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## The influence of social media use on body dysmorphia among young adults in private universities in Nairobi, Kenya

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of social media use on body dysmorphia among young adults in private universities in Nairobi, Kenya. This study used a descriptive design with 23 registered private universities in Nairobi County as the target population. Simple random sampling selected 359 students. Data was analysed using SPSS Version 27, employing descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, standard deviations) and inferential methods, including Pearson's correlation coefficient and regression. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected via questionnaires, with qualitative data analysed thematically and presented in tables. Out of 359 questionnaires, 300 were completed (83.6% response rate), meeting Kothari's (2014) 70 per cent threshold for reliable analysis. The results revealed a positive and significant relationship between youths' use of social media and their body dysmorphia in Kenyan private universities. The study concluded that social media use contributes to body dysmorphia in young adults. Frequent use fosters appearance comparisons, lowered confidence, and pressure to alter looks. Exposure to idealised images increases dissatisfaction. Responsible use, however, can provide benefits like marketing opportunities and informed perspectives. The study recommends that universities raise awareness of social media's impact on body image, promote critical thinking about filtered content, and provide counselling for body dysmorphia. It suggests regulating edited content, adding media literacy programs, and launching awareness campaigns. Further research should explore social media's effects on behaviour, self-denial, and loneliness in students.

**Key words:** Body dysmorphia, digital platforms, obsessive-compulsive and related disorders, private universities, social media use, young adults.



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## INTRODUCTION

The rise of social media has transformed communication and self-perception worldwide. While it fosters global connectivity, it also exacerbates body image concerns by promoting unrealistic beauty standards (Cataldo et al., 2021). Young adults, in particular, are vulnerable to social comparisons, which intensify body dissatisfaction and the risk of developing BDD (Smith & Johnson, 2022). Exposure to idealised images on digital platforms fosters self-criticism, reinforcing unattainable beauty ideals (Tiggemann & Slater, 2013).

Body image is shaped by sociocultural factors and media influences. The prevalence of edited and filtered images on social media contributes to dissatisfaction with one's appearance, fueling psychological distress and maladaptive behaviours such as disordered eating and excessive exercise (Berze-Butts, 2021). The relentless exposure to curated images fosters self-doubt, reducing self-esteem and increasing vulnerability to mental health issues, including anxiety and depression (Fardouly et al., 2018).

Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) is a mental health condition characterised by excessive preoccupation with perceived physical flaws, often leading to severe anxiety and distress (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Classified under Obsessive-Compulsive and Related Disorders in DSM-5, BDD affects individuals across different demographics, typically emerging during adolescence when self-identity becomes more pronounced (Valadas & Santos, 2022). The disorder significantly impacts social, occupational, and personal functioning (Archer et al., 2019).

Excessive social media use has raised concerns about its negative effects on mental well-being (Dharejo et al., 2023). Image-enhancing tools and validation-seeking behaviours, such as likes and comments, reinforce negative self-perceptions, sustaining a cycle of appearance-related anxiety (Brun, 2024). The shift from using social media for leisure to identity formation has intensified body dissatisfaction, particularly among adolescents (Farrell, 2023). Young users frequently encounter digitally altered images that distort reality, further deepening insecurities (Raj et al., 2022).

Global studies highlight the link between social media engagement and body image concerns. Research from Saudi Arabia indicates a significant correlation between social media usage and body dissatisfaction, with 60.8 per cent of adolescents expressing concerns over their physical appearance (Alghamdi, 2024). In Japan, exposure to idealised beauty standards has contributed to increased body dissatisfaction and BDD symptoms among young adults (Ito et al., 2024). Similarly, in Brazil, social media-driven beauty trends have heightened self-criticism and the pursuit of unattainable aesthetic ideals (Silva & Souza, 2022).

Africa has also seen rising concerns over social media's influence on body image. In South Africa, young individuals experience increased body dissatisfaction due to exposure to idealised imagery and societal beauty pressures (Mkhize & Van der Merwe, 2023). Ethiopian youth face similar challenges, as Westernised beauty ideals on social media affect self-perception and body satisfaction (Ajeme, 2017). In Uganda, digital platforms contribute to heightened self-consciousness and BDD-related distress (Kawesa & Akello, 2023).

In Kenya, youths face increased body dissatisfaction due to exposure to idealised beauty standards on social media, according to Mwangi and Kimani (2019). Frequent engagement with such content fosters self-comparison, reinforcing body dysmorphia (Naeem & Hussain, 2022). Social media interactions, including likes and comments, amplify appearance-related concerns and anxiety (Fardouly et al., 2015). The validation-seeking nature of these platforms further deepens insecurities (Tiggemann & Slater, 2013). This study explores how social media influences body dysmorphia among young adults in private universities in Nairobi, Kenya.

Similar to other regions globally, BDDs impact people of different ages, genders, and cultural backgrounds in Kenya. More specifically, young adults have been most impacted because they use social media so frequently and at a high rate. Karanja (2024) estimates that 67 per cent and 81 per cent of Kenyan youth between 12 and 17 use social media. This has been linked to issues like image-based content, which is mainly used on social media networks and is carefully selected and updated regularly. Because of the emphasis on appearance-

oriented social evaluation and the acceptance of unattainable beauty ideals, the prevalence of content supporting appearance dissatisfaction has increased due to excessive utilisation of social media (Mwangi, 2020). This is because there is a forum for appearance-based social comparison, which promotes the objectification of oneself based only on appearance (Karanja, 2024). This has caused a rise in the number of young individuals thinking about ways to change their appearance, which has led to a high prevalence of BDDs.

