

**DOES SOCIAL MEDIA EXACERBATE OR REMEDY BODY ISSUES AMONG
YOUNG ADULTS? A STUDY OF WOMEN IN BOTSWANA**

**A research project report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Bachelor of Arts in Media Studies (Honours) to the University of Namibia,
Faculty of Education and Human Sciences, School of Humanities, Society and
Development**

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Declaration

I, **Michelle Sibusiso Ncube**, declare hereby that this study is a true reflection of my own research, and that this work, or part thereof, has not been submitted for a degree in any other institution of higher education.

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Abstract

Body image is a major concern with young women. It is also of concern to various groups, as studies have shown that a negative body image has the potential to result in eating disorders and mental health issues. Studies have also shown that social media contributes significantly to body image concerns. This is mainly a result of social media being seen as promoting only certain women of certain physical characteristics who qualify as beautiful, as well as unrealistic and unattainable beauty standards, mainly through the use of heavily edited pictures that are a far cry from reality. It is also the result of the subsequent pressure that women feel to conform to such beauty standards.

The purpose of this research, therefore, is to investigate the link between social media and body image, and also find out whether social media platforms exacerbate or remedy body image concerns in young women in Botswana. In order to do this, a qualitative research approach was used, and in-depth interviews with semi-structured questions were conducted with 10 young women in Botswana. In addition to this, a technique that was aimed at discussing the young women's thoughts on various pictures obtained from social media was also implemented. The sample was selected through purposive sampling, with the criteria being active social media users between the ages of 18-25.

The research found there is a strong belief that the beauty standards promoted by social media platforms are unrealistic. It also found that social media promotes certain body types as being ideal. This not only exacerbates body image issues, but also pressures young women to conform to these standards. Furthermore, the research also found that content exposure is key. Young women who exposed themselves more to content that promotes body positivity had a more positive outlook, and this content was influential in remedying body image concerns.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this research report to my parents, who are the reason I have made it this far due to all the support and encouragement they have given me. I also want to give special thanks to my dear friend Rhodri. Thank you for always reminding me just how much I am capable of. I would also like to dedicate this research report to young women who battle with body image issues.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Title

Does social media exacerbate or remedy body image issues among young adults? A study of women in Botswana.

2. Introduction

This research topic aimed to unearth the relationship between social media and body image, particularly in the context of young women in Botswana. Literature has shown that social media platforms have an effect on body image, be it positive or negative. A qualitative approach was adopted and semi-structured interviews were used to gain a better understanding on the research topic, along with any new insights that arose.

2.1 Orientation of the proposed study

According to Hargreaves & Tiggemann (2006, p.567) quoting Cash and Pruzinsky (2002) “body image refers to an individual’s thoughts and feelings about their body and physical appearance.” Two important considerations are investment and evaluation. “Body image investment reflects the degree of cognitive and behavioural importance that people assign to their body and appearance.” Body image evaluation then dealt with the “degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction” that people experience in terms of their body and overall appearance.

For years, social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter and Facebook have been instrumental in embedding and imposing certain societal standards in the minds of social media users. Fashion houses, social media influencers and various parties use social media platforms in their indefatigable pursuit to promote a certain body type that they perceive as being “ideal” and “perfect.” In most cases, women that represent this body type are slender, tall, have long silky hair and flawless skin, and are either light-skinned or of Caucasian descent. This is the body type that has been promoted for a myriad of years, and that young women have become accustomed to seeing on various social media platforms as being ideal. This can be referred to as the thin-ideal. The thin-ideal notion on social media is also supported by Hye (2020) quoting Cohen et al (2019), who states that social media facilitates a continuous stream of images portraying the ideal image. For young women, it is usually the thin ideal.

Due to the influential nature and undeniable power that rests in the hands of social media platforms, young women have become manipulated into believing that their worth and beauty lies in their ability to fit into the mould that social media has crafted with regard to body image. As a result, social media has contributed a great deal to the burgeoning dissatisfaction young women have with regard to their bodies, thereby encouraging a negative body image. The pernicious effects of social media have led to a plethora of unfavourable effects, such as eating disorders and a low self-esteem.

Adding on, the desire and pressure placed upon young women to shape and mould their bodies so they can harmonise with social media's version of an ideal body has also resulted in many women altering their appearance, sometimes with grave ramifications. There has also been an increased use of body editing tools by ordinary women as well as social media influencers that has further aggravated the issue, especially among women who already are unhappy with their bodies. All these factors are indicative of a negative body image. Ordinary young women on social media follow a plethora of celebrities, influencers and fashion and beauty companies. Majority of these are guilty of either airbrushing and editing their appearances, or airbrushing and editing the appearances of models who represent them.

On one hand, social media has, and continues, to promote exaggerated and unattainable beauty standards that the majority of young women feel pressured into achieving. In addition, such social media content that exacerbates body issues seems to be ubiquitous. This is because, due to technological advancements that have resulted in people being glued to their mobile phones constantly, such as the ability to make appointments, attend online meetings and access information through these devices, people are continually within reach of various social media platforms. Salmon and Brown (2018, p. 540) refer to the "ubiquitous nature of social media as a cultural phenomenon." Furthermore, social media brings in issues such as cyber-bullying and the ability to adopt anonymity, which has resulted in users being able to leave negative and malicious comments on other users' posts. If the comments focus on body issues, this can further worsen people's negative body image issues. Moreover, the excessive obsession with getting "likes" on social media also adds to the problem.

However, as much as social media has ushered in these unwelcome beliefs and practices, there is also another side to consider. Pressure and criticism from various stakeholders, as well as women who reject the notion that there is only one kind of beauty, have resulted in the establishment of social media accounts that embrace the idea that beauty and worth comes in

all shapes and sizes. These social media accounts celebrate all types of bodies, as opposed to a specific one. In addition, such posts depict bodies of different shapes and sizes, and embrace features that have, in the past, been considered flaws, such as stretch marks and acne. The ultimate goal is to encourage young women to embrace their bodies as they are, and promote a positive body image. A myriad of organisations and individuals have taken advantage of the powerful impact that social media has in order to encourage body positivity and erase years of manipulation. This is evident in the presence of hashtags such as “#bodypositivity” and “#selflove”. According to Tiggeman and Anderberg (2019, p.2), such posts “expose the falseness of social media and thereby discourage women from comparing themselves with idealistic and unrealistic images.”

Therefore, in as much as there are a significant number of social media accounts and pages that present unrealistic beauty standards that women feel pressured to succumb to, there are also a significant number of social media accounts and pages that dispel a one-size-fits-all idea of beauty, and encourage women to embrace, and be happy with their physical attributes.

2.2 Statement of the problem

Research that was conducted on this topic was necessary because negative body image issues that have come about as a result of social media content have brought about various health, both mental and physical, and social issues. Social media in this regard has promoted eating disorders, depression and anxiety. This view is underpinned by Madden and Breny (2016) who state that body dissatisfaction, as a result of exposure to social media content, encourages eating disorders. Young women who are active on social media have become increasingly insecure and self-critical about their bodies.

In addition, there seems to be a significant amount of research that looks at social media exacerbating body issues, but not enough that focuses on how social media also remedies body image issues. However, even with the focus being on the positive effects of social media on such issues, the primary focus is still on the body. Young women objectify themselves as a result of social media content, seeing their worth and beauty as being dependent on their bodies as opposed to other attributes such as their abilities, skills and experiences.

2.3 Research Questions

1. Does social media make young women in Botswana feel insecure or confident about their bodies?

2. Do young women engage in social comparison? That is, do they compare their bodies with those that social media promotes as ideal?
3. Does this social comparison cause body image dissatisfaction?
4. How do young women in Botswana feel about their body image after being exposed to social media content that is meant to promote body positivity?

2.5 Significance of the study

Most research primarily deals with the role that social media plays in promoting a negative body image. This argument is supported by Cohen et al. (2020, p.2), quoting Fardouly and Vartanian (2016), who state that:

While the existing literature overwhelmingly shows that viewing idealised images of women on social media is negatively related to body image outcomes in young women, less is known about the relationship between body positive social media content and aspects of body image

As a result, research also focused on the role played by social media in promoting a positive body image, and how that role could be extended. The aim was that this study be used as a catalyst to promote discourse on measures that can be taken to alleviate negative effects of social media, such as the development of eating disorders, low self-esteem, and body altering procedures that are sometimes linked to grave ramifications.

Young women would benefit by receiving a greater understanding and awareness of the effects that social media has on their mental and physical wellbeing, which would assist them in adopting a more mindful approach with regard to using and reacting to social media and its content. In addition, other parties, such as schools, parents and guardians, would have an awareness of the impacts that social media has, and how the negative impacts could be mitigated. Such negative impacts are usually unknown to such parties who did not grow up in the information age where social media platforms exercised considerable power and dominance. The aim was also to encourage young women who are active social media users to avoid falling victim to pitfalls created by social media such as depression, eating disorders, anxiety, and comparing themselves with women whose images have been digitally altered. Rather, social media should be used to encourage engagement with, and exposure to content that promotes body positivity and healthy practices.

Further research conducted on this topic would therefore be used as a catalyst to encourage and promote public discourse on actions that can be taken and measures that can be put in place to alleviate the negative effects of social media. For instance, school-based programmes could be introduced in order to educate and assist impressionable social media users on how to navigate and correctly use social media, so they would not fall victim to potentially life-threatening eating disorders and mental health problems such as depression and anxiety.

2.6 Limitation of the study

The study focused on the effects of social media on body image within Botswana only. The focus was particularly on young women only, and men were not included. Furthermore, the study focused mainly on Instagram, as it is based on photo sharing more than other social media platforms. As such, the findings of this study could not be generalised to all young people but only young women in Botswana.

3. Literature Review and the theoretical/conceptual framework

According to Hargreaves & Tiggemann (2006, p.567) quoting Cash and Pruzinsky (2002) “body image refers to an individual’s thoughts and feelings about their body and physical appearance.” Two important considerations are investment and evaluation. “Body image investment reflects the degree of cognitive and behavioural importance that people assign to their body and appearance.” Body image evaluation then deals with the “degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction” that people experience in terms of their body and overall appearance.

Studies have shown that social media contributes towards a negative body image (Madden and Breny). This stance is underpinned by Fardouly and Holland (2018, p. 4312) who state that social media usage is linked to a negative body image. The authors go on to give social media influencer Essena O’Neill as an example. Despite her social media depictions of a perfect life, and a myriad of lucrative sponsorship deals offered to her as a result of her popularity and influence, her decision to quit social media was indicative of her frustration with the “staged and contrived nature of social media, and society’s overemphasis on women’s appearance.” This is intensified by the “ubiquitous nature of social media as a cultural phenomenon” (Salomon and Brown, 2018, p. 540). They go on to state that social media, which enables a high degree of engagement, has the power and capability to shape and mould beliefs and behaviour. This is underpinned by a significant number of theories, such as the social cognitive theory of mass communication. The authors, quoting Fredrickson and Roberts (1997, p.542) further state that social media also results in body surveillance, which is “an excessive

monitoring of the outer appearance, and results in individuals maladaptively paying more attention to how their bodies look than how their bodies feel.”

