



RESEARCH ARTICLE

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THE IRREVERSIBLE DAMAGE OF BODY SHAMING ON THE IDENTITY OF SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN ON SOCIAL MEDIA: A CONTENT ANALYSIS STUDY

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Abstract

This systematic review explores the irreversible damage of body shaming on the identity of South African women on social media. Many people use social media, and women who use it are exposed to a variety of media users from all walks of life. As a result, when they post about themselves on these platforms, they receive a range of responses, from compliments to body shaming, which seems to be particularly popular among South African women. These women receive criticism and judgment based on their body types, which are contrasted with social media's standards. Two conceptual frameworks namely, Black feminist and Self-objectification theories provided perspectives about social media influence on the body shaming of South African women. Google scholar, Taylor and Francis, Scopus and ResearchGate were used to retrieve and analyse data from twenty-two (22) peer-reviewed journal articles (n=22) published between 2015 and 2023. Recommendations are also provided to help with further exploration to the impact of social media on South African women's body shaming. Therefore, the study is profitable as it paves the way for further studies relating to the research topic within the South African context.

Keywords: social media, low self-esteem, Black African women, body shaming, identity

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Social media is one of the biggest and most used means of communication by many people across the globe. Some of the popular platform include Yahoo, X (formerly known as Twitter), Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram (Malloy,2021:15). As important as social media is in assisting different people to communicate, some people are not using it in everyone's best interest but mainly to bully others and body shame women, particularly Black women. In the past, women who were fully figured used to be appreciated and honoured in different communities and regarded as and referred to as "real women"; however, the past few years it is no longer the case as they are more body shamed than any other body types. They are called different names, and they tend to associate their body shames with anything bad. Montle (2020) captures the experiences of fully figured women as follows: "Plus size Black women are dying to be thin as they are pictured and conceived as primitive, lustful, seductive, physically strong, domineering, unwomanly and dirty". In their study, Pedalino and Camerini (2022) state that women on social media platforms are experiencing stress and pressure for looking good, as physical appearance plays an important role and catches many followers and likes and boosts self-esteem as the comments made for someone they regard as looking good are not negative or undermining how they look. Throughout history, women have undergone a wide range of extremes to conform to society's ideal of physical beauty (Gaffney, 2017). Additionally, the way that women perceive their bodies and body image has always been impacted by social media (Gaffney,2017). Wan (2023:235) further asserts that, "people may feel shame because they feel that their body parts or appearance do not conform to socially acceptable standards".

Body shaming African women on social media has detrimental effects on their identities and can cause irrevocable damage. For some women, it can negatively impact their self-esteem, which may take time to recover.

Body shaming is an inherently psychological phenomenon that is universal in human culture and can consider individual psychological development, variations in cultural environments, gender disparities, and other aspects (Wan, 2023). Roodt (2015) orates that social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook play a significant role in shaping how society views female identity and strips women of their identities and concentrates only on their physical looks. The stereotype that Black women are less attractive is communicated daily through social institutions like churches, family groups and different media platforms (Awad, Norwood, Taylor, Martinez, McClain, Jones, Holman & Chapman-Hilliard, 2015). Due to the stress and damage this caused to their self-esteem, some of them are unable to overcome the shame, humiliation, and embarrassment they feel about their bodies and how they look.