Numerous studies have documented the adverse mental health consequences of youths' use of social media, linking it to diagnosable conditions such as anxiety, mood disorders, attention deficits, behaviour disorders, and suicidality (Nafisa, 2023). However, the specific impact of media on body dysmorphia has been largely overlooked. BDD, distinguished by an obsessive preoccupation with imagined imperfections in one's corporeal visage, has been connected to a broader spectrum of obsessive-compulsive disorders (Newport Academy, 2025).

While general body dissatisfaction is common among adolescents, those with body dysmorphia experience an intense fixation on specific body areas, leading to significant psychological distress. The existing literature has primarily focused on peer interactions as a source of psychopathologies, emphasising the contribution of social comparison in exacerbating mental well-being issues (Khalaf et al., 2023). Furthermore, the increase in cyberbullying on social channels has been connected to an increase in both internal and external mental health challenges among teenagers, contributing to higher rates of self-harm and suicidal behaviour (International Association for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Allied Professions [IACAPAP], 2018). This cyberbullying, along with online community conflicts and drama, has resulted in elevated youth's vulnerability to anxiety, depression, and self-harm (Khalaf et al., 2023).

Despite these findings, there remains a significant literature gap concerning the direct effects of interactive media on dysmorphic disorder related to one's physical form. This investigation endeavours to address this lacuna by scrutinising the correlation between engagement with digital platforms and the incidence and intensity of the dysmorphic disorder

and discontent with one's physical appearance among young individuals. By elucidating this particular nexus, the present research aspires to furnish a more nuanced understanding of the detrimental repercussions of online networking on mental health, particularly concerning issues of corporeal self-perception. Such an inquiry is crucial for devising targeted strategies and support frameworks focused on alleviating the adverse effects of digital communication on the psychological well-being of the younger demographic.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Theoretical Review

##### Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theory, developed by Bandura in 1989, stresses that individuals seek agency and control over important life events. It suggests that personal goals, self-assessment, self-efficacy, and expected outcomes shape one's sense of control. Through observational learning, people can acquire new behaviours by imitating others, as demonstrated in Bandura's "Bobo Doll" experiments, where children who saw aggressive behaviour rewarded were more likely to imitate it. Central to the theory is reciprocal determinism, where individuals, their behaviour, and the environment mutually influence each other, affecting goal-directed actions and reinforcing behaviours based on outcomes (Bandura, 1989).

The concept of self-efficacy which a key element of social cognitive theory refers to an individual's belief in their ability to perform specific tasks, influencing their motivation and behavior. Self-efficacy is shaped by past experiences and external factors, and it varies across tasks. Reinforcements, both direct and indirect play a crucial role in determining whether behaviors are repeated. Social Cognitive Theory shows that through exposure to idealised content on digital platforms, young adults can easily replicate behaviours, leading to body dysmorphia as they compare themselves to these standards.

#### Empirical Review

##### Concept of Body Dysmorphia

Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) is characterised by an obsession with perceived physical flaws that are often minor or unnoticed by others. Individuals with BDD engage in compulsive behaviours such as excessive grooming, constant mirror-checking, and

seeking validation (da Silva Carneiro, 2021). Classified under obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) in the DSM-5, BDD involves distorted body image perceptions influenced by cognitive distortions. This disorder shares common features with OCD, such as persistent, intrusive thoughts about appearance. Its development is influenced by a combination of biological, psychological, and social factors, including neurotransmitter imbalances, early life experiences, and societal beauty standards, which are amplified by media and photo-editing tools. The disorder's complexities highlight the intricate relationship between body image and mental health (Khemlani-Patel & Neziroglu, 2022).

Hawi and Samaha (2016) focused on the detrimental impact of addiction on life satisfaction. For example, Khoso et al. (2024) found that Facebook addicts in Poland reported lower life satisfaction and self-esteem compared to non-addicts. Similarly, Satici and Uysal (2015) identified a negative relationship between excessive social media use and psychological well-being among Turkish undergraduate students.

A study with 82 Americans revealed that the time spent on Facebook was negatively correlated with feelings of self-worth and overall life satisfaction. In Germany, a study with 583 Facebook users found that passive users who observe others without interacting often experience envy and self-comparison, leading to lower life satisfaction (Krasnova et al., 2013). Furthermore, Harris (2023) discovered that frequent Facebook users tend to believe that others' lives are better and unfairly happier, which can harm their self-esteem. A Swedish study by Denti et al. (2012) found that when individuals perceive others' lives as more meaningful, their own sense of well-being may decline.

### **Preference of Social Network Sites and Body Dysmorphia**

Frequent engagement with image-focused platforms, such as Instagram and Snapchat, is associated with heightened body surveillance and internalisation of beauty ideals, particularly among young women (Meier & Gray, 2014). These platforms encourage users to modify their images to align with perceived beauty norms, which can lead to increased body dissatisfaction and consideration of cosmetic

procedures (Mironica et al., 2024). The use of photo-editing tools and filters on these platforms further promotes appearance management behaviours (Ozimek et al., 2023). While some studies suggest that photo editing may reduce body dissatisfaction by reducing perceived self-discrepancy (Stewart & Clayton, 2022), others argue that excessive image modification can worsen self-criticism and body image issues. The feedback loop created by photo-sharing platforms reinforces negative body perceptions, leading users to become more conscious of their appearance and engage in constant self-evaluation (Culligan, 2023).

