is

appreciated, then many will work to achieve this perception, including use of filters that bring the illusion of fair skin, use of makeup that gives one fair skin, and in other instances, use of creams that lighten the skin to bring a fair complexion. We have had celebrities who have undergone surgeries to lighten their skins; and while their procedures are undertaken by qualified doctors, those who want to fit into this beauty perception will go for creams sold in the market, overlooking their consequences, as long as they achieve the desired complexion. This also confirms literature from various studies that show that regular exposure to objectifying experiences socialize girls and women to engage in self-objectification whereby they internalize the view of themselves being objects.

5.2.2 Perception of beauty on Instagram

Beauty, as we have seen is perceived differently, depending on the culture. However with globalization and social media, ideas are interacting and the standard of beauty that is pursued by many women is as a result of what is seen on the social media scenes.

From the study, where cultural standards of beauty that are deemed to be objectifying are internalized, then self-objectification will most like take place. Constant interactions with objectifying images made the women internalize this to mean that is how they should look.

Many female celebrities with profiles on Instagram portray certain characteristics in their photos; their photos show they have no blemishes. They have clear skin they are always in makeup, and lean bodies. Even those who have just delivered will appear on

social media days later, with flat bellies. These celebrities are also living to match up to the expectations of society. They have been conditioned to believe that being lean is what is beautiful. Many celebrities who are considered fat, have been body shamed and cyber bullied especially by the media. This in turn leads the young women who are looking up to them to engage in habits that are harmful to achieve these lean bodies or what is considered to be beautiful. Matching up to these standards have led to many young women to engage in activities that will make them achieve these standards. While we have people who go to the gym to keep fit, some go to the gym to achieve certain body goals, because it is prescribed by the society. Some young women have gone into extreme dieting or expensive medication believed to help one lose weight. In trying to meet these standards on Instagram, young women have engaged in the use of filters that will help bring out the best in them and cover their blemishes. Some will pose in manner that brings out curves that do not exist, all because this is what is considered beautiful. From the responses it was apparent that the use of filters was a way to enhance their photos and to get more likes and comments. For those whose bodies cannot attain these standards, many will resort to uploading photos of parts that they deem attractive.

While the standard portrayed cannot be achieved by everyone, celebrities and many women will continue to portray a reality that does not exist or cannot be achieved.

5.2.3 Nature of Feedback and its relation to self-objectification

Feedback on Instagram comes in two ways: either through a like or a comment, or in some instances, a photo can get both. From the study, a photo with many likes encourages one to post photos of that kind. That means, if a young woman posts a

photo showing a desired body in the public standard gets many likes, then the possibility of that young woman posting such photos is high. On the other hand a photo that has not been well received may lead to one posting a different kind of photo to see if the reception will be different. Fox, J., & Rooney, M. C. (2015) in his research suggest that women who share photos and receive favourable comments, are more likely to focus on their appearance as a valued commodity. It is like a reward by those who comment on these photos and this might influence their future behavior to share the photos. If the comments are many and positive, then they are more likely to post more photos of the same kind. This is in line with the results from my study, that the more the positive comments, then the more likely one was to share the same photos. The positive comments are a validation of what is accepted, and what is normal, and this is in line with social constructionism theory which suggests that meaning is socially constructed.

Modification of these photos also led to more comments and this encouraged the participants to modify the photos even more. Fox, J., & Rooney, M. C. (2015) in his study also confirms that the effect of appearance comments was robust across photo modification conditions, and in fact, some people spent more time and effort modifying their appearance on social media than they would do offline. This modification included use of filters to enhance the photo.

5.3 Conclusions

The aim of this research was to study the cultural standards of beauty promoted on Instagram and how these standards lead to self-objectification. To guide me in my findings I had three research questions: a) the motivation behind the use of Instagram

b) the perception of young women on cultural standards of beauty portrayed on Instagram and c) how the nature of feedback on images result to self-objectification.

While studying the motivation behind the use of Instagram, I found that the main reason Instagram was a popular social media platform was because it was a photo sharing application where it was easy to visually see what is trending and not just reading about it. Trending items that many were looking at was fashion and home décor. Participants did tend to follow what was trending. Those who used Instagram more frequently internalized the beauty standards portrayed on Instagram and were more likely to imitate what they saw trending on the platform.

On perception of beauty standards, I looked at the kind of photos posted and interrogated why my participants posted these photos. I also looked at the use of filters, their use and the comparison between photos with filters and those without in terms of feedback. The most popular photos posted included selfies, personal photos and photos that showed achievements. When it came to personal photos and selfies, the photos had to be 'perfect' in the eyes of the owner before they shared the photo. This meant blemishes where hidden or avoided, and only those features that brought out the best in them were portrayed. In the photos posted, there was a lot of comparison with others. Photos posted were as a result of what others posted, though not at all times. There was a lot of imitation and drive to show perfectionism. There was also a lot of conformity to what media portrayed. Most participants acknowledged following certain people who had a huge following and ended up imitating their behaviour as this was seen to be the norm.

On feedback, I looked at what positive and negative feedback resulted to. I looked at what kind of images posted received a lot of feedback and what my participants thought would bring most positive feedback. Feedback came in two ways: through likes or comments. Positive feedback was very important to my participants. It made them feel appreciated, increased their self-esteem and was also a form of validation from the society. Not getting desired likes or feedback meant that the photo was not good enough. It also made my participants post something different, while for some it meant that their target was not reached. Getting positive feedback encouraged my participants to post photos with same characteristics as this was seen to be what is acceptable.