A considerable percentage of Black women have presented depressive symptoms and low self-esteem because of being exposed to idealised media images that make them feel unsatisfied with their bodies, and these risks rise, as most South African women are swayed and become victims of social media's portrayal of attractive and beautiful women as being slender (Mwaba & Roman, 2009). Mally (2021) opines that there is a link between social media use and poor health effects. In their study, Khonach and Kurz (2024) assert that social media continues to put pressure on women to seem slender, which is leading to eating disorders among these women. They believe that by consuming a particular amount of food, they would be able to achieve the body shapes set by the social media. Furthermore, Black women are afraid to embrace who they are since social media has progressively become a tool for encouraging users to make disparaging remarks about their physical appearance. Consequently, some Black women have changed their appearance to appeal to others rather than accepting who they are (Johnson, 2022). Due to the stigma of body shaming, some Black women find it difficult to move past their experiences and rebuild their sense of value and self-worth. Some Black women find social media to be terrifying particularly full-figured Black women, as the social media community does not find them attractive and instead acknowledges slim and non-Black women. As a result, Black women suffer irreversible harm, and some of them disregarded themselves in some female activities because they felt out of place. Furthermore, even if the number of beauty pageants for Black full-figured women are introduced, social media platforms do not provide enough coverage for these kinds of events. In addition, McComb and Mills (2022) claim that some celebrities have undergone plastic surgery to appear thinner, which has led to pressure on black women who cannot afford to have plastic surgery. As a result, some of these women have ended up consulting with doctors who are not specialists, which has negatively impacted their body image and disappointed them. Black women, particularly those who cannot afford plastic surgeries, are under increased pressure as some of the celebrities posting pictures of all the procedures and the money spend when undergoing plastic surgeries on social media. As such, women who believe they are perfectionists often feel intense pressure to conform to social media ideal body shapes (McComb and Mills, 2022).

The body shaming among Black women on different social media platform is increasing daily despite the concerns and complains from Black women. "Racial myths of Black women's 'naturally' larger and curvier—or thicker bodies permeate society" (Hughes, 2020). As reiterated by Mustafa, Mahat, Shah, Mohd Ali, Mohideen and Mahzan (2022), Black women experience body shaming because society has different ideas about what beauty is and how a woman should look. Their self-esteem is thus affected, and some may experience social anxiety. Arsyi (2022) orates that the majority of product and food advertisements feature tall, thin, and white women. This brainwashing and stereotypical behaviour exposes Black women to ongoing body shaming on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. The various types of advertisements on social media also feature these women, which exacerbates the issue of body shaming among Black women. In their study Jung, Barron, Lee and Swami (2022) assert that social media platforms place a lot of emphasis on how women should look like, particularly for women. However, some of these appearances can be challenging to obtain because they require money, which many women, especially black women, cannot afford. This causes these women to feel confused, self-self and to develop low self-esteem about their own body images. According to Perkins, Ward, Jerald, Cole and Avery (2023) Black women are frequently body shamed on social media platforms due to the harsh criticism they receive about their skin tone, hair colour and physical appearances. Black women are still mostly body shamed on social media, especially those who are overweight, despite the fact that some of them have expressed satisfaction with their physical appearance.

According to Wang, Wang, Yang, Zeng and Lei (2019), women from adolescence to young adulthood suffer more body shame on social media than men. This has been the case for decades that women are evaluated solely on the basis of their physical appearance. Sadly, law enforcement still finds it challenging to determine whether body shaming has occurred despite numerous instances of it occurring on social media, since it is maintained that every person has their own sense of humour that makes it impossible to categorise as body shaming or bullying (Buta-butur & Isman, 2023). Fernandes, Papaikonomou and Nieuwoudt (2006) believe that, because of social

media and society, women's bodies are conditioned to resemble the ideal white female body shape, which is slender and has certain acceptable body parts. During the adolescent stage, when young women begin to evaluate their self-worth by body shape that was created by society and social media, this image of an ideal body shape causes uncertainty in women's lives. The media never stopped reminding women how invaluable they are. For example, 'white beauty' continues to influence the 'black ideal' despite attempts to enhance it through 'black is beautiful' campaigns" (Fernandez et al. 2006:857).