Different social networking sites impact body perception in varying ways. Platforms with a greater emphasis on curated visual aesthetics, such as Instagram and Pinterest, are found to contribute more to body dissatisfaction than text-based sites like Twitter or Reddit. Instagram users, in particular, report higher body image concerns, mainly due to the prevalence of beauty-enhancing filters and photo-editing apps (Sukanto et al., 2018). The preference for social networking sites also varies by demographic factors like age and gender. Younger users, especially adolescents and young women, are more prone to body image concerns due to their engagement with platforms that emphasise visual self-presentation. Digital trends promoting fitness, beauty, and diet culture on appearance-focused platforms have been linked to increased body dissatisfaction among frequent users. These findings highlight the need for media literacy interventions and platform-specific strategies to address the negative impact of social networking sites on body image (Fuat et al., 2024).

### **Frequency of Social Media Use and Body Dysmorphia**

Studies reveal that the more moments young ages spend on media, the more they are exposed to idealised body images and engage in social comparisons, which negatively impact their body image (Fardouly et al., 2015). For instance, Tiggemann and Slater (2013) found that adolescent young ladies who spent more time on Facebook reported higher levels of body dissatisfaction and a greater desire to change their appearance. Similarly, a study by Sidani et al. (2016) indicated that young adults who used virtual social networks more

frequently were at a higher risk of developing eating disorders and other body image issues.

The relationship between social networking sites and body dysmorphia is driven by the internalisation of unrealistic beauty standards, leading to heightened self-scrutiny and body surveillance (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). Frequent users may also face negative feedback or cyberbullying, worsening feelings of inadequacy (Perloff, 2014). A study by Vannucci et al. (2017) found that increased media use predicted greater body dissatisfaction over time among adolescents.

### **Social Media Engagement and Content and Body Dysmorphia**

Livingston et al. (2014) state that digital engagement platform is currently the most effective medium youth can access. This technology's benefits include speeding up information acquisition and facilitating communication with adult mentors such as parents, relatives, and teachers (Lenhart, 2019). However, frequent or excessive use can make it challenging to engage in other healthy activities, like extracurricular and community events (Kakungulu, 2024).

Despite statistically significant findings in a recent international study, the authors argue that the effects of digital technology exposure on adolescent well-being are not substantial enough to warrant policy changes. However, some argue that "problematic SMU," characterised by social media addiction, can lead to unsafe online interactions, fostering addictive behaviours and social disengagement (Ayala Guzman, 2024). Adolescents are also at higher risk for issues like cyberbullying due to frequent and intense social media use, as peer pressure may drive harmful behaviours for social gain (Throuvala et al., 2021). Cyberbullying's hidden nature allows aggressive behaviour to persist unchecked, further exacerbating the problem. Additionally, repeated exposure to hate speech or bullying can normalise such behaviours, making young people more likely to engage in or become victims of cyberbullying (Lo Cricchio et al., 2023). Excessive screen time can also increase susceptibility to psychological issues like social anxiety and loneliness, leaving adolescents vulnerable to digital exploitation.

### **Intervention Strategies for Social Media Body Dysmorphia**

Users of the digital platforms must fulfil the four requirements listed by the DSM-V in order to be diagnosed with body dysmorphia. An obsessive-compulsive disorders report 2013 report by the American Psychiatric Organization states that the hallmark of the first condition is a "preoccupation with one or more perceived defects or flaws in physical appearance that are not observable or appear slight to others." To fulfil the second condition, the patient must also partake in repeated sorts of manners like extra grooming, compulsive mental activity, mirror checking, or excoriation. According to the American Psychiatric Organization (2013) standards, an obsession must produce clinically important distress or impair social, occupational, or other parts of functioning for it to be considered a third measure for OCD.

The fourth diagnostic implication asserts that the patient's self-consciousness about appearance has nothing to do with their weight or body fat, which may be more in line with the diagnostic process for a disorder. A medical professional diagnosing a patient must additionally state whether the patient has a clear, moderate, or limited understanding of the severity of their condition. To address this, a proposed intervention involves a multi-step evaluation process for body dysmorphia, specifically in the context of non-invasive aesthetic procedures like neuromodulators and dermal fillers. The target population for screening will be patients seeking these treatments for facial enhancement. Given that many BDD patients may feel comfortable discussing their appearance, the intervention should be discreet and empathetic. The screening tool, based on Leslie Fletcher's model, will begin with an informal questionnaire that explores treatment motivators and potential underlying negative factors.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study was informed by the Social Cognitive Theory. This research employed a descriptive research design. The population of the study consisted of 23 registered private universities in Nairobi County, Kenya. 359 students from the private universities in Nairobi County, Kenya were selected to participate in the study.

