

## A STUDY EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF MEDIA CONSUMPTION ON BODY IMAGE AND BEAUTY AMONG YOUNG CORPORATE GHANAIAN WOMEN IN THE GREATER ACCRA REGION

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### ABSTRACT

*The ubiquitous nature of the media in modern times makes it quite easy for one to be unhappy with one's body as media portray all forms of "ideal" images through platforms such as movies, social media, advertisements, music videos, celebrity/gossip magazines, fashion programmes on TV. Contemporary trends in fashion, such as hairstyles, clothing, makeup and accessories have been popularized through both new and traditional media. It has been estimated that young women now see more images of exceptionally beautiful women in one day than their mothers saw throughout their entire adolescence. Through survey, this study seeks to find out if, among young Ghanaian corporate women, the media had influence on their beauty perceptions, beauty choices and their self-body image. The study gathers that the majority of respondents (88.4%) believed that beauty portrayals in the media are attainable with a lot of them comparing themselves with media ideals and more than half (54%) having attempted to create looks of media icons. Peer comparison was another influential factor, which 46 % of respondents engaged in. It was recommended that media influence should not be overlooked when deciding on media content so as not to project idealised images which may be typical of "foreign" culture*

**KEYWORDS:** Media Consumption, Mediated Beauty, Body image, Media influence, Social comparison, Media Portrayals, Ghanaian women, foreign culture.

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

With all forms of pressure on "perfect" looks coming from different directions in today's world, it seems quite easy for one to be unhappy with one's body as media portray all forms of "ideal" images through movies, social media, advertisements, music videos, celebrity/gossip magazines, fashion programmes on TV amongst others. According to a survey by Central YMCA and the Centre for Appearance Research at the University of West England comprising 810 young people and 759 adults across the UK, a quarter of girls (25.4%) compared their bodies to people on TV and over one third (35.2%) would like to look like the models who appeared in magazines. Over a third of men (36.8%) and over half of women (50.4%) reported having compared their bodies to those of people on TV. Almost half of men (42.4%) and 30% of women said they would like their bodies to look like the models who appeared in magazines.

Drawing on media effects and social psychological theories, this study looks at whether young Ghanaian corporate women have any influences from the media they are exposed to, while assuming that any promotional activities in the media targeted at them could easily be patronized as they are career women and likely to have enough purchasing power. It has been established that human infants begin to recognise themselves in mirrors when they are just about two years old. According to Passanante (2013), female dissatisfaction with appearance, that is, having poor body-image, begins at a very early age; female humans begin to dislike what they see only a few years after recognising themselves in the mirror. As humans, physical appearance seems to be of much importance to us. This is not surprising as Fox (1997) finds that good-looking children are more popular, both with classmates and teachers. Teachers tend to expect attractive children to perform better than their mates and are, sometimes, inclined to give higher marks to such children (Fox, 1997). Research has also shown that attractive applicants have a better chance of getting jobs and of receiving higher salaries. One US study found that taller executives earned around \$600 per inch more than shorter ones (Fox, 1997).

Body image is not only a present-day concern. It has been an issue since ages passed. Every period of history has had its own standards of what is beautiful and what is not and every contemporary society has its own distinctive concept of the ideal physical traits. In the middle ages a plump, voluptuous female body was considered highly attractive, as it connoted wealth and fertility (Fox, 1997). In the 19th century being beautiful meant wearing a corset which made a woman's waist line very slim (Doyle, 1997). This was said to have caused breathing and digestive problems among women.

According to Aiken (1998), in the 1950s, a fuller faced and figured woman was the standard of beauty at that time whereas in the 1960s and 1970s, a deeply tanned face was fashionable and was a major sign of affluence for those who could afford to travel to sunnier climates. In modern times, dieting and exercising oneself into a "fashionable slim shape" to have a youthful appearance is the order of the day (Grogan, 2008). An increased emphasis on the desirability of appearing fit and healthy, together with pressures in the employment market have all conspired to denigrate the visible signs of ageing (Rumsey & Harcourt, 2005).

### **Contemporary Media Scene in Ghana Vis-À-Vis Fashion and Beauty**

The media landscape in Ghana is a friendly one allowing for both private and public electronic and print media to thrive. According to the National Communications Authority (NCA), as at the third quarter of 2015, the total number of authorised TV operators stood at 62. This number included 21 Analogue Terrestrial Television (free on air), 23 Satellite Television Broadcasting (Free-To-Air Direct-Home Single Channel), 6 Satellite Television Broadcasting (Pay TV Direct-To-Home Bouquet), 6 Satellite Television Broadcasting (Free-To-Air Direct-To-Home Bouquet), 4 Digital Terrestrial Pay Television (Service and Frequency), 1 Digital Terrestrial Pay Television (Service Only) and 1 Digital Cable Television (NCA, 2015)

The programming of these TV stations are mainly entertainment-based with most of them showing movies, musicals and serials. News programmes are relatively brief on these networks. By showing more entertainment programmes, viewers are exposed to fashion and beauty trends, especially from other cultures since most of their content is foreign.

The print media is also inundated with a lot of registered and unregistered dailies, weeklies, bi-weeklies, sports, weeklies entertainment and leisure, monthly and quarterly magazines such as *AGOO*, *Canoe*, *Enjoy*, *Glitz*, *Complete Fashion*, *GUBA*, *Lifestyle*, *Raine*, *New African Woman*, *Envogue*, *Dreamlife* and *Ovation* which are predominantly fashion and entertainment magazines. These publications are targeted at young women as they feature young celebrities and corporate women and what they are up to while providing fashion and make-up tips. There are also foreign magazines and newspapers such as *Essence*, *O*, *Ebony*, *Seventeen*, *Vogue*, *Elegant*, *Genevieve*, *InStyle*, *Elle* and *Glamour*. In Accra, these magazines are found in supermarkets, clothing shops, hairdressing salons and hotels. They are also sold by street vendors on busy streets such as the Airport bypass which is a likely route of targeted customers.