Black women's ideal definition of beauty is shaped and dictated by social media. It has long been thought that women who are deemed attractive on social media have an advantage over less attractive women both in their personal or professional lives. This belief is concerning because it is increasingly becoming the norm in our societies and social media (Motseki & Oyedemi, 2017). Hence Black women continue to face body shaming due to a lack of action taken to address many forms of harassment on social media, including racism, abuse and other hurtful behaviours (Musgrave, Cummings & Schoenebeck, 2022). These misconceptions target the structural vulnerabilities of Black women, some of whom experience ongoing abuse and results in body dissatisfaction, particularly on social media. In nations like Slovakia, it is normal and acceptable to body shame women on social media, and not much is done to stop it overall (Zidova, Kurincova & Turzak, 2021). Most of the studies on the bodies of Black women were conducted by white researchers, which led to inaccurate conclusions about the lives of Black women and how they felt about their bodies (Lowy, Rodgers, Franko, Pluhar & Webb, 2021). According to Sobande, Fearfull and Brownlie (2019), there were months in Britain's top-selling magazine, the Guardian, where no black women were featured. Additionally, compared to white women, up to 84 percent of Black women are reportedly more likely to experience abuse on social media (Sobande, Fearfull & Brownlie, 2019). These studies, therefore, leave a gap in the literature on the gendered perspective on body shaming among Black women.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The article is grounded in the following threefold research questions:

- What are the roles of social media in the lives of Black women?
- What are the effects of social media body shaming on Black women?
- What are the possible ways of preventing the body shaming of Black women on social media platforms?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopted the self-objectification and Black feminist theories. Self-objectification theory is useful for this study as it provides a valuable framework for examining the phenomenon of sexual objectification among Black women. Additionally, it encourages women to take on the body image of others (Tylka & Kroon Van Diest, 2015). According to Calogero (2012) women are often equated with their bodies, which has detrimental long-term implications on how they view their body. "Common situations that would constitute self and sexual objectification include leering at women's bodies, sexual comments about women's bodies, taking photographs of women's bodies and body parts with a cell phone and exposure to sexualized media imagery" (Calogero, 2012:573). Black women are subject to and have historically been subjected to oppression and discrimination because of preconceptions that were meant to marginalise them. The misconceptions about the bodies of Black women are based on gendered racisms (Watson, Lewis & Moody, 2019).

Black feminist theory was also used in the study as it stressed the discrimination that Black women are experiencing across the globe. According to Mirza's study (2015), Black women are situated in many oppressive and dominating structures all over the world. Black feminisms still have to deal with a "culture of justification," where Black women are constantly expected to show their worth because many are still unsure of their own capacities (Cooper, 2015). Furthering to this, Potter (2006) asserts that Black women experience more intimate partner violence than White women do, and that they have been repressed for the previous few decades. They also face major implications from racism in addition to sexism.

Methodology

The researcher employed the PRISMA method for this study. Sarkis-Onofre, Catala-Lopez, Aromataris and Lockwood's (2021) study posits that PRISMA is an evidence-based set of guidelines that promotes open, equitable and thorough reporting of systematic reviews. In their study, Ahn and Kang (2018) assert that results from several studies on related subjects are presented through data combination and analysis in systematic reviews and meta-analyses. "Systematic reviews are based on pre-defined eligibility criteria and conducted according to a pre-defined methodological approach as outlined in an associated protocol" (Moher, Shamseer, Clarke, Gherzi, Liberati, Petticrew, Shekelle, Stewart & PRISMA-P Group, 2015). In this regard Knoblock, Yoon and Vogt (2011)

contend that, PRISMA avoids and eliminates publication biases and provides the reader with a better understanding of the selection process.

Planning phase

Based on their excellent reputation and strong recommendations, the researcher collected data by searching the following scientific search databases based on their good reputation and highly recommendation: Google Scholar; Taylor and Francis; Scopus and ResearchGate.

From the above-mentioned scientific search databases, the researcher used the listed terms to retrieve the peer-reviewed journals: (1) social media and South African Black women, (2) social media and body shaming, (3) body shaming and self-esteem, (4) identity of South African women and social media, (5) social media and Black women, and (6) Black women in South Africa on social media.