The respondents were selected randomly. Data was collected using interviews and a 5-Likert scale questionnaire, which helped in collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. The reliability of the questionnaire was evaluated using the Cronbach's Alpha. Castillio (2009) provide the following rules of thumb: >0.9 – Excellent, >0.8 – Good, >0.7 – Acceptable, >0.6 – Questionable, >0.5 – Poor and <0.5 – Unacceptable. A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.7 was used as the threshold for reliability for this study. Quantitative data was analysed using SPSS Version 27 and analysis entailed Pearson's correlation and regression analysis. The analysed data was presented in the form of tables. On the other hand, qualitative data was analysed thematically and presented in a narrative form.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

**Descriptive Statistics**

**Preference of Social Network Sites and Body Dysmorphia**

The first objective of this study was to determine which social networking sites young adults attending Nairobi's private universities preferred. As a result, the respondents were asked to express whether they agreed or disagreed with the supplied assertions. These replies were given based on the means and standard deviation of the inferential statistics. The results of this investigation are shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. Preference of Social Network Sites and Body Dysmorphia**

	SD	D	N	SA	A	Mean	Std. Deviation
I feel more dissatisfied with my body after spending a significant amount of time on social media.	9.67%	6.67%	10.00%	25.67%	48.00%	4.08	1.152
Frequent use of social media makes me more likely to compare my appearance to others	0.33%	0.67%	30.00%	51.00%	18.00%	3.82	1.321
I often think about changing my appearance after viewing social media content	1.00%	0.67%	0.33%	20.67%	77.33%	3.94	1.274
Spending many hours on social media increases my anxiety about my looks	13.33%	11.00%	9.67%	6.67%	59.33%	4.05	1.274
I normally use filters and photo editing tools to change how I appear on social media.	14.00%	8.00%	7.33%	32.00%	38.67%	4.05	1.183
I feel pressure to look perfect when I post photos on social media.	11.00%	26.33%	15.00%	21.33%	26.33%	4.08	1.240

*Source: Researcher (2024)*

The study looked at the most popular online platforms and how they affected respondents' body dysmorphia in general. As a result, this was provided based on the conclusions drawn from each statement regarding the respondents' degree of agreement within various inferential statistical contexts about means and standard deviation.

The study's results showed that, on whether respondents felt less content with their bodies after using digital platforms extensively, the mean was 4.08, and the standard deviation was 1.152. This shows that, in general, respondents consider the time they spend on interactive sites to be valuable if it is used wisely, particularly when studying. This was supported by the fact that some respondents agreed with the statement, indicating that online community use has not had a significant positive impact on their lives and has caused more harm than good.

The mean score of 3.82 and standard deviation of 1.321 indicate a slightly above-average perception of networking site use about the belief that using interactive platform frequently makes me more likely to compare my appearance to others. However, the variability in responses suggests that some users find digital platform more useful than others.

The mean score for individuals who frequently consider altering their looks after watching online community information was 3.94, with a standard deviation of 1.274. This score, below the middle, indicates worries about how online platform competition affects perceptions and raises the incidence of body dysmorphia. The range of answers highlights even more how important a concern the rate of divergent networking platform opinions is to many people. With a mean score of 4.05 and a standard deviation of 1.274, "spending many hours on digital platform increases my anxiety about my looks" was evaluated. This suggests a lack of self-confidence, contributing to excessive interactive platform use because it heightens the respondent's anxiety about their appearance and makes them feel unlikable.

The statement "I normally use filters and photo editing tools to change how I appear on digital platform" has a mean score of 4.05 and a standard deviation of 1.183, indicating that the respondents did not value themselves, leading them to compare

themselves frequently, which increased their rate of self-doubt. The high variability suggests that some users encounter these problems infrequently while others do so often.

According to the study, respondents were asked if they feel pressured to look flawless when they post pictures on networking sites; the mean score was 4.08, with a standard deviation of 1.240. This composite score shows that respondents feel a moderate amount of pressure, which makes them feel more imperfect. This confirms that the respondents were confronted with dysmorphia.

The results showed that many respondents felt less satisfied with their bodies as a result of excessive web-based platform use, and several admitted that it did more harm than good. Exposure to digital sites boosted self-comparison and raised the likelihood that people would think about changing their appearance. Numerous respondents acknowledged feeling more anxious about their appearance, which made them more dependent on digital platforms. Self-doubt and a propensity to compare oneself to others were reflected in the widespread usage of filters and photo-altering software. Furthermore, respondents said they felt under pressure to share images of themselves looking perfect, which supports the existence of issues related to body dysmorphia.

According to Satici and Uysal (2015), people's feelings about themselves and their lives were negatively correlated with how much time they spent on Facebook. A German source study, which included 583 Facebook users, found that those who watch other users online without actively participating in their interactions experience envy and self-comparison, which lowers their life satisfaction. These findings are consistent with broader research on the frequent use of web-based networks, which leads to a lack of self-satisfaction with the natural makeup.

Facebook is a platform that people use to share their good times, unique experiences, and best moments. People's sense of self-worth and well-being may suffer if they think other people's lives are more important than their own (Denti et al., 2012). Harris (2023) found in another study that persons who use Facebook more frequently and those who check it

more frequently had the impression that other people's lives are better than their own, that other people's lives are unfair, and that other people's lives are happier than their own.

Participants in the interview shared the following information based on the dean of students' interview guide:

Participant 001 stated, "I find Facebook to be worth using, especially during the opening of a new term, as I use it to market the institution."

The following was said by participants 007, 015, and 020: "I prefer to use TikTok and Instagram since they are usually active and most of the time make me laugh."