Hye (2020) quoting Perloff (2014) also adds to the argument by asserting that new media could have a more devastating impact on body image than old media. The author goes on to elaborate, claiming that social media allows for users’ reactions and thoughts about pictures to be shared and viewed publicly. Negative comments impact users’ thoughts and opinions, thereby influencing body image. This view is further strengthened by Fardouly and Holland (2018) who claim that idealised images on social media platforms have a more detrimental effect on body image than idealised images in traditional media.

A negative body image leads to lower confidence levels and various eating disorders in most young women, and this body dissatisfaction arises from, among other things, social media content and the desire to conform to social media’s view of an ideal body type (DeBraganza & Hausenblas, 2010). This view is underpinned by Madden and Breny (2016) who state that body dissatisfaction, as a result of exposure to social media content, encourages eating disorders. Although social media platforms, Instagram in particular, promote different body types, it is usually thin or slender women that are portrayed as having the ideal body that young women should aspire to. This is commonly known as thin-ideal internalisation, which involves young women believing that a thin body is ideal, and then taking whatever measures are necessary, such as extreme dieting, to achieve it (Thompson & Stice, 2001). Thompson and Stice (2001, p.181) further state that “specifically, family, peers, and media (i.e., the socialization agents) are thought to reinforce the thin-ideal body image for women through comments or actions that serve to support and perpetuate this ideal.” The thin-ideal notion on social media is also supported by Hye (2020) quoting Cohen et al (2019), who states that social media facilitates a continuous stream of images portraying the ideal image. For young women, it is usually the thin ideal.

The views that these authors share all reinforce the hypodermic needle/magic bullet theory. This theory states that media are powerful, and audience members are weak, passive and impressionable. The media are symbolically seen as needles, with opinions and viewpoints being injected into audience members. As such, the media injects into audiences the viewpoint that there is one, specific kind of physical beauty. This influences audience members’ thoughts and stances on body image, making them believe that they have to look a certain way and be of a certain weight to be considered beautiful.

Despite the strong arguments presented about social media's link to a negative body image, other authors suggest otherwise. A growing trend on social media, especially on Instagram, is posting "Instagram vs Reality" pictures. With these posts, the Instagram picture represents an idealised and retouched body, while the latter depicts a more natural representation (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2019). The authors add that such posts result in less appearance comparison, decrease body dissatisfaction and encourage a positive body image. In addition, the posts "expose the falseness of social media and thereby discourage women from comparing themselves with idealistic and unrealistic images" (p. 2). This view of social media is also shared by Cohen, Newton-John and Slater (2020) who state that a body-positivity movement has established a presence on social media. Despite agreeing that social media generally perpetuates the spread of unrealistic beauty standards, the authors, quoting Sastre (2014) articulate that the body positivity movement has the goal of challenging societal beauty standards, fostering a love and appreciation for the diversity that comes with different body shapes and sizes, and focusing on the health of bodies rather than the appearance alone.

This can be linked to the uses and gratification theory. It states that people choose the kind of content that they wish to consume, based on their needs and desires. In this case, it is possible that, having been exposed to content that promotes a negative body image, young women have decided to expose themselves to body positivity content so as to encourage body satisfaction and the idea that there is no "one size fits all" kind of physical beauty. Accessing only body positivity content on social media platforms has become easy particularly on platforms such as Instagram, where users can easily type in, explore and "follow" certain hashtags that are in harmony with the kind of content they want to be exposed to.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

There are five main types of research design, namely descriptive research design, experimental research design, correlational research design, diagnostic research design and explanatory research design.

Experimental research design focuses on the relationship between cause and effect. This would be the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable. The independent variable can also be manipulated so as to assess the different effects it would have on the dependent variable (*Research Design: Definition, Characteristics and Types*, n.d). Popular in social sciences, experimental research design is used to analyse and understand human

behaviour. Experimental research design was used for this study. In this case, the independent variable was social media. The study examined social media, in particular body image content, and the effect that it had on young women's perceptions regarding body image. The study determined whether, ultimately, social media exacerbates or remedies body image issues.

4.2 Data collection methods

A qualitative research approach was employed. In-depth interviews were conducted in order to establish better understanding of the link between social media and body image. Interviews were selected as the preferred data collection approach as the interviewer would have been able to take note of non-verbal cues such as body language. In addition, the interviewer would have been able to ask follow-up questions and ask for elaboration if clarity was needed. This would not be possible with other data collection approaches such as surveys. The questions were sensitive to some, especially those who were dealing or had dealt with issues such as eating disorders that had developed as a result of body image issues. By establishing a good rapport with the participants and with the interviews being one-on-one sessions, the participants were more willing to divulge sensitive information that may have remained hidden with other data collection approaches. Furthermore, since social media affects young women's perceptions of their physical appearance in different ways, as has been made clear in the literature review, interviews were more effective in incorporating the human experience. Taking a qualitative approach acknowledged the fact that there are different perspectives (Gaille, 2018). The interviews were semi-structured. Thus, there were key questions asked, but there was also room to diverge so as to get in-depth information on a particular response or idea (Gill et al., 2008). Participants were asked open-ended questions concerning their thoughts on body image, and their thoughts on how body image is presented on social media. Respondents were also asked whether or not they believe there is an ideal body type and if so, what constitutes the ideal body. If they did believe that there is an ideal body type, the interview also focused on determining the reasoning behind such thoughts. Participants were also asked questions regarding the amount of time they spend on Instagram, and the kind of body image-related content they usually consume. Along with this, information was sought as to whether participants made conscious decisions on what kind of content they wanted to be exposed to, and what kind of content they did not want to be exposed to. Adding on, the interviews also focused on the effects that body image content has on the behaviour and thought processes of the participants. Furthermore, the interviews aimed to unearth information concerning the kind of pictures the respondents post, whether the pictures are edited or not and reasons why.

Respondents were also shown pictures of people that represent the thin-idealisation notion, and those that are posted with the intention of encouraging body positivity. The respondents' reactions, thoughts and opinions were noted down.

4.3 Population

The population of Botswana stood at 2.37 million in January 2021 (Kemp, 2021). The target population for this research was young women aged 18-25 who are active Instagram users and of various racial and ethnic groups.

4.4 Sample

A sample is a subset of the population that is used in order to conduct research. For this particular study, targeted individuals were 10 young women in Botswana between the ages of 18-25, who are active Instagram users and have unlimited access to internet connectivity and as such, social media platforms. The study also focused on ensuring that the sample consists of women of various body types and structures.

A non-probability sampling approach was used. With non-probability sampling, the sample is chosen based on the researcher's subjective judgement, as opposed to the random selection approach of probability sampling (*Non-Probability Sampling: Definition, Types, Examples, and Advantages*, n.d.). Purposive sampling was used. Thus, the selection criteria included selecting individuals who are active on social media platforms, and are of different body types and structures. In particular, the maximum variation approach was used. The aim, therefore, was to attempt to collect a diverse range of opinions and viewpoints.

4.5 Research Instruments

An interview guide with semi-structured questions was used to find out whether social media exacerbates or remedies body image. A digital voice recorder was also used in order to record the answers given. If any of the sample population did not want to be recorded, paper and pen were used. Research instruments that were used also included edited pictures that supported the notion of social media exacerbating body image issues, along with pictures that supported the body positivity movement.

4.6 Reliability and validity

According to Bertilsson and Gillberg (2017) quoting Williams and Morrow (2009), a researcher must provide comprehensive information and data, such that a replication of the

study is feasible, and could possibly generate similar findings. As such, this study included all relevant materials that were used and generated throughout the entire process.

4.7 Procedure

The data collection process involved securing the sample population through the purposive method. In-depth interviews were then conducted and answers were either recorded, or written down depending on preferences of each respondent. Interviews were conducted in a quiet office, or any other setting of the respondents' choosing in order to ensure they were comfortable. Participants were informed of the purpose of the interview, and confidentiality was guaranteed. Participants were also informed that participation in the interview was non-compulsory.

4.8 Data Analysis

This research adopted a qualitative data approach. As such, coding was used in order to summarise and analyse the information acquired from the in-depth interviews, thereby aiding in understanding. A flexible coding approach was used, based on popular themes that were noticed and observed from the interviews. Thus, data collected was categorised according to the themes.

In order to ensure the veracity of collected data, a triangulation and participant validation approach was used according to Bertilsson and Gillberg (2017) quoting Malhotra and Birks (2007). This involves comparing research findings with secondary data, as well as contacting participants in order to verify their answers.

5. Research Ethics

All participants were treated equally and it was made clear that participation is voluntary. In order to ensure this, all participants were offered a consent form to read over and sign. Confidentiality was guaranteed. Findings were based on what research participants were willing to share regarding their experiences and usage of social media.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and the theoretical/conceptual framework

2.1 Introduction

This literature review outlines the contributions of various authors in the context of the relationship between social media platforms and the body image of young women. It begins with the definition of key terms; namely body image, mass media ideal and social media. It

then outlines the arguments raised by different authors. Lastly, it highlights and explains the theories that relate to the topic of social media and body image, which are the hypodermic needle theory, the uses and gratification theory, as well as the social comparison theory which serve as the theoretical framework for this study.

2.2 Definition of “body image”

According to Hargreaves and Tiggemann (2006, p.567) quoting Cash and Pruzinsky (2002) “body image refers to an individual’s thoughts and feelings about their body and physical appearance.” Two important considerations are investment and evaluation. “Body image investment reflects the degree of cognitive and behavioural importance that people assign to their body and appearance.” Body image evaluation then deals with the “degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction” that people experience in terms of their body and overall appearance.

Kim and Lennon (2007, p. 3) also add that body image “encompasses both how we see ourselves (perceptual) and how we feel about what we see (affective).”

2.2.1 Definition of “mass media ideal”

A mass media ideal, on the other hand, is defined as being “the female body that is reflected in the media as perfect” (DeBraganza & Hausenblas, 2010).

2.2.2 Definition of social media/ social networking sites

Salomon and Brown (2018, p.541) quoting Boyd and Ellison (2007) define social networking sites as:

Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semipublic profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

2.3 In support of social media exacerbating body image issues

Studies have shown that social media contributes towards a negative body image. Salomon and Brown (2018, p.540) state that “Several well-established theories within psychology and sociology argue that mass media, particularly media that involves high levels of consumer engagement, is extremely influential in shaping individuals’ beliefs and behaviour.” This stance is underpinned by Fardouly and Holland (2018, p. 4312) who state that social media usage is linked to a negative body image. The authors go on to give social media influencer

Essena O'Neill as an example. Despite her social media depictions of a perfect life, and a myriad of lucrative sponsorship deals offered to her as a result of her popularity and influence, her decision to quit social media was indicative of her frustration with the “staged and contrived nature of social media, and society’s overemphasis on women’s appearance.” The authors Hargreaves and Tiggeman (2006), once again quoting Cash and Pruzinsky, also support this notion. They state that sociocultural influences, such as the perceived pressure that is placed by the media in order to encourage a thin body structure, also ultimately results in a negative body image. Quoting Garner, Garfinkel, Schwartz and Thompson (1980) along with Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson and Kelly (1986), they also state that the beauty ideals that are propagated by society are made exceedingly apparent through the media. The authors go on to add that media influence results in a lack of contentment among young women regarding their weight, with many of them wishing that they were thinner. This is then intensified by the “ubiquitous nature of social media as a cultural phenomenon” (Salomon & Brown, 2018, p. 540). They further state that social media, which enables a high degree of engagement, has the power and capability to shape and mould beliefs and behaviour. This is underpinned by a significant number of theories, such as the social cognitive theory of mass communication. The authors, quoting Fredrickson and Roberts (1997, p.542) further add that social media also results in body surveillance, which is “an excessive monitoring of the outer appearance, and results in individuals maladaptively paying more attention to how their bodies look than how their bodies feel.”