As this study used non-participatory participants, the observation of comments on social media such as Facebook and Instagram are used. Four local black female celebrities who were body shamed on Instagram and Facebook were chosen purposely for the study:

Lamiez Holworthy-a Metro FM presenter and a disc jockey (popularly known as a DJ), was body shamed on 21 October 2021 on Facebook and Instagram after she wore shorts. She was body shamed by one of her followers on Instagram who said: "Please tell lendoza (man) not to wear shorts...cos wow!". She was body shamed for the shape of her legs and body shape, and other followers of this DJ continue to attack, and body shame her.

Some of the negative comments about her body in X (Formerly known as Twitter)

Okey, enough about [#unisa](#)

Any one please tell lendoza not to wear shorts.... Coz wow! [#FortunerChallenge](#) [#Adiwele](#) [#Uyajola99](#) [#bonang](#) [#GovernorMutuaExposed](#) [#Kourtney](#) [#EswatiniProtests](#)
pic.twitter.com/dU9NVKJ9fm

— ChrisExcel @chrisExcel102 (@Iprayforlovee) [October 18, 2021](#)

But Lamiez was not entertaining their insults. She issued a subtle clapback at anyone who dared to body shame her.

She tweeted: "I had the security lady at work say 'o pila ngwanaka mara yoh! Confidence ya gao ka shorty eo e dirope tse kana' [You are my child, but your confidence with those thighs in those shorts!]

Because with all due respect wang tlawela mama [Get used to it]".



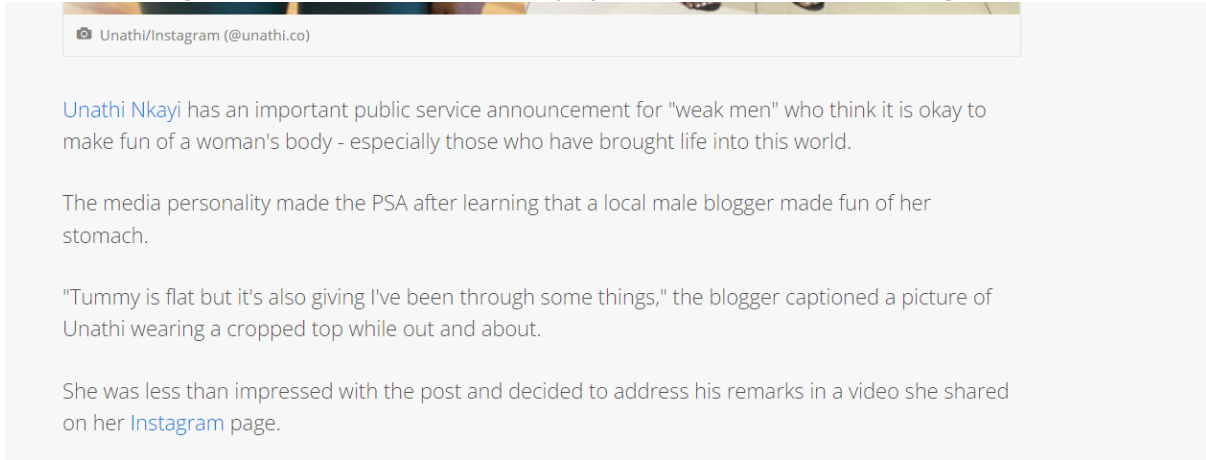
Lethabo "lejoy" Mathato-The Real housewives of Johannesburg, who is also a radio and television presenter, was body shamed on Instagram on 05 January 2024, which people saying that her legs look like a stick, and she must stop wearing trousers as her body does not allow her to wear them. Her body shaming story was a repetition as it was reported in TimesLive on 25 October 2023. She has been the victim of body shaming twice.

Some of the negative comments from her followers about her body on Facebook are as follows:



Unathi Msengana-a Radio and television presenter and musician was body shamed on Instagram on 10 May 2023 by a male follower on Instagram who commented negatively about her tummy that affected her body shape. On 15 May 2023, the TimesLive newspaper covered the story as she had to make a live video protecting herself from that male follower.