"I have no evidence of being influenced by my peers to certain social network sites as they may always

imitate my behavior on those sites," Participant 011 stated.

### Frequency of Social Media Use and Its Influence on Body Dysmorphia

The study's second objective was to determine the frequency of digital platform use and how it affected young adults with body dysmorphia enrolled in private universities in Nairobi, Kenya. To this end, respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the statements provided. Their answers were also based on the means and standard deviation of the inferential statistics. The results of this are shown in table 2 below.

**Table 2. Frequency of Social Media Use and Its Influence on Body Dysmorphia**

	SD	D	N	SA	A	Mean	Std. Deviation
I feel more dissatisfied with my body after spending a significant amount of time on social media	12.00%	7.67%	9.00%	29.33%	42.00%	4.08	1.152
Frequent use of social media makes me more likely to compare my appearance to others	0.00%	0.00%	29.00%	48.33%	22.67%	3.82	1.321
I often think about changing my appearance after viewing social media content	5.67%	7.00%	4.67%	23.00%	59.67%	3.94	1.274
Spending many hours on social media increases my anxiety about my looks	14.33%	12.67%	8.00%	8.67%	56.33%	4.05	1.274
I normally use filters and photo editing tools to change how I appear on social media.	14.67%	6.67%	8.00%	41.00%	29.67%	4.05	1.183
I feel pressure to look perfect when I post photos on social media.	7.67%	14.67%	8.00%	42.00%	27.67%	4.08	1.240

Source: Analytical Data (2024)

The frequency of digital site use was the study variable, and the findings were based on responses to various statements that reflected the degree of agreement from a response perspective in a Likert scale, which was truncated to an inferential statistic using means and standard deviation.

With a mean score of 4.08 and a standard deviation of 1.152, the study's findings regarding respondents' feelings of increased dissatisfaction with their bodies after spending a significant amount of time on online engagement sites indicated a higher parity of how the respondents felt about their bodies when they spent much time on online community, which made them

feel as though they were not the same person in comparison to others.

The study found that respondents who use online communities frequently are more likely to compare their appearance to others, with a mean score of 3.82 and a standard deviation of 1.321. These results indicate that frequent digital platform users are more likely to experience daily self-dissatisfaction, which makes them feel like they are not the same person every day. As a result, they are more likely to injure themselves through various life dimensions of comparison, which leads to increased body dysmorphic behaviour.

The study's findings regarding the frequency with which respondents considered altering their appearance after viewing interactive platform content showed a mean of 3.94 and a standard deviation of 1.274, indicating that most respondents agreed that they frequently consider altering their appearance after visiting various digital engagement platforms and viewing different parametric dimensions that are more attractive than them. This further supported the notion that respondents' bodies and appearances may become distorted to conform to the images they see on their platforms.

Regarding the question of whether spending much time on networking sites makes respondents feel more anxious about their appearance, the study confirmed that it had a mean of 4.05, indicating a high rate of agreement with the statement, and a standard deviation of 1.274, indicating a high rate of statement congruency. As a result, the researcher concluded that the respondents' extensive use of online platforms contributed to their high exposure to body dysmorphia.

The study's findings regarding the respondents' typical use of filters and photo editing software to alter their online personas were confirmed by a mean score of 4.05 and a standard deviation of 1.183, indicating that most respondents agreed with the findings. The findings also revealed that the primary motivation behind their use of these tools was their desire to resemble others, which resulted in a lack of love for themselves and a distortion of who they were, which in turn led to a higher rate of body dysmorphia among themselves.

The research conducted to determine whether the participants feel pressured to appear flawless when they share photos on digital platforms produced a mean score of 4.08 and a standard deviation of 1.240, indicating a strong correlation between the respondents' responses and how they arranged themselves to fit the appearances of others. This confirmed that the participants were incredibly selfless when sharing photos of themselves on digital platforms most frequently, which created a sense of pressure on themselves and contributed to the interactive platform threat of abattoirs.

The study's findings, which focused on determining the frequency of networking site use and its impact on body dysmorphia among young adults in private

universities, generally indicated a higher rate of positivism with the statements at hand based on how the respondents were full of embracing digital community use. These findings were in line with those of Sidani et al. (2016), who found that young adults who used networking communities more frequently were more likely to develop eating disorders and other body image issues; additionally, frequent users are more likely to experience cyberbullying or negative feedback, both of which can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and body dysmorphia (Perloff, 2014) they also supported the findings of Vannucci et al. (2017), who showed that increased media use predicted greater body dissatisfaction among adolescents over time.

Long-term digital platform use was found to raise body dissatisfaction, with many respondents believing their appearances fell short of those they saw online. Regular digital site users were more inclined to compare their appearance to that of others, which increased their risk of self-doubt, worry, and contemplation of changing their appearance. In an effort to fit in with perceived beauty standards, several respondents acknowledged altering their online personalities through the use of filters and photo editing software. The study also found that SMU exacerbated body image issues by creating a sense of pressure to look perfect.

According to the dean of students' interview, the study produced disparate results.

*"I rarely use social media because there are a lot of young adults there who always have behaviors that are not pleasing, especially to elderly people like me,"* Participant 014 stated.

*"Because I'm not used to using social media, I'm always comfortable with how I look and therefore I don't find any issues with my body,"* stated Participant 004.