From my study, I concluded that there is indeed a standard of beauty portrayed from the photos posted on Instagram. It is also apparent that these standards played a big role in the kind of photos that were posted by my participants. Beauty standards portrayed had these characteristics; being slender, showing of part of your body; this might include legs, belly, cleavage or arms, it also meant showing you have the perfect body, which meant hips and a defined waist line. For those who did not qualify to have these, then they manipulated what they had to achieve this. This meant, using makeup, corsets to give the illusion of a flat belly, pants that broadened hips, push up bras that helped one bring out the perfect cleavage and filters that helped hide any blemishes. From this feedback it is apparent that certain body parts plays a big role in what is considered as beautiful. Where these body parts are glorified, they lead to this internalization and ultimately people, in this case young women, end up glorifying these body parts and end up engaging in self-objectification. It is also important to note that while doing this study, I found that

there are those who had no interest in posting their personal photos, and even when they posted their photos, they had no interest in showing off their body parts.

5.4 Recommendations

The study analysed communication of self-objectification observed on social media, and more specifically on Instagram among young women on Instagram. From my first question, it was worth noting that there were many motives why people used Instagram, and why it was popular. It was also apparent that the motives were as a result of standards that have been set by people in the public light or those who set agenda. Celebrities and media have also played a big role in normalizing what should be considered beautiful and what is not. Celebrities have also normalized wearing revealing clothes that show off their bodies, also setting the agenda for what is seen as cool and trendy. By being public figures, their actions are emulated by young women, who end up showing off their bodies in the hope of getting validation through likes and positive comments. Trying to achieve these habits have led to some high-risk behaviours including high risk dieting, and body shaming for those who do not attain these standards. It has also normalized indecency in the name of attaining beauty standards while sometimes hiding under activism such as 'my dress my choice'. While we have had celebrities who have come out to defend those body shamed, they continue to promote the notion of what is beautiful from their actions. Celebrities should therefore not only call out these forced standards but also live by showing the reality.

On the perceptions of standards of beauty, culture is taught from home, which is the first society we interact with. It is important that parents inculcate and reinforce the importance of values rather than what is considered as outward beauty.

Today, there is a lot of discussion around mental health. Governments and many organisations have invested in mental health of different groups of people. The findings of this study are important in this conversation of mental health. This is because, while many young women are struggling to adhere to the unattainable standards set on social media, they end up engaging in high-risk behaviours that affect their mental health. This study will add into the insights of the mental health aspect of young women and the triggers that lead to an unhealthy state of mind.

My study focused on Instagram, but there is more opportunity for study in women who are not exposed to social media and media and find out if there is any motivation to objectification. It will also be interesting to study what cultural standards of beauty exist to those not exposed to social media or media.

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APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Are you on any social media platforms? if yes, please state which one(s)

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2. Are you on Instagram?

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3. Why are you on Instagram?

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4. How active are you on Instagram?

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5. What kind of photos do you post?

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6. How many photos/videos do you post in a day/ week

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8. Do you post photos as they are or do you use filters? If you use filters, why do you use them?

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9. What is your expectation after posting?

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10. What does having many likes/comments mean to you?

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11. What if you don't get any likes?

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12. Are there photos that get more likes than others?

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13. Do you think there is an ideal standard of beauty portrayed of Instagram?

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14. What do you think of these standards? Do they motivate you to use filters?

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15. Who do you target when posting photos on Instagram?

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APPENDIX II: SCHOOL LETTER

MOI UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL INFORMATION SCIENCES
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===

MU/NRB/IS/SA/14   31ˢᵗ October, 2019

National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation
Utalii House
NAIROBI

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: NASIMIYU JOYCE - SHRD/PGC/002/16

This is to confirm that the above named is a postgraduate student of Moi University, School of Information Sciences, Department of Communication Studies. Ms. Nasimiyu is pursuing as Msc in Communication Studies at the Nairobi campus.

The student successfully defended her proposal and is due to proceed for her research data collection. The research Title is – **"Cultural standards of beauty and the promotion of self-objectification: A case study of young women's use of instagram in Nairobi."**

The student is in the process of obtaining a research permit to enable het visit the identified research Centers. The University shall highly appreciate any assistance accorded to her.

Yours faithfully,

DR. JARED OBUYA
COORDINATOR, COMMUNICATION STUDIES
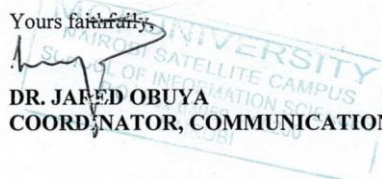
APPENDIX III: RESEARCH PERMIT

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

REPUBLIC OF KENYA

Ref No: 765474

Date of Issue: 18/December/2019

RESEARCH LICENSE

This is to Certify that Ms.. Joyce Nasimiyu of Moi University, has been licensed to conduct research in Nairobi on the topic:
CULTURAL STANDARDS OF BEAUTY AND THE PROMOTION OF SELF-OBJECTIFICATION: A CASE STUDY OF YOUNG WOMEN'S USE OF INSTAGRAM IN NAIROBI for the period ending : 18/December/2020.

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COMMUNICATION OF SELF-OBJECTIFICATION AMONG UNIVERSITY FEMALE STUDENTS ON INSTAGRAM: A CASE OF TWO UNIVERSITIES IN NAIROBI, KENYA

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