Hye (2020) quoting Perloff (2014) also adds to the argument by asserting that new media could have a more devastating impact on body image than old media. The author goes on to elaborate, claiming that social media allows for users’ reactions and thoughts about pictures to be shared and viewed publicly. Negative comments impact users’ thoughts and opinions, thereby influencing body image. In addition to this, social media are accessible to users at all times (Lewallen & Behm-Morowitz, 2016). Furthermore, Fardouly and Holland (2018) further reinforce the idea of social media having a negative impact on body image by declaring that exposure to idealised images that are posted on social media platforms may cause more harm compared to those that are featured in traditional media.

One of the main reasons that social media is linked to the development of a negative body image is the practice of retouching and editing pictures. Kee and Farid (2011, p.19907) state that:

Popular photo-editing software, such as Adobe Photoshop, allows photo editors to easily alter the appearance of a person. These alterations may affect the geometry of the subject and may include slimming of legs, hips, and arms, elongating the neck, improving posture, enlarging the eyes, or making faces more symmetrical. Other photometric alterations affect skin tone and texture. These changes may include smoothing, sharpening, or other operations that remove or reduce wrinkles, cellulite, blemishes, freckles, and dark circles under the eyes. A combination of geometric and photometric manipulations allows photo retouchers to subtly or dramatically alter a person's appearance.

Furthermore, young women who are constantly exposed to such pictures eventually feel the need to conform to this particular beauty standard (Lewallen & Behm, Morowitz, 2016) quoting Bandura (2009). This is an idea supported by Kim and Lennon (2007, p. 4) quoting Blowers, Loxton, Grady-Flessner, Occhipinti, and Dawe (2003). The authors state that:

The level of beauty and physical attractiveness presented in media images is characteristic of an extremely small segment of the population. Furthermore, the use of technology and special effects allows for images to be yet more perfect and idealized than real life. These unrealistic and idealised images play a significant role in facilitating self-comparisons among women, resulting in an upward shift of individuals' personal image expectations.

2.4 Self-objectification as a result of social media

Constant exposure to idealised pictures on social media platforms also results in self-objectification. Salomon and Brown (2018, p.543) elaborate this point, arguing that:

Individuals are posting photos of themselves, it is likely they are thinking about themselves from the perspective of who might see the photo. Thus, the act of taking and posting photos of oneself on social media reinforces focusing on the body as an object for others' viewing, which is by definition, self-objectification. Research suggests that self-objectification behaviours may contribute to feelings of body shame.

Tiggemann and Williams (2011, p.66) further add to the idea of self-objectification, making it clear that “the pervasiveness of sexual objectification gradually socialises women and girls to internalise an observer's perspective of their own bodies; that is, they come to view *themselves* as an object to be looked at and evaluated on the basis of appearance.”

2.5 The link between Instagram and a negative body image

Furthermore, Tiggemann and Anderberg (2019, p.2), quoting Cohen et al (2017), Fardouly et al. (2017), Feltman and Szymanski (2018) along with Hendrickse et al (2017) state that research has revealed a link between Instagram and body image issues such as “body dissatisfaction and self-objectification.” Moreover, Tiggemann and Anderberg (2019, p.3), quoting Tiggemann et al (2018) state that “social comparison is particularly pertinent to social media because comparison targets are largely peers, in contrast to the models appearing in fashion magazines.” This is problematic especially because social media users only tend to post their best pictures and these are pictures that have been digitally altered and retouched for purposes of promoting beauty and attractiveness (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2019), quoting Chua and Chang (2016) and Dumas et al (2017). By doing this, social media users are critically analysing their own posts and pictures in relation to the posts and pictures of other users (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2019).

2.6 The dangers associated with negative body image

A negative body image leads to lower confidence levels and various eating disorders in most young women, and this body dissatisfaction arises from, among other things, social media content and the desire to conform to social media’s view of an ideal body type (DeBraganza & Hausenblas, 2010). This view is underpinned by Madden and Breny (2016) who state that body dissatisfaction, as a result of exposure to social media content, encourages eating disorders. Cohen, Newton-John and Slater (2020) quoting Holland and Tiggemann (2016) state that there is a link between social media usage as well as negative body image and eating disorders. This can be detrimental as stated by Cohen et al. (2020) quoting the World Health Organisation (2018), as eating disorders are the leading cause of death when it comes to mental health disorders. Adding on, quoting Cohen et al. (2017) and Fardouly and Vartanian (2016), the authors also express that:

Photobased platforms, like Instagram, are particularly salient given their widespread use, the idealised nature of the images presented, such as *thinspiration* (content intended to inspire weight loss) and *fitspiration* (content designed to inspire fitness goals), and the infinite opportunities for appearance-comparisons they foster (p.2).

In addition to this, Lewallen and Behm-Morowitz (2016) quoting Bessenoff (2006) make it clear that exposure to idealised pictures on social media platforms bring about body

dissatisfaction and depression. Women who are exposed to such pictures also experience lower moods compared to women who are not exposed to such pictures.

2.7 The thin-ideal internalisation

Although social media platforms, Instagram in particular, promote different body types, it is usually thin or slender women that are portrayed as having the ideal body that young women should aspire to. This is commonly known as thin-ideal internalisation, which involves young women believing that a thin body is ideal, and then taking whatever measures are necessary, such as extreme dieting, to achieve it (Thompson & Stice, 2001). Thompson and Stice (2001, p.181) further state that “specifically, family, peers, and media (i.e., the socialization agents) are thought to reinforce the thin-ideal body image for women through comments or actions that serve to support and perpetuate this ideal.” The thin-ideal notion on social media is also supported by Hye (2020) quoting Cohen et al (2019), who states that social media facilitates a continuous stream of images portraying the ideal image. For young women, it is usually the thin ideal. Adding on to this, another feature that is included in the portrayal of body ideal images by social media is ethnicity, with Caucasian women representing the ideal body image in most cases (DeBraganza & Hausenblas, 2010). Salomon and Brown (2018, p.542) quoting Swami et al (2010) also refer to the notion of thin-ideal internalisation by adding that “media plays a critical role in shaping individuals’ attitudes about their bodies, including increasing body shame. Media establishes cultural standards for ideal body types, which emphasize the importance of thinness for girls...”

Fardouly and Holland (2018) claim that due to the fact that so many women globally experience body dissatisfaction, it has become increasingly normalised. They go on to add that due to this, it is essential to find ways to avoid any negative consequences that may be accompanied by the viewing of idealised pictures. Additionally the authors, quoting Thompson et al (1999) and van den Berg et al (2002), the authors declare that two factors that are involved in the relationship between social media usage and body dissatisfaction are thin-ideal internalisation and appearance-based social comparisons. Quoting Cafri et al (2005), the authors state that “women who subscribe to appearance-related pressures and internalize the societal ideals of appearance portrayed in the media, but who fail to achieve those ideals, are likely to become dissatisfied with their appearance.” Moreover, quoting Myers and Crowther (2009) Fardouly and Holland add that “research shows that women are likely to compare their appearance to cultural ideals

of beauty in the media, of which they often fall short, thus resulting in body image disturbances.”

Derived from the words “thin” and “inspiration,” multiple social media platforms such as Instagram, Pinterest and Twitter are replete with “thinspiration” pictures, encouraging young women to have thin body structures and thereby resulting in a negative body image and eating disorders. In fact, “thinspiration” pictures have flooded social media platforms so much that Pinterest has been dubbed “Thinterest” (Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016).

2.8 The shortcomings of the body positive movement on social media

In recent years, there has been a growing body of research focusing on the link between social media usage and a positive body image. However, a plethora of authors have denounced this viewpoint. One of the reasons for this denouncement is that, although the focus has altered to also include how social media can bring out body positivity, there is still an emphasis on appearance, as opposed to other attributes (Cohen et al., 2020). Furthermore, Cohen et al. (202), quoting Nomi (2018) add that the glorification of all bodies through the body positivity movement on social media eventually results in obesity along with other unhealthy lifestyles. In addition to this, Fardouly and Holland (2018) add that despite actions that have been taken to water down the negative effects of social media on body image, such as adding disclaimer labels to edited and retouched images, these actions have been mainly unsuccessful. Another factor to consider is that social media platforms such as Pinterest and Instagram have resorted to adopting “acceptable use” policies that hinder users from posting any pictures that could serve as catalysts for self-harm. According to the policies, the posting of idealised pictures is permitted, as long as such pictures promote healthy lifestyle habits and choices such as fitness and health. Such pictures fall under the “fitspiration” category, derived from the words “fitness” and “inspiration.” Despite this being a step in the right direction, such pictures can still have negative impacts on body image (Lewallen and Behm-Morowitz, 2016). This argument is reinforced by Lewallen and Behm-Morowitz (2016, p.2) quoting Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2015) who add that “while the goal of fitspiration posts may be to inspire healthier lifestyles, they can also have unintended negative consequences on body image.”

2.9 In support of social media remedying body image issues

Despite the strong arguments presented about social media’s link to a negative body image, other authors suggest otherwise. Hargreaves and Tiggemann (2006), for instance, place emphasis on the fact that despite social media playing an influential role in causing a negative

body image, other factors are also to blame. These factors include biological factors such as pubertal timing and body mass index, as well as psychological factors such as a low self-esteem. DeBraganza and Hausenblas (2010) also support this argument, claiming that despite young women being exposed to a plethora of idealised pictures on various social media platforms, not all of them develop body image dissatisfaction and not all of them resort to extreme dieting in order to achieve the ideal body image that is promoted on social media.

A growing trend on social media, especially on Instagram, is posting “Instagram vs Reality” pictures. With these posts, the Instagram picture represents an idealised and retouched body, while the latter depicts a more natural representation (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2019). The authors add that such posts result in less appearance comparison, decrease body dissatisfaction and actually encourage a positive body image. In addition, the posts “expose the falseness of social media and thereby discourage women from comparing themselves with idealistic and unrealistic images” (p. 2). This view of social media is also shared by Cohen et al. (2020) who state that a body-positivity movement has established a presence on social media in response to content that constantly features exaggerated appearances that are impossible to achieve. Despite agreeing that social media generally perpetuates the spread of unrealistic beauty standards, the authors, quoting Sastre (2014) articulate that the body positivity movement has the goal of challenging societal beauty standards, fostering a love and appreciation for the diversity that comes with different body shapes and sizes, and focusing on the health of bodies rather than the appearance alone. Furthermore, the authors express that “body-positive posts on Instagram have been found to encourage concepts, such as body appreciation and body care, and present women of larger bodies engaging in physical activities, such as yoga...and surfing” (p. 5). Cohen et al. (2020) also note that the body-positive content includes bodily features that are typically disregarded in idealised pictures, such as cellulite, stretch marks and stomach rolls.