Apart from these, there are fashion posters and magazines meant to give ideas about fashion regarding clothing which individuals and dressmakers purchase from almost every street corner to serve as models they can use sew clothes. As far as fashion and beauty are concerned, young Ghanaian women are bombarded with these almost everywhere they turn to Domi (2010).

Being fat, big or plump which was always recognised as the epitome of beauty is now being frowned upon in contemporary African and Ghanaian societies as unappealing, distasteful and even ugly with the adoption of slim Western conformation as the standard of beauty in women by the media (Domi, 2010). According to Domi (2010), the Akan ethnic group, for example, encouraged their chiefs to appear plump and majestic. Also, Akan women after giving birth stayed on special diets for about forty days to put on weight. But this is not the case anymore as women try so hard to get into slim, "fashionable" shapes so they can remain "attractive" to their partners and to prevent a "beautiful" woman from snatching their men away (Domi, 2010).

Projections of beauty in the media are directly opposite to traditional notions. Except for a few programmes tailored to include the plump traditional Ghanaian woman, shows aired on TV like beauty pageants do not include the plump, full-figured woman which is a common feature in traditional Ghanaian society. Rather, it is the slim figure that is projected in the media as the perfect representation of who a beautiful woman is.

New fashion trends are usually made popular through the media—social media, TV, radio, billboards, and magazines amongst others. Since the media tend to be ubiquitous, Fox (1997) asserts that the implication of high exposure could be that audience see and hear about 'beautiful people' all the time even more often than members of their own families, making exceptional good looks seem real, normal and attainable.

Novel fashion trends such as hairstyles, clothing, makeup and accessories have been popularized through both new and traditional media. For instance, if an up and coming Ghanaian dancehall music artiste, wears a natural look hairstyle which is brushed to one side this may become a new fashion trend in Ghana. A popular telenovela aired on UTV, Ghana has a character who often wears a dress that has a front low cut to the knee and that style of dress is christened “Maria Cruse”, which is the name of that character and becomes the “in thing” for young ladies to wear.

Apart from using models that are projected as “ideal”, there are certain advertisements which are actually meant to promote certain products that are supposed to give audience the “ideal” body shape and size. A recent ad about a body sculpturing center and another about a drug called Calorad on both analogue and digital television channels in Ghana have caused a stir among women stimulating discussions about these product and service on social media. The body sculpturing ad shows a plus-size lady who wishes to be slim so she can wear swim suits and body-hugging dresses. She gets the doctor at the center to “trim her down” and she is extremely excited about her new look urging women to give body sculpturing a trial.

In a similar vein, an advert on Calorad shows a Ghanaian movie star, Nana Ama McBrown, who used to be plump and later after using the product becomes slim. In the advert, she talks about how her “former body shape and size” became an impediment to her career but after taking Calorad she is actively back on her career which sends the signal that being slim is more beautiful and gives better opportunities than being plump. Perhaps the notion that being slim is a mark of beauty is a reality, but the question is, who is responsible for the creation of this impression? The media, certainly, cannot be ruled out of the answer.

Social media is said to be a major factor that can promote negative body image, especially among young women in contemporary times (Perloff, 2014). Research has shown that exposure to images of friends in social media groups has resulted in dissatisfaction among women. In one such study (Eckler et al., 2013), the researchers found that women were more negative toward their own bodies after looking at photos and posts on Facebook. This particular research showed that the more time the women spent on that social network, the more negatively they felt about themselves and the more comparisons they made to others on Facebook

Currently, getting access to media content is easier than it used to be in the past. It has been estimated that young women now see more images of exceptionally beautiful women in one day than their mothers saw throughout their entire adolescence (Fox, 1997). There have been several studies proving the point that very young girls are adopting certain lifestyles, such as going on diet and taking medications because they think they are fat and unattractive partly as a result of projections in the media (Passanante, 2013).

Although men do make upward comparisons, research finds that more women make upward comparisons and often compare themselves with unrealistically high standards presented in the media (Strahan, Wilson, Cressman & Buote, 2006). As women get exposed to more mainstream media images of powerful, successful and thin women, they tend to perceive the “ideal” projected in the media to be the norm for societal views of what is attractive. Some women have been reported to have made upward comparisons in a positive manner for the purposes of self-motivation which, to a large extent, is acceptable but the majority of upward comparisons are made when the individual feels inadequate suggesting a negative connotation (Collins, 1995).

Generally, women appear to be more anxious about their looks than men because women are judged on their appearance more often than men. Female standards of beauty are much sophisticated and more intransigent (Fox, 1997). As the media give prominence to the ideal female looks and women continually get exposed to these images, extraordinary good looks seem normal with anything short of that standard being nonstandard and ugly. These idealised images have been described by Wolf (1990: p.198) as “The Official Body”. Adolescents and university-age women have been the centre of most research on body image in the past. This is despite the fact that there is little evidence to suggest that graduation from university is associated with a graduation from body image concerns (Tiggemann, 2004). The scanty research on body image of older women suggests that body dissatisfaction is comparable in younger and older women (Tiggemann, 2004; Webster & Tiggemann, 2003).

A cross-sectional study conducted by McLean, Paxton and Wertheim (2010) and Reboussin et al. (2000) supports a relationship between body dissatisfaction in adult women and depression-decreased quality of life, fewer pleasant feelings, increased negative feelings and decreased self-care. The findings of these studies suggest that adult women, however old they may be, also have body image concerns. This current study attempts to provide empirical evidence from the Ghanaian perspective as to whether young Ghanaian corporate women, who are mainly graduates and are less susceptible to any influence from the media as far as body image and satisfaction is concerned. A young Ghanaian corporate woman, in this study was operationalized as a woman who worked for a limited liability company, be it private or public institution, and who was at least 25 years old and at most forty-five (45) years old living and working in the Greater-Accra region.