The only time, according to Participant 011, that she has ever felt self-disgusting over social media comparisons with other people was when she realised her appearance was unwelcoming and nearly committed suicide as a result.

Participant 003 stated, *"I like other people's posts on social media without leaving a comment because I want to make them feel loved and cared for."*

**Influence of Social Media Engagement on Body Dysmorphia**

As a result, the respondents were asked to provide their opinions regarding whether they agreed or disagreed with the statements provided, and these responses were also provided based on the inferential

statistics through means and standard deviation. The results of this are provided in Table 3 below. The third objective of the study was to ascertain the influence of SMEs on body dysmorphia among young adults in private universities in Nairobi, Kenya.

**Table 3. Influence of Social Media Engagement on Body Dysmorphia**

	SD	D	N	SA	A	Mean	Std. Deviation
Viewing posts of influencers and celebrities with idealised body images makes me feel dissatisfied with my own body	12.00%	7.67%	9.00%	29.33%	42.00%	3.97	1.277
Exposure to fitness and diet content on social media increases my desire to change my body	0.00%	0.00%	29.00%	48.33%	22.67%	4.07	1.155
Seeing edited and filtered photos of others on social media makes me more critical of my natural appearance.	5.67%	7.00%	4.67%	23.00%	59.67%	4.09	1.168
I feel more self-conscious about my appearance after viewing social media content that highlights physical attractiveness.	13.33%	11.00%	9.67%	6.67%	59.33%	3.97	1.214
Social media advertisements and promotions for beauty and fitness products make me more dissatisfied with my body.	14.00%	8.00%	7.33%	32.00%	38.67%	3.93	1.233
Comparing myself to the 'perfect' images on social media makes me feel anxious about my body	11.00%	26.33%	15.00%	21.33%	26.33%	4.21	1.005

Source: Researcher (2024)

The statements representing the degree of agreement from the response perspective in the Likert scale truncated to inferential statistics through means and standard deviation were used to present the findings based on SME in line with the study variable under study.

The majority of respondents agreed that whenever they view posts of influencers and celebrities with idealised body images, they always have self-doubt about their body makeup, which increases the rate of body dissatisfaction. The study regarding the respondents' perceptions of whether viewing posts of these individuals makes them feel dissatisfied with their bodies found a mean score of 3.97 and a standard deviation of 1.277.

The study found that the respondents' desire to change their bodies increased when exposed to fitness and diet content on social media, with a mean score of 4.07 and a standard deviation of 1.155. These results indicate that when respondents have a strong admiration for fitness but do not find it within themselves, they seek external exposure, which makes them hate themselves and puts them in a situation where they dislike their appearance daily, increasing the likelihood of experiencing body dysmorphia.

Most respondents agreed that when they see edited and filtered photos of others, they always aspire to be like them and try everything to discomfiture themselves to fit those external appearances, which increases the likelihood of body dysmorphia. The

study examined whether seeing edited and filtered photos of others on social media makes me more critical of my natural appearance. After data analysis, the study's mean was 4.09, and the standard deviation was 1.168.

Regarding whether the respondents feel more self-conscious about their appearance after seeing social media content that emphasises physical attractiveness, the study confirmed that it had a mean of 3.97, indicating a high rate of agreement with the statement, and a standard deviation of 1.214, indicating that there was a high rate of statement agreement, which was interpreted as positive feedback. As a result, the researcher established that the respondents were likely to compare their photos with those of others on the social media platform of their choice, creating the impression that they have differing opinions about their appearance. This confirmed the high rate of exposure to body dysmorphia.

Most respondents strongly agreed that social media advertisements on promotional products for beauty and fitness always engulf them to be like those on the product; therefore, through comparison, they feel like they are not as good as they would wish. The study findings established that a lack of self-control through social media makes many youths frustrated by life based on their appearances. The study findings on whether social media advertisements and promotions for beauty and fitness products make me more dissatisfied with my body were confirmed through a mean score of 3.93 and a standard deviation of 1.233.

The study aimed to determine whether comparing oneself to social media's "perfect" images causes anxiety about one's body. It found that the mean score was 4.21, and the standard deviation was 1.005. This indicated that the respondents' rate of self-conflict about their appearance was very high, as they constantly found new comments about their appearance on various social media platforms, making them feel incompetent. This increased their rate of personal dislike, which in turn increased their rate of body dysmorphia.

The majority of participants acknowledged that they experienced self-doubt and body dissatisfaction as a result of seeing posts from celebrities and

influencers. Their drive to change their look was heightened by exposure to diet and fitness content, which frequently led to frustration and a poor opinion of themselves. Numerous respondents had a skewed perception of their bodies and increased self-criticism because they wanted to look like the people in photographs that had been altered and filtered. Self-consciousness was increased by social media posts that emphasised physical attractiveness, which strengthened body dissatisfaction and encouraged comparisons. People's feelings of inadequacy were exacerbated by advertisements for fitness and beauty products. Regular exposure to "perfect" social media images also raised anxiety and self-conflict, which elevated the risk of developing body dysmorphia, according to the study.

While different researchers had differing opinions about how social media engagement was a significant factor in their research, the findings based on social media engagement were consistent. For example, the study by Çakar-Mengü and Mengü (2023) confirmed that teens who use social media excessively and inappropriately are more likely to encounter cyberbullying and online harassment, which affects between 37 and 70 per cent of the general population.