The authors Cohen et al. (2020, p.3), quoting Tylka and Wood-Barcalow (2015) further elaborate on the body positive movement on social media, defining body positivity as an “overarching love and respect for the body.” Quoting Swami et al (2018), they go on to add that exposure to body positive content results in “greater psychological, social and emotional well-being (p. 3). Furthermore, the authors (p. 3), once again quoting Tylka and Wood-Barcalow, add that:

Core features of positive body image include appreciating the unique features of one's body, accepting aspects of the body that are inconsistent with idealised media images, broadly defining beauty, inner positivity, tending to the body's needs, and filtering information in a body-protective manner.

Furthermore, despite the claims that body-positive pictures on social media platforms only serve to glorify unhealthy and undesirable situations such as obesity, Cohen et al. (2020, p. 5) quoting Boepple and Thompson (2016) express that:

To date, there is no empirical evidence to support the supposition that viewing body positivity leads to unhealthy behaviours or obesity. In fact, idealised social media's contents, such as *thinspiration* and *fitspiration*, have been found to disseminate messages that conflate notions of health with thin-ideals, exclude individuals of larger body sizes and promote fat stigmatisation and disordered eating.

The authors, quoting Haskins (2015), also add that body-positive content is effective in promoting empowerment and inclusivity, regardless of body shape and structure. The benefits of the body-positive movement on social media are made clear by Cohen et al. (2019, p.1549) quoting Paraskeva et al (2017) who highlight the fact that "researchers have suggested that in order to improve body appreciation, it is important to provide women with broader conceptualisations of beauty and to encourage women to surround themselves with social networks that foster respect and appreciation for one's own body." The authors P.1549), quoting Williamson and Karazsia (2018) further stress that:

It is plausible that engaging with body positive content on Instagram, which aims to foster an online community of acceptance and appreciation of all bodies, may be one avenue through which to promote positive body image in young women. A recent study found that women who were exposed to images of full-figured models that did not adhere to the sociocultural thin-ideal reported increases in state body appreciation, compared to those who viewed images of thin models.

2.10 A neutral standpoint

Due to the arguments that claim that the body positive movement on social media platforms does more harm than good, some authors have advocated for body neutrality instead. Cohen et al. (2020 p. 5), quoting Rees (2019) define it as a middle ground, claiming that:

Whereas body positivity aims to change the definition of beauty in society by promoting acceptance and appreciation of all body shapes and sizes, body neutrality aims to change the value placed on beauty in society by encouraging individuals to place less emphasis on their physical appearance altogether.

2.11 Theoretical Framework

2.11.1 The social comparison theory

The first theory examined in this research is the social comparison theory, as arguments that are in favour of social media exacerbating body image issues among young women are in line with the social comparison theory. According to the theory, people have a tendency and inclination to compare themselves with others, within their social contexts. There are two types of comparison, namely upward comparison and downward comparison. With upward comparison, people compare themselves with others that they perceive to be better than them. In this case, young women compare themselves with social media influencers, models and other regular people that they perceive as having better physical characteristics. This then causes body dissatisfaction and a negative body image. With downward comparison, people compare themselves with others they perceive as being worse than them. In this case, young women may compare themselves with other social media users in order to feel better about their own bodies and physical characteristics.

Kim and Lennon (2007, p.3), quoting Lee (1998) elaborate further on the social comparison theory, stating that “the theory is based on the idea that people compare their own opinions and abilities to those of others and that the comparison affects self-evaluation.” The authors (p. 7), quoting J. K. Thompson et al (1999) go further, indicating that:

People engage in a relatively continuous self-evaluative process to determine whether they are normal. They reflect on their characteristics, strengths, and capabilities to develop a consistent and orderly impression of self and then use this self-examination process to facilitate self-understanding and consistent, effective behaviours. However, objective sources of comparison are not always available for self-evaluation, and people examine others as sources of comparison. The process of self-evaluation in comparison with others in the social environment is the basis for Festinger’s social comparison theory.

2.11.2 The hypodermic needle/magic bullet theory

The idea that social media exacerbates body image issues is in line with the hypodermic needle/magic bullet theory. This theory states that media are powerful, and audience members are weak, passive and impressionable. The media are symbolically seen as needles, with opinions and viewpoints being injected into audience members. As such, the media injects into audiences the viewpoint that there is one, specific kind of physical beauty. This influences audience members' thoughts and stances on body image, making them believe that they have to look a certain way and be of a certain weight and have certain physical characteristics in order to be considered beautiful. The hypodermic needle theory will provide a guideline for discovering whether social media does indeed exacerbate body image issues in young women.

2.11.3 The uses and gratification theory

The idea of social media remedying body image issues can be linked to the uses and gratification theory. It states that people make conscious decisions regarding the kind of content that they wish to consume, based on their needs and desires. In this case it is possible that, having been exposed to content that promotes a negative body image, young women have decided to expose themselves to body positivity content so as to encourage body satisfaction and the idea that there is no "one size fits all" kind of physical beauty. This has become easy particularly on platforms such as Instagram, where users can easily type in, explore and "follow" certain hashtags that are in harmony with the kind of content they want to be exposed to.

The uses and gratification theory is articulated by Shaw (1979, p. 98) who indicates that:

The uses and gratifications approach to the mass media, however, stresses intrapersonal needs rather than interpersonal factors. Instead of regarding newspapers, television, and the other mass media as principally disseminators of news and information and wielders of power and influence, this research tradition assumes they are primarily sources of diversion, gratifiers of individual needs, and entertaining outlets for personal escape. With this assumption, researchers investigate how people use a particular medium for their individual purposes.

For the purposes of this research, the uses and gratification model will be used as a guideline to ascertain whether young women are truly in control of the type of content they consume on various social media platforms, with particular reference to content that is related to the topic of body image. The uses and gratification model will also be beneficial in encouraging young

women to make conscious efforts in choosing what kind of social media content to consume in order to assist in curbing negative body image issues, along with the risks associated with them.

2.12 Conclusion/ Summary

This literature review details the contributions made by various authors on the subject of social media and the links that social media has with body image. It includes topics and themes such as the thin ideal internalisation, the body positivity movement on various social media platforms, self-objectification, as well as theories such as the social comparison theory, the uses and gratification theory and the hypodermic needle theory.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines exactly how the research was conducted. A qualitative research approach was used, and in-depth interviews were chosen as the data collection method. The sample included 10 young women in Botswana between the ages of 18-25, with different body types and ethnic backgrounds. In addition to interview guides, recording devices were used and field notes were made on the interview guides, as well as in a notebook. For purposes of reliability and validity, credibility, authenticity, criticality and integrity were ensured. In order to analyse the data, the flexible coding approach was adopted. Lastly, for ethical purposes, the purpose of the interviews were explained to the participants, consent was obtained and anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed.

3.2 Research design

A qualitative research approach was used for this particular study. Unlike quantitative research that involves the analysis of numerical data, qualitative research focuses on analysing a range of non-numerical data so as to gain a better and clearer understanding of opinions and experiences (Bhandari, 2020).

This approach to data collection and analysis has a plethora of advantages. Firstly, qualitative research offers more flexibility as open-ended questions are frequently used (Mack et al., 2005). As a result, instead of simply understanding whether, for instance, social media results in a negative body image, a qualitative approach will aid in understanding the specific elements that contribute to a negative body image, along with precisely how a negative body image impacts each individual. With a qualitative approach, participants are able to give their own answers and elaborate, as opposed to choosing an answer from a selection of answers given

(Mack et al., 2005). Secondly, qualitative research considers human experience (Gaille, 2018). Due to the fact that people interpret and internalise social media content in different ways, qualitative research makes room for different thoughts, opinions and perspectives. Thirdly, qualitative research has predictive qualities (Gaille, 2018). Predictive qualities are connected to the idea that people with the same perspectives are likely to have the same thought processes. As such, if there are people who, for instance, find social media to be beneficial in creating a positive body image because of the way they internalise and interpret certain content, it is likely that people who internalise and interpret the same content the same way have the same thoughts and opinions regarding the link between social media and body image.

3.3 Data collection methods

In-depth, semi-structured interviews consisting of open-ended, questions were used. The interviews were semi-structured so as to allow an opportunity to delve deeper into some of the responses given by the participants, as well as to be able to ask follow-up questions and ask for further elaboration where needed. In-depth interviews were chosen as the preferred data collection method because they provided a chance to read non-verbal cues such as body language in order to determine the participants' thoughts and feelings about the relationship between social media and body image. Secondly, interviews gave a chance to establish a good rapport with the participants, thereby making them more willing to open up about certain issues and topics that may be sensitive, such as eating disorders brought about as a result of social media content. Furthermore, as young women respond differently to social media content, interviews offered an opportunity to understand individual perspectives (Mack et al., 2005).

When conducting interviews, first impressions are important and interviewers must carefully consider body language, clothing, the manner of greeting as well as the manner of speaking. These must be appropriate, and respect for the participant and his/her time must be shown (Mack et al., 2005). Furthermore, cell phones and any other distractions must be eliminated. This communicates to the participant that the interviewer respects their time and is taking the interview seriously (Mack et al., 2005).

Typically, in-depth interviews last anywhere from one to two hours. The interviewer must take note of any boredom or impatience from the participant. If any of those signs are there, it is advisable to take a break and resume after a few minutes (Mack et al., 2005).

3.4 Population

The population refers to a broad range of individuals that researchers wish to draw conclusions about (Bhandari, 2020). The population of Botswana stood at 2.37 million in January 2021 (Kemp, 2021).

3.5 Sample

For the purposes of this research, a purposive sampling approach was used. Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling also known as subjective, judgmental or selective sampling. With this kind of sampling, researchers use their judgment when choosing participants to take part in the research process. Purposive sampling requires knowledge and understanding of the research topic and objectives in order to effectively and accurately choose eligible participants (Purposive sampling 101, 2021).

There are a variety of options to choose from when it comes to purposive sampling. These options include maximum variation, critical, typical, extreme and homogenous. For the purposes of this study, maximum variation sampling was used. This type of sampling is used in order to gain insight from a myriad of angles and perspectives (Purposive sampling 101, 2021).

Compared to other sampling methods, purposive sampling is both cost and time-effective. Secondly, there are a variety of options to choose from, making it a versatile method (Purposive sampling 101, 2021).

However, purposive sampling is prone to bias due to the fact that researchers make subjective assumptions (Purposive sampling 101, 2021).