The study seeks to find out if the media have influence on perceptions of beauty among young corporate women in the Greater-Accra region of Ghana. It also seek to know if the media have any influence on self-image among young corporate women in the Greater-Accra region of Ghana. Further, the study will find out if respondents aspire to media projections on “ideal beauty” and have, consequently, been taking decisions based on those ideals and finally if respondents engage in social comparison behaviour to media ideals and peers.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Social Comparison Theory**

Festinger’s theory of social comparison suggests that people are constantly evaluating themselves including their physical appearance, beliefs and abilities by comparing themselves to others. The comparison is usually, with those in the same peer group or with whom one is similar (Festinger, 1954). Festinger believed that humans engage in this comparison process as a way of establishing a benchmark by which they can make accurate evaluations of themselves.

According to the theory, there are two types of comparisons that usually occur: upward and downward comparisons (Wills, 1981). Upward social comparison is when one compares himself with those one believes one is better than whereas downward social comparison is when one compares oneself to others who are worse off than oneself (Wood, 1989).

Upward comparison is said to be linked to increased depression, anger and low self-esteem; whereas downward comparisons are associated with increased self-esteem and positive effect (Cattarin, Thompson, Thomas & William, 2000). This is because it is believed that when one does not much up to the “ideal” standards which often exists in the upward comparison process, one tends to be under pressure wanting to much up which can lead to psychological imbalances. The converse situation, however, makes one feel “better” and upbeat knowing that one is better off than someone and can, in that way, boost the psychological state of the person (Wills, 1981).

According to Morse and Gergen (1970), “...people are often concerned with their personal attractiveness and general value as human beings. They may frequently compare themselves with others in their immediate

environment to judge their own personal worth” (p. 148). The mass media, certainly, cannot be ruled out of the social comparison equation. It is a “force” that is said to depict a reflection of the reality and forms part of one’s immediate environment. Many researchers have found that normally, women tend to engage in upward social comparisons with a target other who, in most cases, is portrayed in the media.

In the media, we see comparison between light skin people and dark skin; between fat and thin people; between short and tall people; straight hair and people with kinky hair, etc. There is always a comparison concerning appearances in the media. Majority of women have a daily opportunity to make upward comparison by measuring themselves against some form of societal ideal which is depicted in mass media. Social comparisons with media ideals have become a relevant mechanism for learning about appearance and related social expectations among peers and for evaluating oneself in terms of those standards (Jones, 2001).

In Ghana, the dominant cultural norms of beauty is from the west. There is more content coming from the west than local content. By observation, we have a lot more western TV series than local ones. Even local fashion/entertainment programmes have been “westernized” with beauty and fashion tips which are predominantly western. Fashion TV programmes like *Glitterati* and *Glam TV* on GHONE TV station, have segments for new fashion trends and all one sees are summer/spring clothing trends from another continent and this is projected as latest trend for Ghanaians to follow. It would be interesting to know if these depictions, in any way, influence the body image of young Ghanaian corporate women who are required to be conscious about their looks because they represent various organisations and whether it makes them have a particular perception of what beauty is and whether that in turn influences them to take steps to match up with portrayals.

### **Cultivation Theory**

The Cultivation theory was created by George Gerbner and Larry Gross in the late 1960s. It was developed from a large research project that aimed at identifying the “cultivated” effects of television on its viewers (Miller, 2005). The cultivation theory posits that television portrays a certain perception of society which when exposed to for long periods of time, one becomes engrossed in these perceptions and therefore, consider it as the actuality (Gerbner et al., 2002). Gerbner added that the recurrent messages and themes portrayed on TV gradually becomes accepted as the reality, especially, among heavy viewers. This is termed the “mediated reality” For example when viewers watch a lot of violent content, it is assumed that the perception among viewers will be that there is a lot of violence in society.

Expositions portrayed by television is generally considered to be a representation of the reality. For this reason the continuous exposure to the portrayal of reality presented on TV among heavy viewers, especially in cases where they are not exposed to another depiction of reality, makes them accept what is shown on TV as the truth Gerbner (1990). Heavy viewers therefore see the real world in a way that reflects the world as presented on TV. To this effect, Gerbner (1990) argues that television acts as a conduit through which individuals learn about the values of the culture they belong and even the culture of others. Thus the cultivation theory is used to explain how culture is imparted unto others with the help of TV.

Though Gerbner based his assertions through a study of the heavy consumption of violence as shown in fictional television programming, the cultivation theory has been used by other researchers to study the effects of TV and other media content on stereotypes, family, health, the environment and politics (Gerbner et al., 2002).

This study is therefore not limited to television but all media types. In this regard, the study sought to find out if there was any kind of influence of media on body image and perception of beauty among young corporate Ghanaian women.

### **Portrayal of “Beautiful” Images in the Media**

Generally, TV programmes show very beautiful people but advertising leans towards the use of idealised images which is likely to make heavy viewers of TV ads more likely to feel less satisfied about their body image and probably make efforts to match up with these idealized images.

A study by Rumble, Cash, and Nashville (2000) found that the schematic association of attractiveness and thinness with goodness was present in over 100 female characters appearing in 23 Walt Disney animated films (cel cartoons) produced over a 60-year period.

In similar vein, Fouts and Burggraf (2000) observed that thin female characters in television situation comedies were more likely than weightier female characters to be praised by male characters, and less likely to be insulted by male characters in ways deliberately tied to evocation of “canned” and supportive audience laughter.

Gregory Fouts and Kimberly Burggraf studied 18 situation comedies from prime time TV and discovered that the higher the weight of the female character depicted, the more likely it was that negative comments were made by other characters about her or directly to her (Fouts and Burggraf, 2000). These negative comments were often followed by a laugh track that suggested to the audience that these negative comments were funny.

### *Impact of Media Portrayals of Beauty Versus Peer Influence*

There have been researches done to prove that overly thin females in the media actually have an impact on the way young girls think or behave (Poorani, 2012). It has been observed that exposure to media ideals is one of the socio-cultural factors that is promoting increasingly held up view on thinner body (and now ever more physically fit) image as the ideal for women and the muscularity schema for boys (Harrison & Hefner, 2006; Smolak & Levine, 1996; Thompsen et al., 1999).

