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Attitudes toward Body Modification among Women with Limited Social Media Exposure

¹Fatima Musa Hudu, ²Iorwuese Peter Igbum & ³Bossa Vivien Samuel

^{1,2} Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State.

³ Nasarawa State University, Keffi

 **ORCID:**

¹ <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-1460-338X>

² <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-9838-3290>

³ <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-1155-481X>

***Corresponding Author:** fatyhudu@gmail.com

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Abstract

With continuous proliferation of digital tools, social media platforms are increasingly becoming active agents in shaping individual perceptions and attitude. This includes attitude towards body image and body modification practices. Scholars have shown that social media is responsible for creation of beauty standards online. Platforms such as Instagram and Tik Tok are great amplifiers of global beauty trends and practices especially among women. Studies have also shown that exposure to idealised images on social media could lead to body dissatisfaction and increased need for modification practices. However, people with less exposure to social media platforms have being given less attention on the subject. This study examines the attitude towards body modification practices among women with less social media exposure in Nasarawa State. Using a mixed-method approach, it employs questionnaire and interviews to explore how women in the population selected, feel about body modification. Findings show that psychological and social factors played a significant role in shaping attitudes toward body modification among women with limited social media exposure. Respondents were not influenced by online beauty trends and thus exhibit positive attitude towards their bodies, acceptance of natural body changes as well as less desire to alter their bodies or conform to societal body standards. The researcher concludes that limited social media exposure boosts body satisfaction and reduces proclivity to social comparison. It is recommended that promoting media literacy and balanced engagement with digital platforms is key to boosting healthy body image perceptions and attitude.

Keywords: Body Image, Social Media, Body Modification, Social Comparison, Attitudes, Women.



Introduction

People's attitude about their physical appearances form part of their body image (Grogan, 2016). The influence of social media on these attitudes as well as their perceptions and belief has become an increasingly popular research area. Scholars have studied how continuous exposure to social media platforms such as Tik Tok, Instagram and Facebook has curated an idealised beauty standard especially among women (Preda, 2025; Shabeer et al., 2025). These representations are often characterised by thinness of the body, fair and smooth skin, full lips, curvy bodies and a youthful look. These standards have shaped individual perceptions about their own bodies.

Many studies have concluded that continuous exposure to such idealised images can overtime lead to great body dissatisfaction, low self esteem, anorexia nervosa and other negative psychological and physical outcomes (Perloff, 2014; Sanzari et al., 2023). Fardouly et al. (2015) posits that social media consumption leads to outcomes like comparison based on appearances, which ultimately leads to moodiness and less body satisfaction. Similarly, Tiggemann and Slater (2013) found a correlation between social media use and body image concern among adolescent girls.

Limited attention has been given to populations with less or limited social media exposure on the subject. Focus on this research area is mostly on women with access to internet and social media exposure or consumption. This study focuses on individuals who are not exposed to digital platforms in Nasarawa State. This provides a unique perspective to studying media influence on body image. It provides an opportunity to study women's body image outside the social media dominance as well as compare what these women feel about their bodies. Do they rely on personal experiences or their social environments instead when forming attitudes about their bodies? What do they feel about body modification practices outside high levels of internet and social media access? Are they more likely to accept natural body changes and ageing such as wrinkles, stretch marks, sagging body, dull skin e.t.c.? Do they also feel the need to conform to acceptable beauty standards through other factors outside social media? These questions are examined by the study in the following objectives:

1. Examine awareness of body changes.
2. Assess attitudes towards body modification.
3. Evaluate the influence of limited social media exposure on body image.
4. Identify psychological and social factors influencing body perception

Theoretical framework

The study is anchored on the social comparison theory proposed by Leon Festinger in 1954. Social comparison posits that individuals evaluate and compare themselves with others and this comparison leads one to evaluate their own attributes and abilities with that of others. Comparisons can either be upward or downward. In upward comparison, individuals compare themselves with those perceived as better and in downwards, the comparison is with those perceived as less or bad. When individuals socially make comparisons on body image, an upward comparison could lead to body dissatisfaction and negative attitude towards self.