Purposive sampling was chosen for the purposes of this research because, firstly, as with other third world countries, the digital divide is still a prevalent issue in Botswana. In other cases, some young women aged between 18 and 30 years do not have constant access to the internet due to a lack of resources. For this study, eligible participants had to be young women with constant access to social media platforms, and young women who are active on these platforms, particularly Instagram. Furthermore, the research sought to recruit young women of different body types and ethnic backgrounds, so as to acquire a wide range of perspectives and viewpoints on the relationship between social media and body image.

Furthermore, young women were chosen as the sample for this study because, compared to men, women are more likely to be concerned about their body image and internalise opinions

and perspectives regarding their bodies (Bertilsson & Gillberg, 2017). Moreover, Fardouly and Holland (2018) claim that due to the fact that so many women globally experience body dissatisfaction, it has become increasingly normalised. Body dissatisfaction has a myriad of undesirable effects, such as the development of eating disorders that in some cases, can be fatal. As a result, it is of extreme importance to find ways to alleviate the negative effects that social media has on how women view their bodies.

As a result, this research focused on young women in Botswana between the ages of 18-25.

3.6 Research Instruments

Research instruments included an interview guide with semi-structured questions. The questions were centred on unearthing the relationship between social media content and the participants' body image. There were also pictures representing "thinspiration" content as well as pictures representing "body positivity" content. These pictures represent the two sides of social media when it comes to body image concerns; the side that could potentially cause a negative body image, and the side that could potentially cause a positive body image.

In addition to these, instruments also included recording equipment, paper and pen. These were used to capture the responses of the participants to the different questions. A consent form was used in order to guarantee informed consent.

3.7 Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are two factors that both deal with the quality of research conducted (Middleton, 2019). Reliability deals with consistency and how well the results from research conducted can be duplicated. Validity, on the other hand, deals with veracity and how well the results from conducted research align with established theories (Middleton, 2019).

The four criteria for reliability and validity are credibility, authenticity, criticality and integrity. Credibility deals with whether the results accurately represent the participants' responses. Authenticity deals with different voices being heard. Criticality deals with thoroughly assessing all parts of the research. Lastly, integrity deals with researchers being self-critical (How is reliability and validity realised in qualitative research, n.d.).

According to Bertilsson and Gillberg (2017) quoting Williams and Morrow (2009) in order to ensure reliability and validity, researchers should provide detailed data and information regarding the study so as to make a replication of the study possible, and so that another study

conducted could possibly generate the same outcomes and findings. Thus, this research included all the resources that were used throughout the research process.

Adding on, Bertilsson and Gillberg (2017) suggest balancing between reflexivity and subjectivity so as to ensure reliability and validity. This process involves striking a balance between the input of the participants and how it is interpreted and understood by the researcher. In order to avoid bias, they suggest discussing the participants' contributions and answers, so as to obtain different perspectives. This then reduces subjectivity.

Moreover, another process involves clearly communicating findings and their importance. With this process, quotes from the participants during the interview process should be provided, along with evidence that confirms that the interview questions were answered (Bertilsson & Gillberg, 2017).

3.8 Procedure

Prior to the commencement of the interviews, the interview equipment was set up. This included recording equipment, along with paper and pen, an interview guide, a consent form, pictures representing "thinspiration" and airbrushed content, pictures representing "body positivity" content and a quiet, private room. The recording equipment was charged beforehand to make sure that it did not switch off during the interviews (Mack et al., 2005). Some of the interviews were conducted via Zoom in observance with COVID-19 protocols. An interview guide is a documented list of questions, and it helps to guide the interviewer on how to conduct the interview (Verlinden, n.d.). It was also used because interview guides help establish structure by ensuring that all interviews follow the same order. In this way, the interviewer does not forget to ask any questions.

For the interviews that were conducted face-to-face, quiet rooms with no outside interference were used in order to make the participants feel safe and assure them that their confidentiality was protected (Mack et al., 2005). A quiet and private room was also essential so as to make the participants feel at ease and more comfortable with opening up.

The interviews, consisting of open-ended questions, were then conducted and recorded. With open-ended questions, there is no limit placed on the length or range of answers given by participants (Mack et al., 2005). The pen and notebook were only used to extra notes and to emphasise any important details so as to listen attentively to the answers given by the

participants and to engage with them as much as possible. Most of the interviews lasted an hour, with a few lasting longer.

Emphasis was placed on engaging with the participants as much as possible, and adopting a warm, conversational tone in order to make them feel comfortable. The pictures were shown to the participants in order to capture their thoughts and feelings on both “thinspiration” and “body positivity” content. The participants were also asked how the pictures made them feel about their own bodies, and whether they thought the pictures were accurate representations of young women’s bodies.

Field notes were also made on the interview guide. Field notes are important as they provide back-up in case the recording device fails. They also note down any non-verbal information that may be of importance. The notes must be taken strategically and also include a range of observations (Mack et al., 2005).

The notes were then expanded after the interviews were conducted. Expanding notes includes developing the short-hand field notes into comprehensive descriptions of the interview outcomes and responses given by participants (Mack et al., 2005).

Expanding notes typically should be done soon after the interview. Due to the fact that the notes will be in short-hand, the interviewer is unlikely to forget any abbreviations and any other important information (Mack et al., 2005).

3.9 Data Analysis

Making sense of qualitative data usually requires categorisation. The three main ways of categorising qualitative data are fixed coding, flexible coding and grounded theory. For the purposes of this research, the flexible coding approach was used. This method of analysing qualitative data was chosen because unlike fixed coding, flexible coding makes room for any new insights and observations that may occur. Furthermore, grounded theory does not allow for transparency or reanalysis of interview data (Deterding & Waters, 2021).

With flexible coding, researchers include new categories and ideas that are based on responses given by participants (Deterding & Waters, 2021). It is considered to be both exploratory and generic. It is exploratory in the sense that it identifies emerging theories, and generic in the sense that it builds theories from contextualised materials.

According to Bertilsson and Gillberg quoting Malhotra and Birks (2017), data analysis for qualitative research includes four stages, which are data assembly, organising and structuring

the data, data display and data verification. In the first step, which is data assembly, the information from the audio recordings, interviews, field notes and researcher's observations is collected. In the second stage, which is organising and structuring the data, the researchers must determine which information is relevant and of importance, and which information should be discarded. The third stage involves the presentation and display of information so as to provide a summary of the research findings. The final step then involves credibility. In this step, the researchers ensure that the data presented accurately reflects the input of the participants, and not the researcher's personal views (Bertilsson & Gillberg, 2017).

Furthermore, according to Bertilsson and Gillberg quoting Malhotra and Birks (2017), triangulation as well as participant validation should be employed. With triangulation, the researcher must compare research findings with secondary data so as to ensure that the research findings are credible. Participant validation, on the other hand, involves contacting the participants after the interviews have been conducted in order to provide clarity in cases of uncertainty.

3.10 Research Ethics

With regard to research ethics, the purpose of the interview must be explained, along with the research topic and research objectives (Mack et al., 2005). In addition to this, consent must be obtained from all interview participants. In most cases, informed consent is usually given verbally. However, a document may be signed as well (Mack et al., 2005). Moreover, in order to conduct interviews in an ethical manner, one must be truthful about the study objectives and not create any false expectations about any aspect of the interview process (Mack et al., 2005). All the participants were asked whether they consent to taking part in the interview and it was made clear that participation in the interview was optional and not compulsory. In addition to this, all the participants signed a consent form as well. Furthermore, all the participants were informed that the interview would be based on the link between social media and body image. The link between the two was explained and participants were given the chance to ask questions. Any possible risks and benefits associated with the interview were also communicated (Mack et al., 2005). It was made clear that some of the questions would potentially be of a sensitive nature. It was also made clear that reading material would be provided at the end of the interview. This reading material was meant to help the participants learn to use social media in ways that would benefit them and promote body positivity, rather than for the consumption of content that could produce undesirable effects such as the development of low self-esteem, eating disorders and a negative body image.

Guaranteeing participants that their responses will be kept confidential is beneficial in encouraging candour, particularly when it comes to any sensitive issues (Mack et al., 2005). The interview participants were assured that their identities and responses would remain private, and that their responses would strictly be used for research purposes only.

3.11 Summary/ Conclusion

In this chapter, an in-depth analysis of the research methodology used for this study was provided. The chapter included information on qualitative research, which was the research approach adopted for this study. The chapter also included the benefits of qualitative research, and why it was chosen as the preferred method for this study. The data collection methods were also explained, along with the procedure that was to be used in order to collect data from eligible participants. Furthermore, the chapter included information regarding how the data collected would be analysed. Lastly, matters of ethics in research were discussed.

Chapter 4: Data presentation

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings obtained from the in-depth interviews. It includes the opinions, insights and thoughts of the participants, as well as the researcher's analysis of some of their contributions. It also includes the opinions and thoughts of the participants obtained through showing them 10 pictures of different women with different body types, skin tones and other physical characteristics. These pictures were obtained from Instagram, and were meant to unearth the views of the participant's on issues related to body image and beauty standards. These opinions were then presented succinctly and in a table format so as to serve as a complementary feature to the information obtained from the interviews.

4.2 Definition and understanding of the term "body image"

At the start of the interview, the 10 participants, young women in Botswana, were asked how they would define the term "body image." Eight out of 10 of the answers given were similar, with the participants stating that overall, body image dealt with perception as well as physical appearance. Some also added that body image deals with the way that one looks. For instance, participant 8 stated that body image refers to how "you see yourself." She added that someone would typically either think that they look good, or that improvement was needed. She then added that body image also had to do with how other people perceive someone, in terms of physical characteristics. Participant 10 stated that body image was about perception, and how

one perceives their own body. She added that body image also deals with how other people feel about their bodies. Although body image is typically described as relating to thoughts and feelings about one's own body, the majority of the participants shared the idea that body image also deals with thoughts and feelings that other people have about another person's body. Participant 4 and 5, however, were different. Their understanding of body image only dealt with people's own opinions about their bodies, and did not include the opinions of other people.

Two out of 10 of the participants had dissimilar responses to the question. Participant 3 felt that body image deals with how one carries themselves in public and in private. She also felt that body image stems from how one feels about themselves, and that those feelings then influence how one carries themselves. Furthermore, she mentioned that body image also deals with the image that other people could possibly have about someone's body.

Participant 9, on the other hand, believed that body image deals with the ideal image that one constantly uses as a basis of comparison. She mentioned that she sometimes compares her physical characteristics with those of young women that she sees on social media.

4.3 The importance placed on other people's opinions about one's body

The next question that was asked was whether other people's opinions about their bodies mattered to the participants. Majority of the participants were on middle ground, while two others said no, and two others said yes. For most of the participants, other people's opinions only mattered if the people were close to them, or if the opinions were kind or as a result of genuine concern.

One of the participants who answered no was participant 4, stating that she had two reasons for her answer. Firstly, she expressed that when she was growing up, there was a culture of other people's opinions being regarded as important, and that this culture stretched to include physical appearances as people were very outspoken. She further added that she then believed that someone was defined according to how other people saw that person, and not how that person saw themselves. There was a general belief that "because people say this, that's who I am." However, she shared how she shifted her mindset to focus less on what others thought of her, and more on what she thought about herself.