Some of the negative comments about her body by one of the followers on Instagram are as follows:



Ntokoza Mayisela- a philanthropist, jazz music student and Zulu King Misuzulu Zwelithini’s wife, has been body-shamed on Instagram and X (formerly known as twitter) over her weight on 23 February 2023. One follower who started the bullying questioned the King's decision and implied that the King's wife was too obese to be the King's wife.

Some of the negative comments from her followers on X (formerly known as Twitter) are as follows:

@Sabza200BC: "I love her Royal Highness, but they need to find her a diet plan. No disrespect, but it’s unhealthy to be this big."

@TheDBK84: "Our queen needs to lose weight. Call it body shaming, BUT this level of thickness is unhealthy."

@AdvocateOfTrut2: "He could have chosen a better wife or at least assisted this one to lose weight."

@Kamohelo_Moloi: "No disrespect to the Queen, but she needs to look after herself. How does she inspire young princesses? There’s nothing inspiring about obesity."

Scholarly documents selection phase

Figure 1 depicts the various steps followed by the researchers during the process of searching for journal articles. Out of the 90 journals that were found during the first search, 21 were not included in the second search because they did not meet the criteria for inclusion. A total of 49 records remained after 50 of the 69 eliminated journals underwent another screening. A total of 11 journals were then removed because they contained insignificant information. Out of the 44 scholarly documents that the researcher selected, 22 were eliminated because they included information not related to Black women in South Africa, and only 22 scholarly articles from the original 90 journals were used in the study.