Social media alleviates the social comparison process. By providing a platform for carefully curated; sometimes photo-shopped and even AI generated images, women with access to social media are exposed to body image comparison, body dissatisfaction and modification. Perloff (2014) agrees that social media creates an environment where users are exposed to idealised body image standards raising the tendencies for negative self-comparisons. Fardouly and Vartanian (2016) posit that the interactive nature of social media boosts comparisons on appearance more than conventional media.



Following this, chances for such comparisons are thereby greatly reduced for individuals with less social media exposure. As such, they may have reduced levels of negative self image, be less interested in set beauty standards, accept natural body changes and be less likely to alter their bodies. They may therefore evaluate their bodies based on personal or immediate social contexts instead.

Method

Research Design

The study employed a mixed method design using both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide an understanding to the research problem. Structured surveys and in-depth interviews were used to gather data for the research.

Population

The population for both research methods comprises women within the ages of 18-45, residing in selected communities in Nasarawa State who have limited or no engagement with social media platforms.

Sampling

The sample size for the study was determined using Cochran's formula for an unknown population at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, which yielded a minimum required sample size of 384 respondents. Five participants were further selected for in-depth interviews. Purposive sampling was used to identify women with limited social media exposure.

Instrument of Data Collection

A self-created, structured questionnaire consisting of 20 items was administered; responses were measured using a likert scale. Five participants were selected for in-depth interviews. The interview guide contained open-ended questions allowing for a deeper exploration of personal experiences and opinions regarding body modification and beauty standards. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and responses were recorded and later transcribed for thematic analysis.

Validity of Instrument

The questionnaire and interview guide were subject to face and content validity. Copies of the instruments were given to experts in communication and social science research for review to ensure that items were clear, relevant and adequate in measuring attitudes towards body modification among women with limited social media exposure. Their corrections and observations were incorporated before final administration of the instruments.

Reliability of the instruments

A pilot study was conducted using 20 women outside the study area who possessed similar characteristics to the target population. Trustworthiness of Interview guide: To ensure trustworthiness of the qualitative instrument, credibility was achieved through member checking, where participants confirmed the accuracy of their responses. Dependability was ensured by keeping detailed records of the interview process.

Duration of Data Collection

Questionnaire administration lasted three weeks, while interviews were conducted over a period of two weeks. The entire data collection process lasted five weeks.



Ethical Consideration

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and told that participation was voluntary. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, by identifying key themes and patterns.

Findings

Table 1: Acceptance of Body Changes (n = 384)

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
I accept natural changes in my body overtime	160	140	60	24	3.13
Body changes such as weight gain and saggy body are normal	170	130	50	34	3.13
I am comfortable with my natural physical appearance	150	150	50	34	3.09

All statements recorded high mean scores above 3.00, indicating strong agreement among respondents.

Respondents accepted natural changes in their bodies over time (Mean = 3.13). They agreed that changes such as weight gain and body sagging are normal (Mean = 3.13). They were also comfortable with their natural physical appearance (Mean = 3.09). This suggests that respondents generally have positive body acceptance and view physical changes as normal life experiences. Their comfort with natural appearance indicates healthy body image perceptions.

Table 2: Attitudes toward Body Modification (n = 384)

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
I am satisfied with my body	120	140	90	34	3.04
I would consider body modification to enhance appearance	54	86	137	107	2.23
Body modification is accepted in my community	40	60	150	134	2.02

Responses in this table were mixed. Respondents were satisfied with their bodies (Mean = 3.04), showing positive self-image. By implication, they showed low willingness to consider body modification to enhance appearance (Mean = 2.23). They also disagreed that body modification is accepted in their community (Mean = 2.02). Due to respondents being satisfied with their bodies, they generally do not support or desire body modification. Cultural or community norms may discourage cosmetic alterations.