Secondly, participant 4 listed reading self-help books as a reason why she does not take other people's opinions regarding her body seriously. She stated that she believes someone passes

malicious comments about someone else's body only because that is how they actually feel about themselves. As a result, other people's opinions should not be taken personally.

Participant 10 answered yes to the question, but added that she was aware that other people's opinions really should not matter to her. She mentioned that she was more likely to internalise what was said about her body if it was said by someone close to her. However, if a stranger said something negative about her body, it would not affect her.

Participant 1 was on middle ground, although mentioned that, to a greater extent, others opinions do not matter. She believed that one should not let what other people think weigh them down. She also believed that other people's opinions would only matter if they were coming from a place of concern and love. For instance, if someone said that she was overweight and that it was bad for her health, she would take it seriously. Other people's opinions would not matter if the opinions were meant to be hurtful.

4.4 Amount of time spent on social media

The participants had varied responses regarding how long, on average, they spent on social media in a day. Some participants, such as participant 3 and 9, mentioned that they would typically spend a maximum of three hours on social media. Participants 4 and 6 mentioned that on a typical day, they would spend roughly 6 hours on social media platforms. Participant 1 was unable to give a specific number of hours, but mentioned that she spent a lot of time on social media platforms as it is her main way of passing the time. Participant 5 mentioned that she would typically spend two to three hours on social media, but would occasionally delete the applications on her phone because they were either too distracting, or would give her feelings of depression as she felt that people's lives were progressing, while her life was at a standstill.

4.5 Type of content participants are exposed to on social media

Questions four, five and six of the interview sought to get a better understanding of the kind of content that the participants expose themselves to on social media platforms, as this has an impact on body image.

With question four, participants were asked whether they followed any social media influencers or celebrities, and why. This is due to the fact that a significant number of influencers and celebrities contribute to body image concerns through practices such as posting heavily edited pictures and promoting a sense of perfection and vanity. Answers varied, though the majority

mentioned that they only follow a few. Participant 1 added that she followed roughly five to ten celebrities, having chosen to stop following many influencers. She stated that the reason for that was that she did not want to continue to feel envious of influencers and their bodies, explaining that influencers always have certain features such as the perfect face, perfect teeth and perfect weight. She also added that influencers made her not want to post any pictures of herself as they have set a standard that people follow, and that she believes she does not meet that standard.

Participant 8 also stated that she only follows a few celebrities and influencers. One of the influencers she gave is a woman known as Saggy Sarah on Instagram. She added that she enjoys Saggy Sarah's content because she spreads body positivity, thereby making her feel confident in her own body. She also mentioned that other influencers typically post the best versions of themselves on social media, as opposed to an accurate representation of how they look most of the time. Participant 4, on the other hand, stated that she followed many influencers and celebrities. She included that she followed mainly those that post about yoga and eating healthy, such as Yoga with Jess, because she likes the content and learns a lot from it.

With question 5, participants were asked whether they follow any accounts of hashtags that promote body positivity. In addition to participant 8, participants 1, 2 and 10 also stated that they follow such accounts. Participant 10 stated that she follows people such as Mik Zazon and hashtags such as '#bodypositivemovement' because they make her feel confident in her body and help her to overlook her insecurities and love the parts of herself that she does not like. Participant 2 added that she followed accounts such as Fit Girls Guide and other accounts that posted positive, uplifting and motivating content. Fit Girls Guide typically posts before and after pictures of women who have transformed their bodies through exercise, healthy eating recipes and work out challenges that followers can join in on.

The rest of the participants stated that they do not follow such accounts and hashtags, with no specific reason other than that it has simply never come to their minds.

Question six dealt with following any accounts or hashtags that promote weight loss. Eight of the participants added that they did not follow any such accounts. For many of the participants, the idea had simply never come to their minds. Participant 3 said that she would only follow such accounts if she was ever looking to lose weight. Those that responded 'yes' were participants 2 and 9. Participant 2 stated that she follows a myriad of accounts that promote

weight loss as she has always felt like she was on the heavier side. Asked how those accounts make her feel, she added that although they are sometimes depressing, especially when she is in low spirits, they mainly make her feel motivated to work out and push herself so that she can look better.

4.6 A young woman's idea of an ideal body type

The next question dealt with discovering what the participants believed was an ideal body type, as well as what had influenced their answer. All the participants gave certain physical characteristics, with some going into more detail than others. Before participant 1 gave her response, she stated that she believed all body types were beautiful. She then added that an ideal body type for her would be someone with a medium-sized body, weighing around 60-75 kilograms. This would include moderately sized breasts and hips. When asked what had influenced her answer, she mentioned society and social media. She elaborated further, stating that when growing up, she never paid attention to her body until classmates and family members started to comment on how thin she was, claiming she was not eating enough. This was further exacerbated by the change in social media standards. According to her, in the past, social media would promote skinny figures and nowadays, social media promotes women with fuller bodies, big breasts and buttocks and an hourglass figure. Due to all those influences, she became convinced that she had to gain weight in order to have an acceptable body.

Participant 2 described two different body types in response to the question. These were a curvy body, as well as a slender body with toned arms and a skinny waist. She added that she felt as though if a woman's body was not one of the two, she was just average. When asked what had influenced her answer, she mentioned social media advertisements, where most of the time, the models were thin and the clothes they were wearing suited them well. She also added that when she tried the same clothes on, she felt that they did not look as good on her as they did on the models' bodies.

In response to question 7, participant 3 did not give much information in terms of physical characteristics, instead saying that she believed all body types were ideal as long as the person exuded confidence. Participants 5 and 6 gave similar responses. Participant 5 stated that she believed any body type was ideal as long as the person felt comfortable in that body. Participant 6 also stated that being comfortable in one's own skin was the most important thing. She also mentioned proportion.

Participant 4 responded that her answers were influenced by the media, society as well as the male gender. She described her ideal body type as consisting of a slim waist, small breasts and of medium height. Although she does not fit into that body type, she did add that, in general, she was not unhappy with her body.

In response to the question, participant 7 stated that her ideal body type consisted of features such as dark skin, natural hair and full lips. She also mentioned preferring a curvy figure that was in proportion, and arms that are not too muscular. She added that she felt a curvy figure appealed to her more, and that men generally pay more attention to curvy women, which then makes other women feel less attractive. She also gave society as a reason, adding that in the past, many people would pass negative comments about her body and this had a negative impact on her body image.

Participant 8's characteristics included a mocha complexion, medium height, a curvy figure and curly hair. She stated that she felt her answer was influenced by social media as well as society. Participant 9, on the other hand, provided a picture of a tall and slender woman as an example of her ideal body type. She also mentioned that she preferred a skinny body that would be able to fit into small clothes. Lastly, participant 10 gave a curvy body with moderately sized breasts and buttocks as her answer. She mentioned that she was partly influenced by social media, as although skinny figures were promoted in the past, there is now an emphasis on curvy women. She also mentioned that she felt curvy women looked better in most items of clothing.

Question 8 followed up on question 7, asking the participants if they had ever taken any actions to achieve the body types they described. Eight out of ten of the participants answered yes, stating that they had started working out and had also made changes to their diets. Participant 2 mentioned following diets such as the Ketogenic diet, which consists of eating less carbohydrates and more fats, as well as cleanses and remedies such as drinking lemon water and green tea. She also focused on exercises that were meant to tone her arms and give her bigger buttocks, such as squats. Participant 8 stated that she focuses on working out rather than making changes to her diet, adding that she had done so in the past and it led to her developing an eating disorder in an attempt to become slimmer. She also mentioned that, although she had not realised it at first, her eating disorder brought about depression.

Question 9 asked the participants how they felt about their bodies, and whether they had a positive or a negative body image. Majority of the participants, six to be exact, were on middle ground. Two other participants reported that they had a positive body image, while the

remaining two reported that they had a negative body image. Participant 3 reported that she is in the middle when it comes to her body image. She stated that one thing she really likes about her body is that she does not gain weight easily, no matter how much fast food she eats. She also gave information about the bodily features she did not like, most of which were laced with self-ridicule. She mentioned not liking her posture, likening herself to the Hunchback in the way she walked. She also mentioned feeling that some of her features drew her unwanted and unnecessary attention, such as her thick lips.

Participant 9, on the other hand, reported that she had a negative body image because what she considered to be the ideal body type is a far cry from the way her body looks.

Participant 4 reported a positive body image. When asked why, she stated that she has come to learn that everyone is different, and once one accepts their uniqueness, one starts to focus more on the bodily features that they like.

Question 10 aimed to unearth the participants' opinions on social media platforms, and in particular, whether or not they believed that social media platforms such as Instagram promote a certain body type. All the participants voted yes, confirming without a shadow of a doubt that social media platforms tend to promote a certain body type. Four participants stated that they believe social media promotes women with thin body structures, while six participants stated that they believe social media promotes women with curvy body structures, such as big buttocks and breasts, a small waist and an hour-glass figure. Some of the participants gave celebrities such as Kim Kardashian and Rihanna as examples.

When asked whether they felt the body types they described in question 10 were attainable or unattainable. One participant, participant 9, voted that the slender body type is attainable, but only if one dedicates a significant amount of time to attaining it and is motivated as dieting can be quite challenging. Three participants felt that the body type promoted can be both attainable and unattainable, depending on the person. Participant 6, for instance, stated that genetics plays a significant role in whether you can achieve a certain body type or not, regardless of how much exercise you put in. The remaining six participants voted that the body types promoted by social media platforms are unattainable. Participant 3, for instance, stated that social media sets unrealistic and ridiculous standards, thereby making the curvaceous body type unattainable.

Question 12 asked the participants if they ever edit pictures of themselves before posting them on social media platforms. Six of the participants reported that they do not edit their pictures,

while the remaining four reported that they do. Of the participants who reported that they do not edit their pictures, the main reasons given were, firstly, the desire to present an authentic rather than fake depiction of themselves, and secondly, generally being happy with the way they look in pictures. Participant 5, for instance, reported that she used to edit her pictures in the past as a result of her insecurities and belief that she had to look a certain way. However, she is now more comfortable with the way she looks. Adding on, participant 3 stated that although she generally tends not to take a lot of pictures of herself, she does not edit them whenever she does as she wants the ‘real her’ to show.

Question 13 dealt with comparison, asking participants whether they ever compare their body types and other physical characteristics with those that they see on social media. Seven of the participants admitted to engaging in comparison, while two stated that they did not and one stated that she sometimes did it. For those who stated that they did not engage in comparison, participant 6 mentioned that she appreciates other women’s beauty rather than comparing as she knows that she cannot compare to anyone else. Participant 8, on the other hand, stated that she does not engage in comparison as it is the thief of joy, and because one woman’s beauty does not translate the absence of her own.

Of those who admitted to engaging in comparison, participant 1 stated that she used to compare herself to other women on social media a lot more frequently in the past, before choosing to remove them from her timeline. Her response highlights the importance of making conscious decisions on what content to expose yourself to on social media, and how that content has the power to shape your beliefs and actions. She also added that she currently follows women who are similar to her in body structure in an effort to appreciate her body more. However, she still engages in social media comparison once in a while.