It also confirmed the findings of Tran et al. (2023), who discovered that teens with intellectual and developmental disabilities who are cyber-victimised have a high probability of experiencing depression and that excessive use of social media is linked to low self-esteem. Balluerka et al. (2023) also found that bullying has been linked in multiple studies to adverse psychological effects like depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem.

The study observed that varied answers were obtained based on the perspectives of the dean of students in the interview guide.

Participant 006 stated, *"I have never felt pressured to post anything on social media because I am aware of the negative effects it can have on people, especially when someone is trying to bully you."*

Participant 014 stated, *"I cannot tell which content made me feel positive or negative as long as I don't post any content on social media. This is also articulated by the fact that I am not a frequent user of social media,"* further supported this.

**Body Dysmorphia among Youth**

The dependent variable on body dysmorphia among young adults in private universities in Nairobi, Kenya, was the study's fourth objective. Accordingly, respondents were asked to indicate

whether they agreed or disagreed with the statements provided, and their answers were also based on the means and standard deviation of the inferential statistics. The results of this are shown in Table 4.8 below.

**Table 4. Body Dysmorphia among Youth**

		Frequency-social media use	Social media engagement	Preference for social network sites	Body dysmorphia among youth
Body dysmorphia among youth	Pearson Correlation	.583**	.697**	.491**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.021	0.010	
	N	300	300	300	300
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)					

Source: Researcher (2024)

The respondents generally perceive that body dysmorphia can be avoided through strict regulations based on SMU as moderately adequate, as indicated by the mean score of 3.90 with a standard deviation of 1.125 for dysmorphia. Regarding the need for young adults to be informed about self-acceptance, the mean score of 3.76 and standard deviation of 1.333 indicate that respondents generally need information on self-acceptance. The response suggests that youths should always be coached, especially on the negative effects of frequent use of social media.

Social media should be regulated, especially to avoid cyberbullying. The mean score was 3.73 with a standard deviation of 1.380, suggesting a generally positive perception of platform variety, though responses vary significantly. The statement "Young adults should be encouraged to love the way they are

to avoid lowering their dignity" has a mean score of 3.79 and a standard deviation of 1.324. This score indicates that respondents find youths should always have mentors on the addictive nature of social media so that they are not carried away by the waves that occur in those social media platforms.

With a standard deviation of 1.256, the mean score for the issue of whether or not self-esteem should be taught to young adults to prevent the dysmorphia effect is 3.89, indicating a moderately positive perception of self-esteem that should be taught in various higher education institutions for the youths to avoid issues related to body dysmorphia.

**Correlation Analysis**

Table 5 below presents the correlation data showing a statistically significant association between juvenile body dysmorphia and social media activity.

**Table 5. Correlation Results**

		Frequency-social media use	Social media engagement	Preference for social network sites	Body dysmorphia among youth
Body dysmorphia among youth	Pearson Correlation	.583**	.697**	.491**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.021	0.010	
	N	300	300	300	300
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)					

Source: Researcher (2024)

These results suggest that social media usage frequency ( $r = .583, p < 0.05$ ) has a moderate positive correlation with body dysmorphia, meaning that more SMU is linked to higher levels of body image dissatisfaction; social media engagement ( $r = .697, p < 0.05$ ) has a stronger positive correlation, meaning that the more people use social media platforms, the more body dysmorphia they have; preference of social network sites ( $r = .491, p < 0.05$ ) suggests that the preference of social media may also have an impact on body image concerns. Taken together, these results indicate that social media usage

frequency and social media engagement are significant factors in the development of body dysmorphia in young people.

**Regression Analysis**

To determine the impact of social media engagement, frequency of use, and social media content on body dysmorphia in young people, regression analysis was utilised. The results of this analysis, including model fitness, regression coefficients, and analysis of variance, are presented in Tables 6, 8, and 7, respectively.

**Table 6. Model Fitness**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.802 <sup>a</sup>	.643	.639	.53513

a. Predictors: (Constant), PSN, FSMU, SME

The model adequately links the variables, as evidenced by the R-value, representing the correlation coefficient between the predictors and the dependent variable. The R-value of 0.802 indicates a higher positive correlation between the predictors and the dependent variable, suggesting that the predictors collectively explain a substantial portion

of the variance in body dysmorphia among youth in Nairobi private universities. The FSMU, engagement, and preference explain approximately 64.3 per cent of the variance in body dysmorphia among youths in Nairobi's private universities. Other factors outside the scope of this study account for the remaining variance.

**TABLE 7. Analysis of Variance**

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	152.542	3	50.847	177.561	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	84.764	296	.286		
	Total	237.307	299			

a. Dependent Variable: BDAY  
 b. Predictors: (Constant), PSN, FSMU, SME

The regression model is statistically significant, as indicated by the F-value of 177.561 and the significance value of 0.000. This suggests that the predictors FSMU, engagement, and preference significantly impact the dependent variable, body dysmorphia and that the model explains the variation in the data better than chance. The presented ANOVA table breaks down the dependent variable's variability, body dysmorphia, into variability explained by the model (Regression) and unexplained variability (Residual).

**Regression Coefficients**

A one-level increase in the value FSMU increases body dysmorphia among youths in private universities in Kenya by 0.394 ( $\beta_2 = 0.394$ ), according to the regression coefficient table, which also revealed that the p-value for the coefficient of SME is 0.000, also less than 0.05, indicating statistical significance. As a result, there is a significant relationship between the FSMU and body dysmorphia among youths in private universities in Kenya.