Table 3: Influence of Limited Social Media Exposure (n = 384)

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
Limited social media exposure reduces pressure to change body appearance	150	150	60	24	3.11
I rarely compare my body with people on social media	170	130	50	34	3.13
Social media has little influence on my perception of beauty	140	140	70	34	3.03

All statements had high mean scores above 3.00. Respondents agreed that limited social media exposure reduces pressure to change body appearance (Mean = 3.11). They rarely compare their bodies with people on social media (Mean = 3.13). Social media had little influence on their perception of beauty (Mean = 3.03). Limited social media exposure appears to protect respondents from unrealistic beauty standards, body comparison, and pressure to alter appearance.

Table 4: Psychological and Social Factors Influencing Body Perception and modification (n = 384)

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
Family and peer group opinion influence perception of my body	160	140	60	24	3.13
Compliments and criticisms affects how I feel about my body	150	130	70	34	3.08
Culture affects my attitude towards body modification	170	120	60	34	3.10

All statements recorded mean scores above 3.00. Family and peer opinions influence body perception (Mean = 3.13). Compliments and criticisms affect how respondents feel about their bodies (Mean = 3.08). Culture influences attitudes toward body modification (Mean = 3.10). Despite low social media influence, traditional social factors such as family, peers, and culture remain strong determinants of body perception and decisions about body modification.

Discussion

Findings indicate that majority of respondents are cognizant of body changing patterns due to conditions like aging, pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding as well as other health conditions. Common body changing patterns recorded among participants includes wrinkly and sun damaged skin, discoloured teeth, sagging body parts, hair loss and weight gain or loss. Most participants however recognize these patterns as expected and normal. This is as Grogan (2016) notes that body awareness which is influenced by both biological and social factors, is an important part of self-perception.

A positive attitude towards natural body changes was recorded as majority of respondents reveal acceptance of their bodies and changing patterns. Few respondents expressed dissatisfaction over their bodies and fewer expressed desire for modification through cosmetic or artificial body alteration



practices. Few respondents viewed body modification as a way to improve self-confidence, attractiveness and self-worth. Some believed that altering certain parts of their bodies could make them feel more comfortable. Majority however, expressed satisfaction with their natural appearance and saw no need for modification, indicating positive self-acceptance.

Respondents also agreed that body modification was not accepted in their communities. Studies conducted in highly digitized societies have however recorded high body dissatisfaction due to exposure to idealized images (Perloff, 2014) and likelihood to pursue cosmetic surgeries (Ateq et al., 2024).

Among key finding is the role of limited social media exposure to body dissatisfaction and modification practices. Most respondents were unaware of idealized beauty standards online. This correlated with reduced pressure to conform to such standards. Respondents were also less engaged in body comparisons. Majority of respondents agreed that social media has little influence on their perception of beauty.

The study found that participant's body image were shaped by personal confidence, self-esteem, cultural expectations and interactions with members of the social environment.

Socially, family, spouses, peers and community proved major influences on body perceptions. Compliments, criticism and expectations from close social circles affected how women felt about their bodies. Respondents also agreed that culture affected how they felt about body modification.

Interview findings (Thematic Analysis)

Theme 1: Acceptance of natural Body Changes

Participants mostly viewed body changes as normal while expressing little concern about them. Changes relating to childbirth, aging, marriage, breastfeeding were all expected. Most respondents expressed belief that the body changes naturally overtime due to certain factors especially motherhood and that these changes should be accepted rather than resisted.

Among top body change patterns among women are weight gain after marriage or child birth and dry wrinkly skin due to aging.

Interview excerpts:

“ As I grow older, my body changes, and I have to accept it like that. It is normal.”