The next question was a follow-up on question 13, and asked the participants how the comparison made them feel. Majority of the participants mused that the comparisons made them feel insecure about their bodies. Participant 5, who stated that she usually engaged in social media comparisons with those slimmer than her, indicated that such comparisons typically make her feel pressured into losing weight. Participant 1, on the other hand, added that comparison makes her feel envious of other people, which is one of the reasons she chose to stop following a significant number of celebrities and social media influencers. Adding on, participant 8 mentioned that comparison makes her feel bad about herself, and pressured into achieving a certain body type.

Participant 7, on the other hand, stated that the comparison inspires and motivates her to work towards achieving her ideal body type. Participant 10 was on middle ground, explaining that sometimes engaging in comparison motivates her to achieve her body goals, and other times the comparison magnifies what she perceives to be her flaws, thereby making her feel insecure about her body. Participant 4 stated that although comparing her body with those she sees on social media platforms makes her feel insecure, she then has time to reflect afterwards and realises that she is generally happy with the way her body looks. Furthermore, participant 2 stated that the comparison makes her realise that, unlike influencers on social media, she does not have to edit her pictures to look a certain way and that everything different about her body makes her unique.

Question 15 asked the participants whether they felt that social media puts pressure on young women to look a certain way. All participants responded to the question with a resounding yes. Participant 4 stated that social media sets beauty standards, and social media influencers exert a significant amount of influence and their opinions matter to people. Thus, if a certain influencer is of the belief that that a certain body type is the ideal body type, that opinion will matter to people. Participant 7, also of the belief that social media puts pressure on young women, added that nowadays, young women are constantly taking pictures in certain angles to achieve a certain look, such as making their waists smaller or their buttocks bigger. This then speaks to the considerable amount of influence that social media holds over young women.

4.7 The link between social media and insecurity

Adding on, question 16 asked the participants whether social media made them feel insecure or confident about their bodies. Three participants expressed indifference, some admitted to social media making them feel insecure, and others were on middle ground, stating that sometimes they felt insecure, and other times they felt confident. Only one participant stated that social media only makes her feel confident about her body.

Participant 6 mentioned that she is more focused on social media accounts that will help her to achieve her goals as well as progress in life. Participant 3 stated that she focuses more on social media content that makes her feel good, and less on the side of social media that tries to dictate how she should look in order to be more appealing. Participant 7 talked about the comments section of social media, as well as the number of “likes” that people get on their pictures. She mentioned that in some cases, her insecurity comes from the fact that she could post a picture she thinks she looks beautiful in, but receive only a few likes. She then went on to mention

issues of nudity on social media, and how she felt that young women who post half-naked or completely naked pictures receive more “likes” and comments. The issue of “likes” raises a valid point, as many young women focus excessively on receiving as many interactions as possible on their pictures, and they tend to interpret it as an indication of how attractive, or not attractive, they are. Thus, if they fail to receive many interactions on the pictures, this in turn has a negative effect on their self-esteem and body image.

Participant 8 stated that social media makes her feel confident in her body due to the fact that she focuses on accounts and content that promote body positivity. Her answer highlights the importance of young women making conscious decisions regarding the kind of social media content that they expose themselves to.

The last question, question 17, asked participants if there were any other factors, other than social media, that made them feel insecure about their bodies. The question also asked which factor takes precedence. The participants gave answers such as society, traditional media, as well as family friends. One participant also mentioned men as a contributing factor to insecurity. Some participants mentioned that, in addition to social media, traditional media outlets also have a tendency to promote certain body types. Participants also mentioned that people around them sometimes pass negative, hurtful or unsolicited comments about their bodies, which also contributes to their insecurities. Majority of the participants mentioned society as the main factor contributing to their insecurities.

4.8 Picture Technique

After the 17 questions, participants were shown 10 pictures sourced from Instagram. The pictures, which were all of women of various races and body types, dealt with body image, and were a combination of edited pictures and pictures that were not edited. The goal was to find out how participants perceived the pictures, and whether they felt they contributed positively or negatively to body image concerns. The participants were asked to share their thoughts and opinions in a succinct manner. The information obtained is detailed in the tables below.

TABLE 1

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5
Picture 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Body type is not attainable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I like the picture. • Nice long legs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nice picture. • Natural body. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not a lot of airbrushing. • Nice picture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edited – green screen was used. • Would have made me feel better if it

					was a plus-size woman.
Picture 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Airbrushed. • Too perfect. • Unrealistic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perfect facial features. • Airbrushed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woman trying too hard. • Heavy makeup. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates the impression that women should be flawless. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beautiful woman. • Slim.
Picture 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Represents today's beauty standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nice outfit. • Beautiful body. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looks natural. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beautiful. • Probably used a filter. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good body size.
Picture 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes body positivity. • Natural, and not enhanced. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Favourite picture. • Embrace imperfections. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I like the picture. • Real. • Unapologetic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confident in her body. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too revealing.
Picture 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement on T-shirt promotes body positivity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women need to work out. • Love statement on T-shirt. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May have used makeup to cover up for being fat. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beautiful woman. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beautiful. • Motivates women to love their bodies.

TABLE 2

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5
Picture 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing body hair and acne. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bold and brave. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looks revolting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goes against beauty standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should have shaved.
Picture 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes body positivity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing imperfections. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows bodily scars are normal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The message is to love your body. • Feel-good picture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beautiful.
Picture 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unrealistic beauty standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Body type is not attractive. • Fake. • Excessive makeup. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Body type promoted by social media. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following the trend that women should have big breasts and buttocks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edited.
Picture 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes body positivity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not too revealing. • Women having fun. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looks happy and confident. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looks natural. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural
Picture 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Airbrushed. • Filters used. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beautiful body structure. • Toned. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows how women on Instagram like flaunting their bodies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looks natural. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A little enhanced

TABLE 3

	Participant 6	Participant 7	Participant 8	Participant 9	Participant 10
Picture 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavy editing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stunning woman. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beautiful long legs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misleading. • Causes insecurity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessive editing.

Picture 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lot of airbrushing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not a confidence booster. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pretty woman. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Also misleading. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skin is too “perfect”
Picture 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beautiful. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woman is dark and beautiful. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beautiful. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Body is not too exposed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel-good picture.
Picture 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brave woman. • Too exposed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence booster. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caption should read “normalise all bodies” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confident woman. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes body positivity.
Picture 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unhealthy body • Causes body shaming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes a positive body image. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pretty woman. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confident woman. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence booster.

TABLE 4

	Participant 6	Participant 7	Participant 8	Participant 9	Participant 10
Picture 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unshaved underarms look unattractive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Underarm hair on a lady is unattractive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not used to seeing body hair on women. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatable due to acne. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perfectly imperfect.
Picture 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows real bodies. • Feel-good picture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows scars should be embraced. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women look happy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel-good picture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence booster.
Picture 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In line with current beauty standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes a negative body image. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Ideal” body type promoted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows you have to change yourself to fit in. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unrealistic and fake.
Picture 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beautiful smile. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woman looks happy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woman looks happy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel-good picture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beautiful, carefree woman.
Picture 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows social media is also advocating for dark skinned women. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perfect body and skin tone. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beautiful woman. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Causes insecurity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beautiful body.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter highlighted key findings from the interviews conducted with the ten participants. Important themes that were unearthed from the interviews were mentioned in detail, along with the researcher’s analysis of some of the findings. Themes included the beauty “ideal,”

insecurities as a result of social media content, as well as social comparison. The chapter then concluded with the participants' thoughts and opinions on the ten pictures presented to them.

5. Chapter 5: Discussion of findings, summary, conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses research findings, provides a summary of the findings, explains the research questions and how these were answered by the participants, and provides recommendations. In discussing the findings, information that was provided by the participants during the interview process is compared with the contributions of various authors mentioned in the literature review. The summary of findings then highlights the key issues that were raised and discussed during the in-depth interviews. How the research questions were answered is then explained, before sharing recommendations based on the findings.

5.2 Discussion of findings

In the literature review, Hargreaves and Tiggemann (2006, p. 567) refer to body image as “an individual’s thoughts and feelings about their body and physical appearance.” Kim and Lennon (2007, p.3) add that “it encompasses both how we see ourselves (perceptual) and how we feel about what we see (affective).” Referring to these definitions, it is clear that body image relates to how people view themselves, and the thoughts and opinions that they formulate based on this. Majority of the participants, however, described body image as not only thoughts and opinions one has about their own body, but also thoughts and opinions that one has about other people’s bodies. Only two out of ten of the participants defined body image as thoughts one has about their own body, disregarding how other people may feel about other people’s bodies.

5.3 In support of social media exacerbating body image issues

A considerable amount of literature deals with arguments that support the validity of the link between social media and a negative body image. Salomon and Brown (2018, p.540) state that “Several well-established theories within psychology and sociology argue that mass media, particularly media that involves high levels of consumer engagement, is extremely influential in shaping individuals’ beliefs and behaviour.” This argument points to the influence of social media, as social media platforms allow for interaction and engagement. This link was addressed mainly in questions 7 and 15 of the interview. When the participants were asked about their ideal body type and what had influenced their answers, the majority of the participants added that their answers had been influenced by social media, among other factors. Participant 1, for

instance, added that social media platforms nowadays promote women with fuller, curvy bodies and that that has made her believe that she needs to gain more weight in order to have an acceptable body. Question 15 asked the participants whether they felt that social media puts pressure on young women to look a certain way. All the participants answered yes. Many of them stated that social media platforms and influencers set beauty standards, often unrealistic, that young women feel pressured to conform to. For instance, participant 4, named beauty standards promoted on social media platforms as well as social media influencers as reasons why social media pressures young women to look a certain way. She then elaborated, stating that these factors have a strong influence on the choices young women make as well as how they see themselves. Participant 8 also contributed to the argument, stating that, because of social media and how influential it is, young women who are slender will be under the impression that there is something wrong with them and their bodies. Thus, the participants' responses corresponded with the contributions of the authors mentioned in the literature review.

Furthermore, participant 8 added that her idea of an ideal body type is partly influenced by social media. This then led to her working out more, opting not to make any changes to her diet because, in the past, her desire to be thinner led to the development of an eating disorder. The idea of social media content potentially causing eating disorders is in line with contributions made by multiple authors in the literature review. DeBraganza and Hausenblas (2010) state that a negative body image caused by social media, among other factors, results in the development of eating disorders. Madden and Breny (2016) also state that social media content and body dissatisfaction lead to eating disorders. Moreover, Cohen, Newton-John and Slater (2020), quoting Holland and Tiggemann (2016) acknowledge the link between social media and eating disorders. This also, once again, validates the argument proposed by numerous authors that social media exercises a great deal of influence in the lives of social media influencers.