According to Van Vonderen, and Kinnally (2012) comparison to media figures is associated with internalization of the thin ideal. They, however, indicate that media comparisons is not as pronounced as peer comparisons which was observed in their study to be the strongest indicators of body dissatisfaction.

Also, social or environmental influences and self-esteem proved to be the strongest indicators of body dissatisfaction, which suggests that the indirect effect of media messages on body dissatisfaction is an important area for further examination (Van Vonderen, and Kinnally, 2012).

A study by Field et al. (1999) reported that majority of nearly 550 working class adolescent girls were dissatisfied with their weight and shape. Almost 70% of the sample stated that pictures in magazines influenced their perception of the “perfect” body shape, and over 45% indicated that those images motivated them to lose weight. Further, adolescent girls who were more frequent readers of women’s magazines had a higher tendency of being influenced to think about the perfect body, to be dissatisfied with their own body, to want to lose weight, and to diet.

People's reactions to their reflection in the mirror may depend on recent exposure to idealized images of physical attractiveness shown in the media (Mundell, 2002). Experiments have shown that people become significantly more dissatisfied with their own appearance after being shown TV ads featuring exceptionally slim and beautiful people (Bayou et al, 2009).

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

#### Research design

The research design adopted was quantitative where numbers become the basis for drawing inferences and possible conclusions.

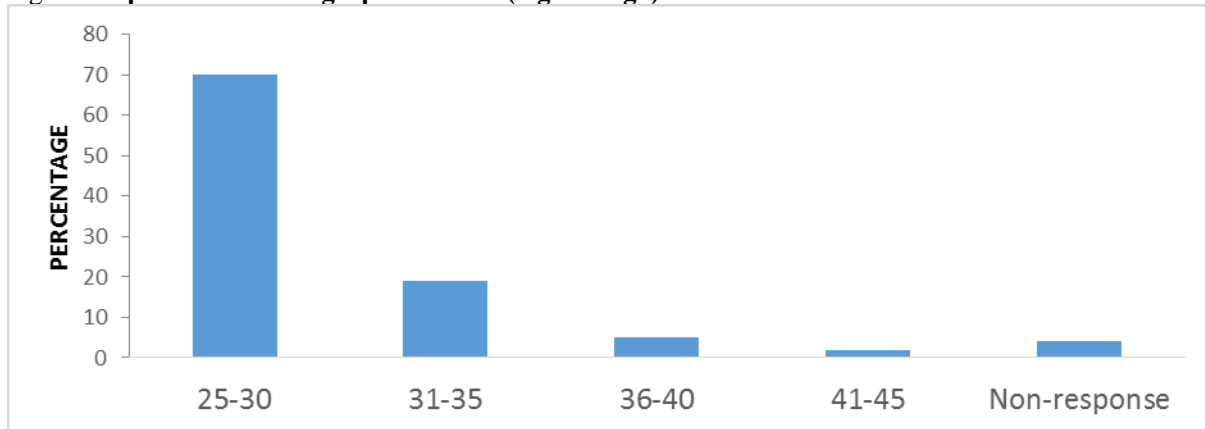
#### *Sample Size and Sampling Technique*

The purposive sampling method was used for this study. This type of sampling method, which falls under non-probability and usually used in qualitative studies, could be adopted in quantitative research when the number of elements in a population is usually unknown or cannot be individually identified. In such a situation the selection of elements is dependent upon other considerations such as the researcher's perception of the characteristics of the study subjects (Oescher, 2012). This commonly used in both qualitative and quantitative research. For this study, the targeted respondents were Ghanaian corporate women working in limited liability companies, be it private or public, and who were at least 25 years old and at most forty-five (45) years living in the Greater-Accra region.

Because this study was quantitative, the researchers selected a predetermined number of cases which was 100. The decision to use 100 as the sample size was based on the assertion of Comrey and Lee (2010) that a sample of 100 = Fair, 200 = Good, 300 = Very Good. Having determined who should partake in the study and the number of participants in mind, the researchers collected data using structured questionnaires. The questionnaires sought information on past media influences on respondents' body image, aspirations to media ideals and their perceptions of beauty. The questionnaires were self-administered to respondents and data analysed using the SPSS, 17.0 version. There were a few "non-response" to some of the questions; therefore, findings reflect "non-response" where applicable.

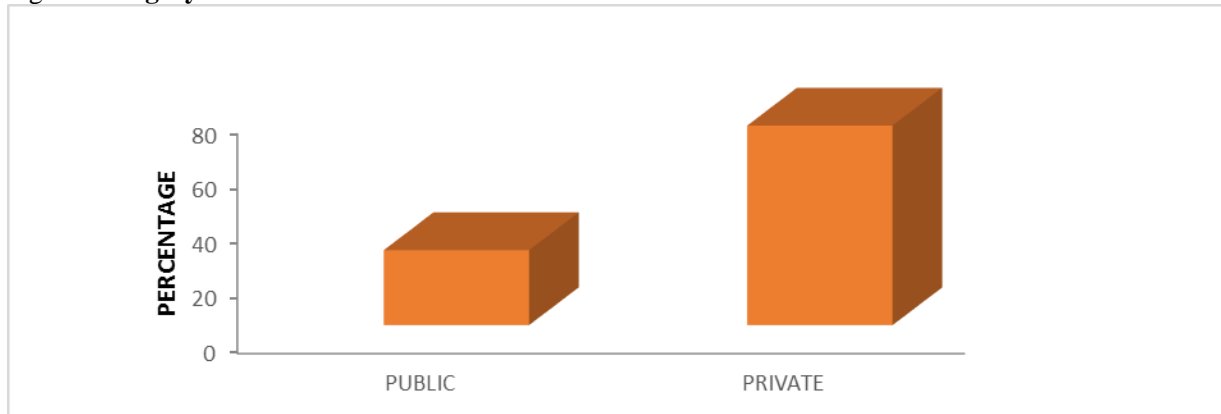
### RESULTS

Fig.1: Respondents' demographic details (Age Range)