“ Your body cannot remain the same as a woman. We tend to add weight when we marry or give birth and after breastfeeding multiple children, the breasts start to sag, the hair starts to fall and you loose that youthful look. It is maturity”

Theme 2: Low Awareness of Media Standards

Most respondents were unaware of online beauty trends. Limited awareness of global ideals of beauty such as extreme curves and slim waists, cosmetic surgery enhancements were demonstrated. Due to limited exposure to these trends, the likelihood for dissatisfaction were significantly low. Their definition of beauty were instead shaped by local values, family upbringing and religion.

Some participants reported to have noticed certain beauty trends on television or through relatives with social media exposure but never paid much attention to them. Respondents believe that limited exposure is responsible for less pressure to conform to such standards they may have noticed indirectly.

Interview Excerpts:



“ I don’t have an internet compatible phone or device. However, it doesn’t mean that I don’t see or hear things from those who do. Sometimes we see what is trending on television. I don’t admire or want to be like them though. I believe that we that don’t have smart devices are more at peace with our looks. It means we are more confident and no one can influence us wrongly.”

Theme 3: Attitude towards Body Modification:

Most respondents saw body modification practices as strange and even sinful. Many expressed fear, caution and a general negative attitude towards altering their body. Such practices include skin bleaching, breasts and buttocks augmentation, tummy tuck and other surgical cosmetic procedures. Respondents viewed these practices as unnecessary and risky. Natural appearance was prioritized as participants believed body modification could lead to health issues or community stigmatization.

Non invasive self-care practices were socially accepted and preferred. This includes hair-styling, makeup and non permanent henna tattooing. Structural body changes were however strongly rejected.

Interview Excerpts:

“I cannot cut my body because of beauty, What will I tell God if I dies in the process. Even our religion forbids it. My parents will disown me and the society will see me as an anomaly.”

“There is nothing wrong in practices such as hair styling, applying henna to look beautiful or using waist beads if you want to achieve a curvy waist. I think cosmetic surgeries are stressful and dangerous. They are not worth it.”

Theme 4: Reduced Social Comparison

Participants said that they hardly compared their bodies to others. This group instead focused on well-being and family responsibilities. This reduced the tendency to compare and increased positive body perception and high self contentment. The few who said they compared themselves to others agreed that they were pressured by societal expectations mostly regarding body changes after child birth and breastfeeding.

Interview Excerpts:

“I cannot compare myself to anyone. Beauty and body shape is determined by genetics, health and financial status. As long as I am healthy and I can do my work and take care of my family, then I am satisfied.”

“The only time I compared myself to others was when I gave birth and people were saying that my body did not snap back as expected, that I still had a big tummy months after giving birth. That time I had also developed lots of stubborn acne on my face. I had to look at others to understand the differences they were talking about.”

Conclusion and Recommendations

Findings from this study, highlights the significant contribution of social media towards shaping body image and negative attitude formation towards their bodies. This is directly related to body dissatisfaction which makes body modification appealing. The study demonstrates that women with low social media exposure in Nasarawa State are more welcoming towards body change occurrences. Lack of constant



exposure to idealized images on platforms such as Tik tok and Instagram reduces pressure to conform to online beauty standards thereby limiting social comparison. It is note-worthy though that findings equally reveal that body perceptions were shaped by psychological needs and social interactions rather than digital media influences among women with limited social media exposure. Although participants were not influenced by online standards, their self confidence as well as societal and cultural expectations shaped their attitude towards their bodies significantly.

The following recommendations are hereby submitted:

1. Promote body acceptance education: Schools, organizations and community groups should promote awareness programs that encourage acceptance of natural bodies and promote positive body image among women.
2. Provide accurate information on body modification practices: Health practitioners and relevant bodies should educate women on risks, benefits and implications on body modification practices.
3. Encourage healthy use of social media: Women should be encouraged to maintain a balanced use of social media as limited use and exposure has being proven to reduce comparisons and pressure to conform to social media beauty standards.
4. Strengthen psychological and social support systems: families, peer groups and communities should provide supportive environments that builds confidence and esteem and reduce social pressures on body perceptions.

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