With regard to the link between social media and insecurities, and as mentioned in the literature review, Hye (2020) quoting Perloff (2014) states that social media is likely to be more damaging on young women's self-esteem as opposed to old media platforms. This is a result of certain features that are only linked to new media platforms, such as the ability to comment on pictures, as well as share and like them. If comments posted on young women's pictures are negative, this causes a myriad of insecurities. This point also corresponds with some of the participants' responses. For instance, participant 1 reported that she feels social media platforms view women with curvy body types as more beautiful, which then makes her feel insecure as she is

skinny. Adding on, participant 7 mentioned that when it comes to social media, her insecurities mainly stem from receiving only a few “likes” on pictures of herself that she posts.

5.4 In support of social media remedying body image issues

In addition, for the participants who acknowledged following social media accounts that promote body positivity, they stated that such accounts make them feel confident and happy in their own bodies, and that they make them realise the importance of accepting their flaws. As such, all these responses support the argument brought forward by Salomon and Brown (2018) that social media plays a key role in influencing people’s thoughts and beliefs. Social media platforms influence what young women perceive to be the ideal body type, as well as how they should feel about their bodies, depending on the kind of content that they expose themselves to. Adding to this argument, Tiggemann and Anderburg (2019) state that the body positive movement reduces appearance comparison, decreases body dissatisfaction and promotes a positive body image. Furthermore, as stated in the literature review, Cohen et al (2020) quoting Sastre (2014) add that the movement challenges societal beauty standards, promotes acceptance and appreciation for various body shapes and sizes, and also focuses on the health of bodies, and not the appearance alone. Such posts also promote body appreciation and body care. When asked how following accounts that promote body positivity made them feel, the participants stated that such accounts post uplifting content that helps them feel confident and more accepting of their flaws. The participants also mentioned that such posts help them not to pay much attention to any insecurities that they have. As such, the participants’ responses correlate with the ideas promoted in the literature review.

The literature review also deals with the “ideal” body type that is promoted by social media platforms. According to Thompson and Stice (2001), slender or thin women are frequently portrayed as having the ideal body type that women should work towards. This idea is known as the thin-ideal internalisation, where young women are influenced into taking various measures in order to achieve this body type. Furthermore, Hye (2020) quoting Cohen et al (2019) states that social media platforms present a stream of images that advance the idea that being slender is ideal. This argument is further strengthened by Fardouly and Holland (2018). Quoting Thompson et al (1999) and van den Berg et al (2002), the authors report that the relationship between social media usage and body dissatisfaction is characterised by two factors, which are appearance-based social comparisons and the thin-ideal internalisation. Majority of the participants were not in agreement with this notion, stating that it is in fact curvaceous women that are portrayed on social media as having the ideal body type.

Participants 1 and 10, for instance, stated that although slender women were featured by social media as having the ideal body type in the past, this is no longer the case. Currently, women who are portrayed as having the ideal body type are those who have hour-glass figures, with a small waist and sizable breasts and buttocks. However, four participants did agree with the authors' contributions, expressing that slender women, particularly those with bodies similar to those of professional models, are depicted as having the ideal body type.

5.5 Photo editing and retouching

The literature review also covers the issue of young women on social media platforms using applications to edit and retouch their pictures before posting them. Kee and Farid (2011, p. 19907) state:

Popular photo-editing software, such as Adobe Photoshop, allows photo editors to easily alter the appearance of a person. These alterations may affect the geometry of the subject and may include slimming of legs, hips, and arms, elongating the neck, improving posture, enlarging the eyes, or making faces more symmetric. Other photometric alterations affect skin tone and texture. These changes may include smoothing, sharpening, or other operations that remove or reduce wrinkles, cellulite, blemishes, freckles, and dark circles under the eyes. A combination of geometric and photometric manipulations allows photo retouchers to subtly or dramatically alter a person's appearance.

This corresponds with the responses that four of the participants gave when asked whether they edit pictures of themselves before posting them on social media platforms. The participants mentioned using filters, such as those found on Instagram and Snapchat, in order to change their facial features. Participant 1, for instance, mentioned using the filters to conceal any blemishes or uneven skin because social media promotes a sense of perfection. Participant 6 mentioned using filters to make her skin look lighter and clearer. Majority of the participants expressed that they do not use filters. From the responses given, most mentioned that their choice not to use filters is tied with the desire to present an authentic image to the world, as opposed to a fake one.

5.6 Social media putting pressure on young women to look a certain way

The literature also correlates with the responses given by participants with regard to the idea of social media platforms putting pressure on young women to look a certain way. Hargreaves and Tiggeman (2006) quoting Cash and Pruzinsky (2002) state that the perceived pressure that is placed by the media as a means of encouraging a thin body structure results in the

development of a negative body image. In addition, the authors Fardouly and Holland (2018), quoting Cafri et al (2005) highlight the fact that women “subscribe to appearance-related pressures and internalise the societal ideals of appearance portrayed in the media.” Referring to the interviews conducted, all the participants strongly believed that social media applies pressure on young women to look a certain way. Participant 4, for instance, mentioned the influence and power that social media platforms and social media influencers have over women, as well as other social media users. Thus, their promotion of certain beauty standards and body types are taken seriously by young women, who then feel the need to conform to them. Participant 7 expressed that, due to social media’s depictions of women, ordinary women worry that no one will like them because their bodies do not look like those promoted by social media. In addition, participant 6 communicated that this pressure can be seen in the way that young women take pictures in certain angles so as to, for instance, make their waists look smaller or their buttocks look bigger.

5.7 Summary of the findings

The research found that, ultimately, participants have mixed feelings when it comes to body image. Although social media plays a part in this, other factors such as society and traditional media platforms are also to blame. When it comes to social media platforms, promoting beauty standards that are considered unrealistic and encouraging a sense of perfection that is a far cry from reality were the main reasons the participants had body image concerns. In addition to this, the research found that body image issues are also the result of worrying over how many “likes” and comments pictures will receive. If a participant posts a picture and only gets a few reactions, this is likely to cause insecurity. Furthermore, some participants expressed the feeling that social media platforms encourage nudity, as such pictures typically tend to receive more reactions compared to pictures where social media users are fully dressed.

The research also found that all the participants have a strong belief that social media platforms put pressure on young women to look a certain way. This is through encouraging certain beauty standards that then result in young women altering their appearances or conforming to those beauty standards in an effort to fit in. Furthermore, the research findings show that the participants regard body image as relating to not only how they feel about their bodies, but how other people feel about the participants’ physical characteristics as well.

Regarding the ideal body image, research findings show that all of the participants have one thing or another that they would like to change about their bodies. In addition, they have all

taken actions to achieve their ideal body types, ranging from exercising to making changes to their diets. Lastly, the participants all had different opinions regarding the body types that social media platforms promote. Some are of the idea that social media promotes being slender, while others feel that social media promotes being curvaceous.

5.8 Conclusions

The first research question sought to find out whether social media makes the participants feel confident or insecure about their bodies. The answers were varied; some stated that social media made them feel insecure, some were indifferent, and others were on middle ground. Only one participant expressed that social media makes her feel confident about her body. Participant 10, for instance, who was on middle ground, added that social media makes her feel confident about her body if she is exposed to content that promotes body positivity. In a similar fashion, she mentioned that social media makes her feel insecure if she is exposed to content that promotes particular beauty standards and a sense of perfection. Participant 7 mentioned that social media makes her feel insecure if she gets only a few “likes” on a picture of herself that she has posted.

The second and third questions dealt with whether young women engage in social comparison, and how engaging in such comparisons make them feel. The interviews conducted revealed that majority, though not all of the participants engaged in comparison.

The participants gave different responses regarding how the comparison made them feel, with some stating that they felt insecure, some on middle ground, and a few stating that engaging in such comparisons made them feel confident. For those who felt insecure, this was mainly when comparing themselves with women who have the body type that they want to work towards. One participant mentioned that she mainly compares herself with people that she knows, due to the fact that social media influencers, models and celebrities frequently edit their pictures, sometimes excessively. Two of the participants stated that they do not engage in such comparisons. Participant 8 added that she views comparison as the thief of joy when explaining why she does not engage in social comparison. Another participant, participant 6, added that she does not engage in comparison as she is aware that one person cannot compare to anyone else.

The final question sought to find out how young women in Botswana felt after being exposed to content that encourages body positivity. Majority of the participants reported that they did not “follow” any social media accounts that promote body positivity. However, for the

participants who mentioned that they “followed” such accounts, it was revealed that such content has a positive effect on their mood as well as body image.

5.9 Recommendations

Social media platforms offer a host of benefits for users. For instance, they connect people, provide useful information and resources to help people improve their lives, and they serve as platforms where people can sustain livelihoods. They are also a source of entertainment. As such, social media users are advised to use those platforms wisely so that they have positive rather than negative impacts on their lives. This involves being mindful about the content that they expose themselves to. With the exception of advertisements, social media platforms such as Instagram grant users the power to take control over what they view. Therefore, social media users should take advantage of this. With regard to the purpose of this study, rather than consuming content that creates feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem, young women should consume content that will encourage body positivity.

With influence, comes responsibility. As such, social media platforms should do more to ensure that the time that users spend on the platforms is enjoyable, rather than depressing. Adding disclaimers for certain hashtags that are related to body image, such as “#thin,” and providing resources to help such users, shows that social media platforms such as Instagram are moving in the right direction. Instagram has also provided a feature that hides the exact number of “likes” people receive on their pictures. However, more still needs to be done to ensure that social media platforms do not cause or exacerbate body image issues. These platforms could, for instance, add disclaimers under heavily edited images so that social media users, especially those who are impressionable, are aware that such images are not representations of reality, and that they do not need to conform to any beauty standards. Social media influencers can also, if willing, add such disclaimers, and publish posts about body image issues, sparking discussions with the very users that they have the power to influence.

Parents, guardians and schools should also educate on safe practices when it comes to navigating the social media sphere, in order to ensure that social media users do not fall victim to content that may worsen body image issues, as well as possibly lead to undesirable outcomes such as mental health issues and eating disorders. Emphasis should be placed on teaching users to use social media as platforms for entertainment, building skills and acquiring knowledge.

The link between social media and body image should also be of importance to policy makers, due to issues such as depression and eating disorders coming into play. Although these can be

treated, they can, in some instances, also result in grave health-related consequences and even death. Policy makers, therefore, should carefully control the legal framework in which social media platforms operate. In particular, social media content that promotes eating disorders and being thin should be banned. As people who have first-hand experience, and therefore opinions, comments and recommendations to share, young women can also galvanise policy makers into action by sparking discourse on the issue and writing to legislators.

Lastly, for future research, researchers should also focus on the body image issues that males face as a result of social media. Researchers should also investigate the relationship between time spent on social media platforms and body image issues, so as to assess whether time spent on social media has any bearing on body image concerns.

5.10 Conclusion

This chapter provided a review of the research findings as well as recommendations based on the findings. The findings were compared against information provided in the literature review. Authors' contributions on the link between social media platforms and insecurities correlated with the responses given by participants. This was the same for social media both exacerbating and remedying body image issues, and putting pressure on young women to look a certain way. Recommendations were then made to key groups, such as social media users, policy makers, social media influencers and the people behind the platforms, as well as schools, parents and guardians.

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