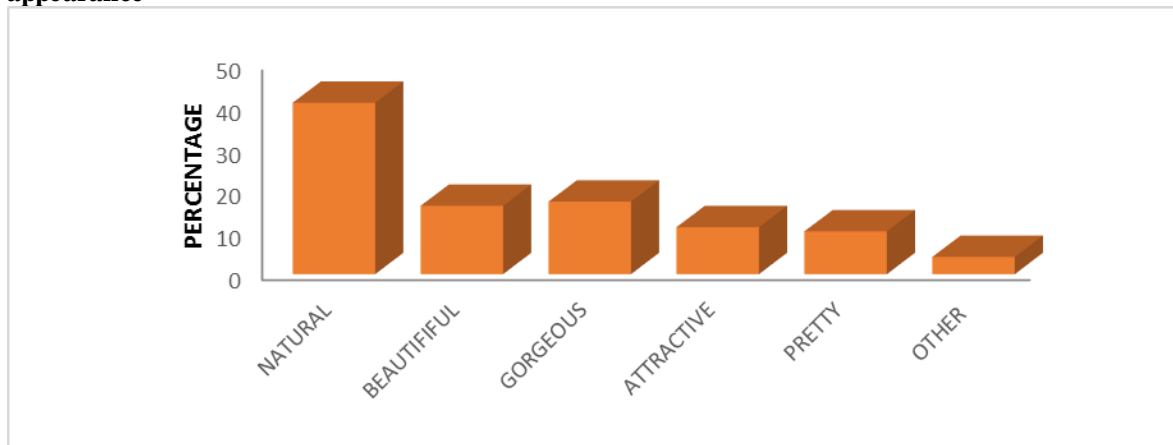
From Figure 1, the majority of respondents (70%) who took part in the study were within the age range of 25-30 years, followed by those within the age range of 31-35 years (19%). The least represented were those who fell in the age range of 41-45 (2%). Of the total number, the majority (72.7%) worked in the private sector whereas the rest were from the public sector (see Fig.2).

Fig. 2: Category of Institution



Source: *Media and body image data, 2015*

Fig. 3: Respondents' definition of their personal appearance



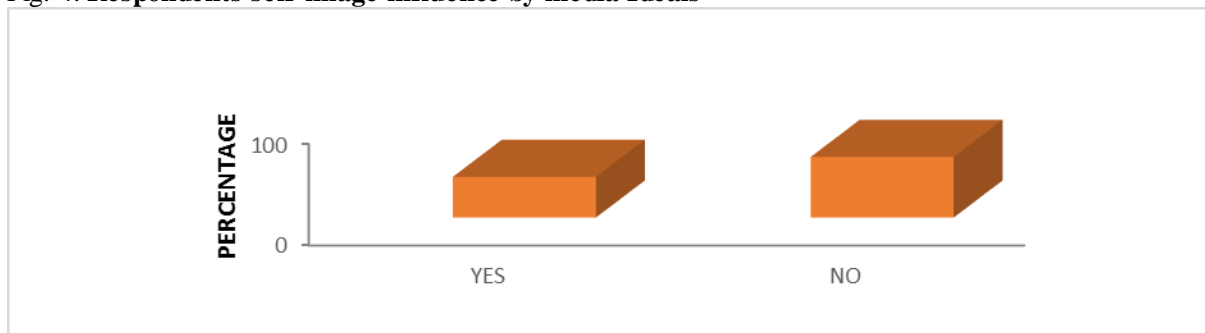
Source: *Field data, 2015*

A greater proportion of the respondents (40.9%) answered the question of how they personally would describe their appearance by ticking “Natural”. A total of 17.3% selected “Gorgeous” and about 16.3% selected “Beautiful”. For the options “Attractive” and “Pretty”, 11.2% and 10.2% of the respondents described their appearances as attractive and pretty respectively. None of the respondents was negative about their looks even where they provided their own answer as a result of not finding an option which suited their personal appearance.

The implication is that since the various adjectives used have different inferences, it goes to say that close to half the overall sample (40.9%) saw themselves to be as beautiful as nature gifted them. For, such looks are not limited to facial appearance supposing that they did not necessarily have to “enhance” their beauty by using cosmetics and makeup. More than half (59.2%) suggested their looks were more than just natural and also associated their beauty more with facial or cosmetic appearance and with sexual connotations. The choice of “Gorgeous” meant respondents were extremely beautiful or attractive; “Pretty” meant the respondents were facially attractive whereas “Beautiful” meant they were eye-catching and the choice of “Attractive” meant respondents were good-looking, especially in a way that makes one sexually interested in them as defined by the Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary. If more numbers voted for these adjectives it can be concluded that the majority of respondents associate beauty with mere facial looks and attractiveness.



Fig. 4: Respondents self-image influence by media Ideals



Source: Field data, 2015

More than half of the respondents (59.8%) indicated that their subjective view about their body image was not the result of idealized media portrayal of beauty. On the other hand, a considerable number of the respondents (40.2%) said that their self-image was influenced by media portrayal of beauty, implying that their ratings were influenced by beauty standards in the media. This then means that in their choice of what adjective described them in the questionnaire, almost half of respondents had a benchmark with which they compared themselves as suggested in the social comparison theory that humans constantly engage in social comparison behaviour which could be either upward or downward. It also means that however they saw themselves was based on beauty projections in the media.