Therefore, there is a significant relationship between youths' use of social media and their body dysmorphia in Kenyan private universities; for every level increase in SME, youths' body dysmorphia in Kenyan private universities increases by 0.233 ( $\beta_3 = 0.233$ ). The study also found that the p-value for

preference of social network sites is 000, which is less than 0.05 and indicates a significance level; consequently, there is a significant association between social media content and youths' body dysmorphia in Kenyan private universities.

**Table 8. Regression Coefficients**

Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
1	(Constant)	.134	.169		.791	.430
	FSMU	.394	.065	.388	6.078	.000
	SME	.233	.063	.238	3.694	.000
	PSN	.293	.057	.256	5.174	.000

a. Dependent Variable: BDAY

The final regression model estimated from the study results is as follows:

$$Y = 0.134 + 0.394X1 + 0.233X2 + 0.293X3$$

Where: -

Y = Body dysmorphia

X1 = Frequent social media use

X2 = social media engagement

X3 = social media content

### Summary of Findings

#### Preference of Social Network Sites and Body Dysmorphia

The study examined the influence of popular digital engagement platforms on body dysmorphia, using statistical measures to assess respondents' perceptions. Findings revealed that excessive SMU contributed to body dissatisfaction, with a mean score of 4.08 and a standard deviation of 1.152. Many respondents acknowledged that frequent SME heightened self-comparison, anxiety about appearance, and a tendency to consider altering their looks. The mean scores for these concerns ranged from 3.82 to 4.05, indicating a moderate to high impact. The variability in responses suggests that while some users find online communities beneficial, others experience significant psychological distress.

Additionally, the study highlighted the widespread use of filters and photo-editing tools, with a mean of 4.05, reflecting self-doubt and a desire to conform to beauty standards. Respondents also reported feeling pressured to present flawless images online (mean = 4.08), reinforcing the link between social media exposure and body dysmorphia. The findings

confirm that social media intensifies self-comparison, anxiety, and dissatisfaction with physical appearance, contributing to body dysmorphic tendencies among users.

#### Frequency of Social Media Use and Its Influence on Body Dysmorphia

The study looked at how often young adults attending private institutions used interactive platforms and how that affected their body dysmorphia. The results showed that excessive use of digital sites increased respondents' anxiety and self-comparison regarding their looks, which in turn led to body dissatisfaction. Long-term use of social media caused many people to feel unhappy with their bodies, according to a mean score of 4.08, while comparing oneself to others was highlighted by a score of 3.82. The idea that digital platform promotes irrational beauty standards and body image issues is further supported by the study's finding that regular digital platform users were more inclined to think about changing their appearance after watching online content.

Additionally, the research showed that many respondents used filters and photo editing tools to modify their online appearance, with a mean score of 4.05, suggesting a desire to conform to idealised images. The study confirmed that networking sites increased pressure to present a flawless image, further exacerbating body dysmorphia.

## **Influence of Social Media Engagement on Body Dysmorphia**

The study examined the impact of SME on body dysmorphia, focusing on self-comparison and body dissatisfaction. Findings revealed that respondents frequently experienced self-doubt and dissatisfaction when exposed to posts from celebrities and influencers showcasing idealised body images, with a mean score of 3.97. The desire to alter their appearance intensified upon viewing fitness and diet content, leading to frustration and negative self-perception (mean = 4.07). Additionally, seeing edited and filtered images heightened self-criticism, reinforcing body dysmorphia tendencies (mean = 4.09). Many respondents admitted feeling more self-conscious about their appearance after engaging with content that emphasised physical attractiveness, confirming that social media exposure fosters unrealistic beauty comparisons.

The study also found that social media advertisements promoting beauty and fitness products contributed to dissatisfaction with personal appearance (mean = 3.93). Many respondents felt pressured to conform to the standards portrayed in these advertisements, leading to frustration and self-doubt. Comparing oneself to “perfect” social media images significantly increased anxiety and self-conflict (mean = 4.21), further amplifying body dysmorphic tendencies. The study established that frequent social media engagement fosters self-doubt, dissatisfaction, and heightened self-consciousness, increasing the risk of body dysmorphia among young adults.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Conclusion:** It was concluded that social media use affects body dysmorphia among young adults in Nairobi's private universities. Preference for certain platforms influences self-perception, while frequent use leads to appearance comparisons, reduced confidence, and pressure to alter one's looks. Exposure to idealised images, beauty content, and fitness promotions increases dissatisfaction, reinforcing body concerns. However, responsible use can offer benefits, such as marketing opportunities and informed perspectives, mitigating negative effects.

**Recommendations:** The study recommends that university management implement awareness campaigns on the detrimental effects of social media on body image, promote critical thinking about filtered content, and offer counselling services addressing body dysmorphia. Additionally, it suggests that universities collaborate with mental health specialists to provide tailored therapy sessions and support groups. Policy recommendations include regulating exposure to altered content, integrating media literacy programs in university curriculums, and launching public awareness campaigns on social media's impact on mental health. Theoretical implications highlight the importance of fostering authenticity and self-acceptance through person-centred approaches in both educational and mental health interventions. Further research should explore social media's impact on behavioural changes, self-denial, and loneliness among young adults in higher education.

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