#### Respondents' Personal Definition of Beauty

This was an open-ended question to shed light on how Ghanaian corporate women define beauty. Responses varied, including:

“A kind and affable personality that responds to the need of others”

“A quality or combination of qualities that gives pleasure to the mind”

“A well-behaved person”

“Beauty is character of a person and not the physical”

“Aggregate qualities that bring pleasure to the sense”

“All the inward character that you possess rather than the physical look; the physical is just an added advantage”

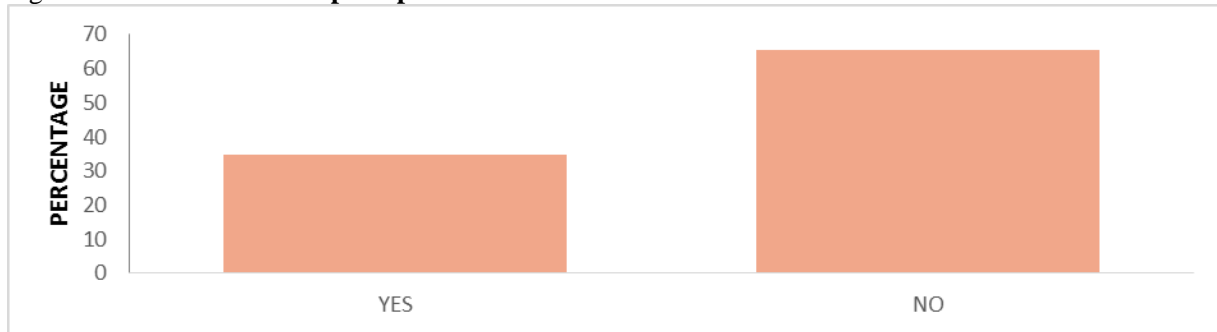
“Beauty has its own physical definitions but I think the physical looks must accompany the knowledge”

“Anyhow I see someone or something with a particular style, I see elegance or simplicity”

“Beauty comes from the inner self”

Most of the responses had connotations of virtue; that is, beauty emanating from within and not necessarily the outward qualities of an individual.

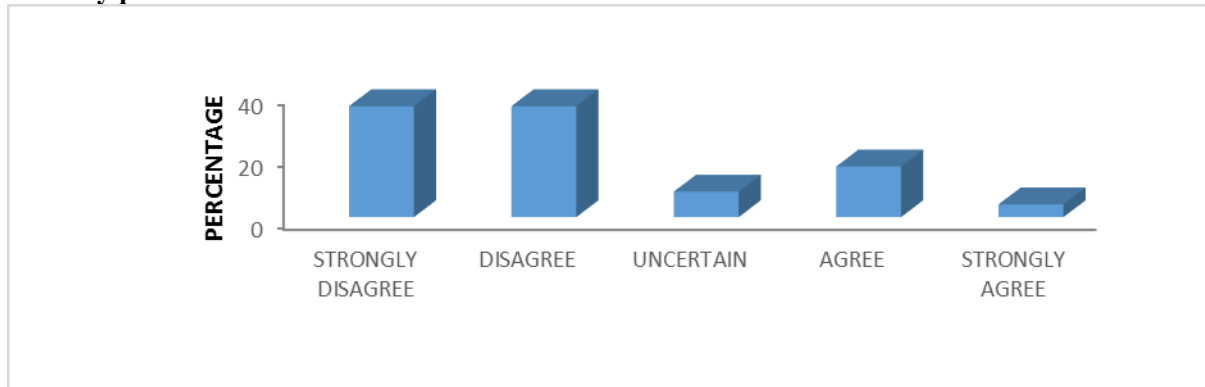
Fig. 5: Media influence on perception of who is beautiful



Source: Field data, 2015

Although a considerable percentage of respondents (65.3%) answered that their perception of who is beautiful was not influenced by the media, a substantial number (34.7%) said there was some influence. This cannot be overlooked as it communicates that the media has power to influence the mindset. This is the power advertisers of beauty and other products can take advantage of to drive the sale of goods and services. This finding has a relationship with the cultivation theory which posits that expositions portrayed in the media are generally considered to be a portrayal of the reality and also influence our thoughts.

Table 1: Images portrayed in the media are the ideal beauty standards which cannot be met by the ordinary person

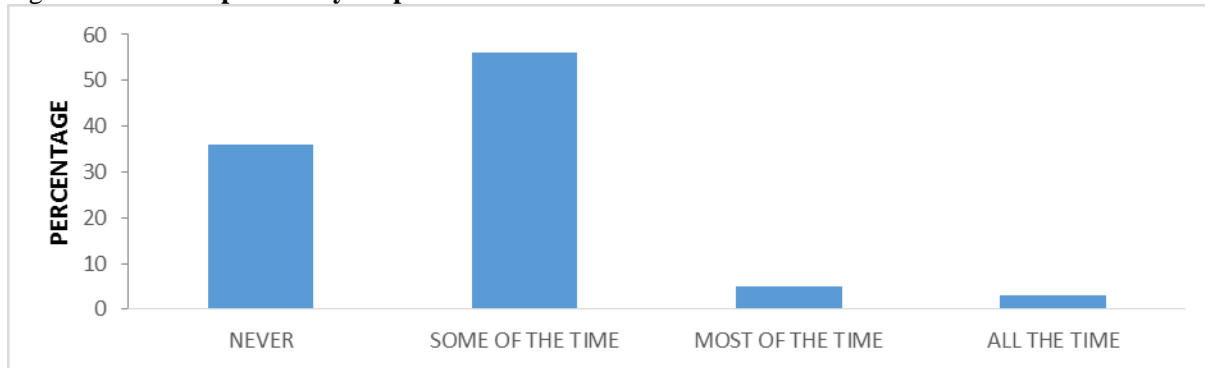


Source: Field data, 2015

Depictions in the media can be regarded as realistic or unrealistic. For one to have confidence in media portrayals can be the result of a belief that those depictions are a total reflection of what pertains in reality as suggested in the cultivation theory. This may result in audience aspiration to those depictions assuming that once it is real, it is attainable. Overwhelming majority of the respondents (88.4%) disagreed in varying degrees that images portrayed in the media are ideal images of beauty which are unattainable. The suggestion is that beauty portrayal in the media, although may be idealized, is attainable according to 88.4% of respondents which makes media representations susceptible to belief.

If such a high number believes beauty depictions are achievable, it goes without saying that the media tends to be a powerful instrument of churning out information which is susceptible to belief and, therefore, supports the claims of the cultivation theory.

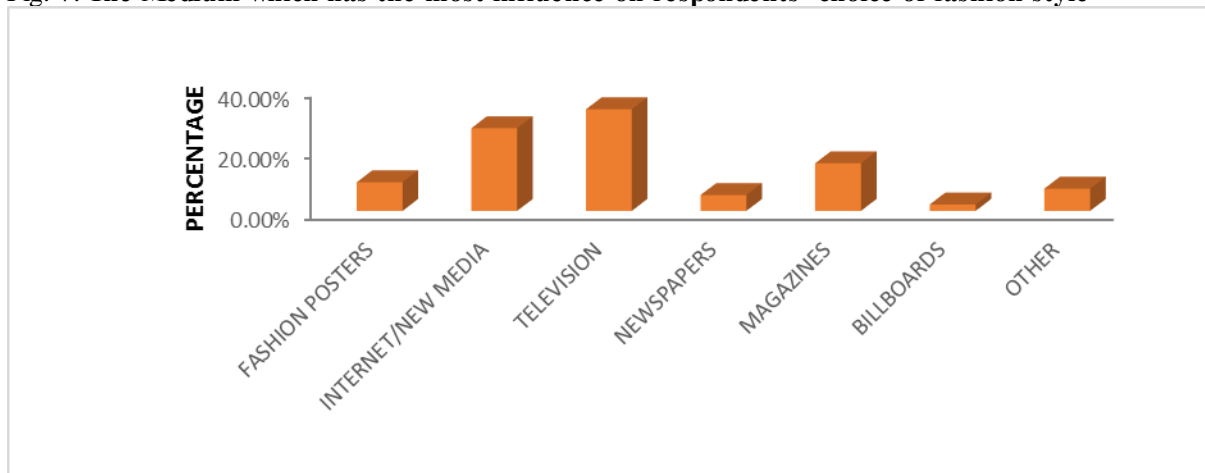
Fig. 6: Media comparison by respondents



Source: Field data, 2015

A lot of respondents, as discussed below, disclosed that at one point in time they engaged in social comparison to media ideals. More than half (56%) said they rated their beauty against depictions in the media “sometimes”, whereas 5% went in for “most of the time”. For 3% of the sample, they rate their beauty against media depictions “all the time”. These levels of comparison make up 64% of the overall sample. It must be noted, however, that 36% of the sample said they “never” engaged in any sort of comparison with media ideals. This is worth taking note of as it connotes a sense of independence of mind and having confidence that beauty is not dependent on what one sees in the media and supposes to be the norm. But it can be deduced that more than half (64%) of the respondents engaged in upward (media) comparison as suggested by the social comparison theory.

Fig. 7: The Medium which has the most influence on respondents’ choice of fashion style

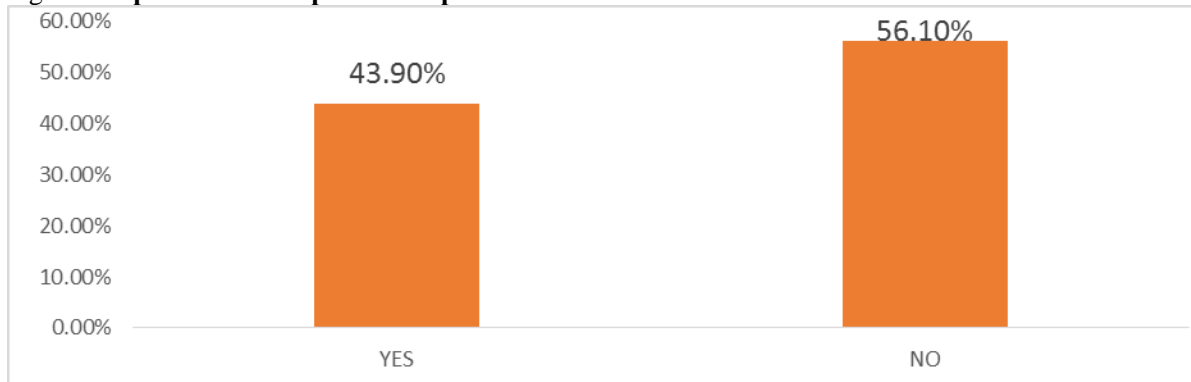


Source: Field data, 2015

Television was voted as the medium with the highest influence on fashion choices (33.3%), followed by internet/new media, and magazines. The least was billboards. This finding conveys information about the lifestyle of young Ghanaian corporate women. It also has implications for advertisers. It can be deduced that by their lifestyle, young Ghanaian corporate women are hardly influenced by billboard ad messages. They are people on the move, likely to be driving to and fro work and thus may not look out for billboard messages. They may be exposed more to television as they probably relax with television. Magazine reading may come in when they, probably have time on their hands to do so and also when they visit beauty salons and fashion houses.

New media is not surprisingly placing second since with the help of smart phones and opportunity to get access to social media sites, these women get exposed to fashion information on the go. Advertisers who target Ghanaian corporate women can pay more attention to, in order of highest impact, TV, internet and magazine advertising. These findings also have implications for the cultivation theory's assertion that long hours of exposure to particular media content influence the individual. Respondents' admission and vote for the various media, especially, television confirms the influence of mass media.

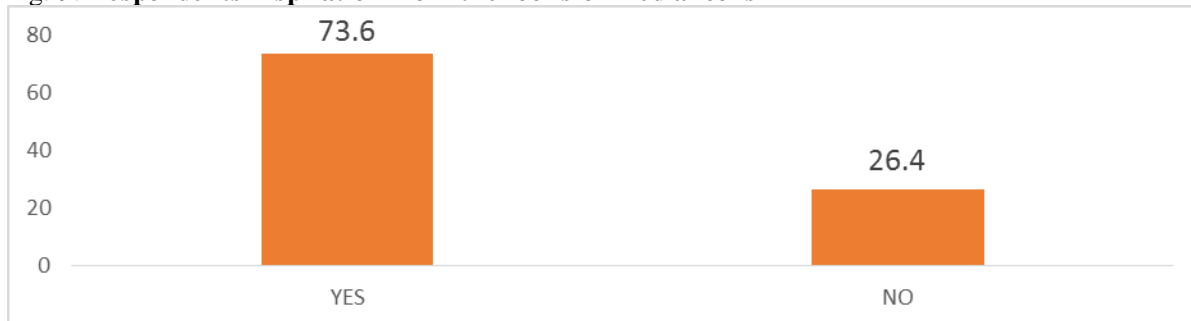
Fig. 8: Respondents' comparison to peers



Source: Field data, 2015

Although measurement levels for media and peer comparisons were different as the former was nominal whereas the latter was ordinal (scale), findings show that comparison to media (64% in total- Fig. 6) was rated higher than peer comparison although cases of peer comparison were quite substantial (43.9%). This means respondents engaged in media comparison more than peer comparison. This is the opposite of the result from the study by VanVonderen, and Kinnally (2012) which saw peer comparison to be more pronounced than media comparison.

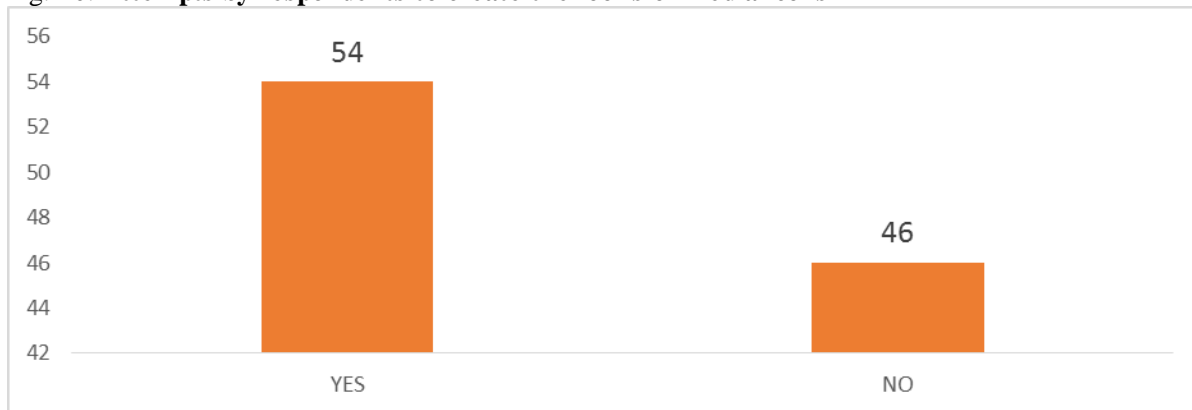
Fig. 9: Respondents inspiration from the looks of media icons



Source: Field data, 2015

Media icons could be regarded as “purveyors of beauty” as they popularize and entrench new fashion trends. Once audiences have a desire to look like those “purveyors of beauty” it could inherently lead to audience creating the looks projected in the media for themselves. On whether the looks/fashion sense of media icons had ever been a source of inspiration for respondents, leading to a likely imitation of those looks, the majority of respondents (73%) answered in the affirmative while a relatively lower number (26.6%) said they had never done that. This means there is a high tendency for people to desire to have the looks of media icons. This point cannot be downplayed as it goes to say that the media is a powerful tool for influencing the mind. Media icons must therefore be conscious of this fact and mindful of their actions and even inactions.

Fig. 10: Attempts by respondents to create the looks of media icons



Source: *Field data, 2015*

In persuasive communication such as advertising, advertisers or marketers aspire to create a desire for products and services in the hope that the desire leads to action which may be considered the peak of the persuasive process. This “action phase” which emanates from the desire to have the looks of a media icon was measured. Findings showed that more than half of respondents (54%) had ever taken the step to look like media icons, be it acquiring similar clothing or accessories used by media icons, getting the hair style or make up of media icons among others.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

It can be deduced from this study that the mass media has a lot of influence. The effect of fashion projections are real and must be part of the consideration for content development. Media audience, especially, those who rely on media for fashion trends should be given realistic projections in order to make a choice. The projection of the slender, light skinned with straight hair woman as the best standard of beauty becomes biased to the more dominant day-to-day typical African woman feature. This may propel those without the idealized body type to do anything to get those features that are deemed best. Also, if projections are not those of local culture, it is a surety that the dominant “foreign” fashion culture in the media will surpass what is deemed indigenous.

Besides, media icons wield a lot of influence. The idea of “fans” or “followers” is real in Ghana and the effect icons have on those who “love” them cannot be downplayed. Fans of icons attempt to create fashion looks as confirmed by this study that more than half of respondents ever replicated the looks of media icons. Media icons must therefore be aware of their level of influence. When a media icon has a particular look and tells fans or viewers about how he/she got that look, it is possible that an audience member will attempt whatever that icon did to get that look. This means any negative effect that comes with such a look (which may not have been disclosed by the icon) is extended to other people.

Peer comparison was another considerable factor of influence. The social comparison theory considers this type of impact and this study confirmed that almost half (43.9%) of respondents engaged in social comparison to peers.

More so, this study revealed that television is the leading medium of attention for fashion information, especially advertising to corporate women. Advertisers may have to pay more attention to this and consider this medium as the number one above-the-line medium for advertising that targets this category of people.

The study also shed light on how young Ghanaian corporate women defined beauty with majority seeing beauty as springing from within. Also, this category of people was positive about their looks— no one considered themselves to be ugly.

**Suggestions for future research**

This research concentrated on young corporate women. It is recommended that future research considers social comparison behaviour and influence among males of the same social category so that gender differences and similarities in social comparison may be explored.

The sample frame could also be extended with equal number of public and private sector employees to consider similarities and differences in the influence levels and even what they considered beauty to be. Another study can explore particular types of comparison among this category of people- whether it is upward or downward. Other social influences on body image and satisfaction could also be studied.

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