Figure 1

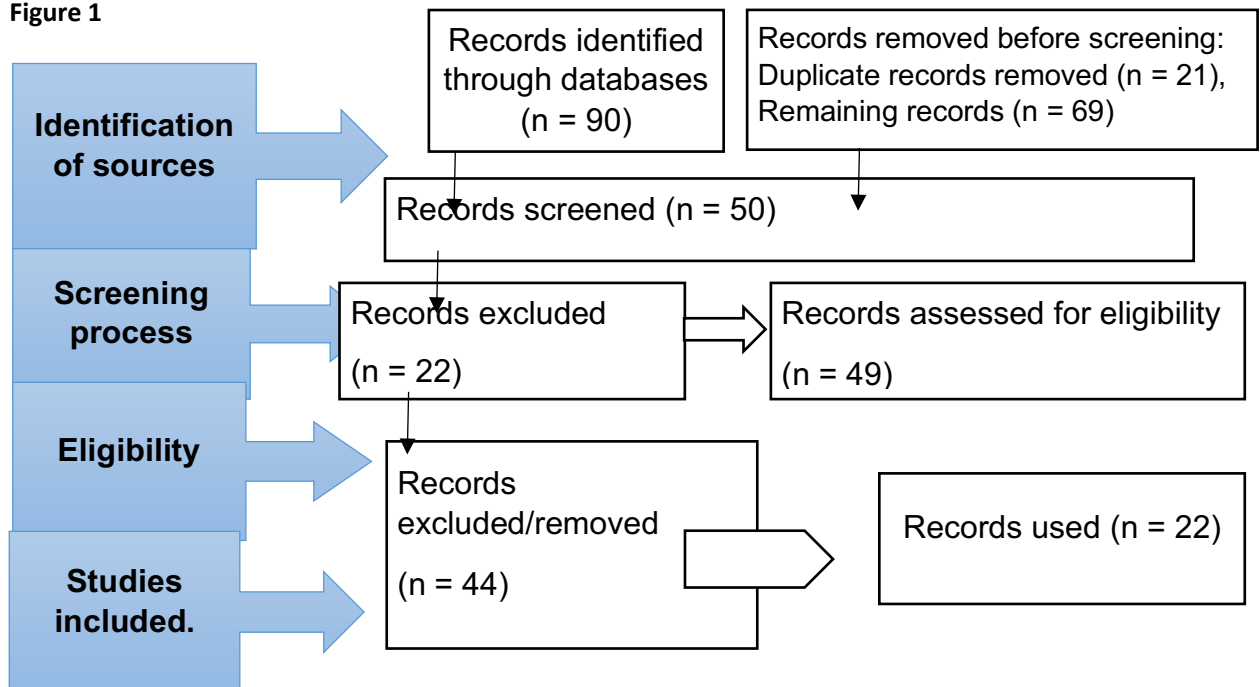


Figure 1. PRISMA flow chart for systematic review

The 22 peer-reviewed journal papers that were retrieved were validated by the researcher after she had screened the articles to make sure the study was of high quality. The study focuses on 22 peer-reviewed journal journals, as table 1 shows. The researcher has examined every journal article that was part of this study to see if the inclusion and exclusion requirements were satisfied. Here is a discussion of the inclusion and exclusion criteria:

Inclusion criteria of the journal articles:

- They have been written in the English.
- They are about the irreversible damage of body shaming on the identity of South African women on social media.
- They are global studies that cover the variables of this study.
- They were published between 2012 and 2023.

Exclusion criteria of the journal articles:

- They are not written and published in English.
- They do not cover the variables of the study.
- They do not focus on the body shaming among Black women on social media platforms.
- They were published before 2012.

Twenty-two peer-reviewed journal publications from various databases are included in the current investigation. The whole search procedure carried out by the researchers is shown in the below table.

Table 1: Synopsis of the journal articles that were used in the study.

Author(s)/ year and country of publication	Scholarly document	Methods	Theoretical framework(s)
Stanton, Jerald, Ward & Avery (2017); United States	Journal article	Social media analysis	Feminist identity and critical consciousness development theory
Jean, Neal-Baenett & Stadullis (2022); Unites States	Journal article	Social media analysis, Exploratory analysis	N/A
Mthethwa (2018); South Africa	Dissertation	Qualitative, In-depth interviews, Semi-structured interviews	Social constructionism theory, Black feminist theory
Tighe (2023); Arizon	Dissertation	Qualitative, In-depth interviews, Semi-structured interviews	Applying feminist theory, routine activity theory
Shamar, Major & Gautam (2022); Delhi	Journal article	Qualitative, Online questionnaire	N/A
Mutugi (2021); Nairobi	Dissertation	Qualitative, in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews	Discourse theory, theory of social construction
Honore (2023); United States	Journal article	Qualitative, social media analysis	N/A
Sultan (2023); Iraq	Dissertation	Qualitative, in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews, questionnaire	Social cognitive theory, the social composition theory

Monde (2018); United States	Journal article	Social media analysis	Impression management theory
Ellington (2015); Ellington	Journal article	Qualitative, in-depth-interviews, semi-structured interviews	Black feminist theory
Tanskley (2019); United States	Dissertation	Qualitative, thematic analysis	Critical race theory in education, Black feminist theory, Black feminist technology studies
Maragh (2016); United States	Journal article	Social media analysis	N/A
Butar-butur & Isman (2023);Indonesia	Journal article	Social media analysis	N/A
Clark, Lee, Jingree, O'Dwyer, Yue, Marrero, Tamez, Bhupathiraju & Mattei (2021); Unites States	Mini review	Social media analysis	N/A
Cornish & Tranter, (2022); South Africa	Journal article	Social media analysis	N/A
Bennett (2019); Netherlands	Dissertation	Qualitative, in-depth-interviews, semi-structured interviews	N/A
Dunn & Falkof (2021); South Africa	Journal article	Qualitative, in-depth-interviews, thematic analysis	N/A
Firdaus, Dewi, Dini, & Suharyati (2022); Indonesia	Dissertation	Explanatory qualitative	Social assessment theory
Hassan (2018); Georgia	Dissertation	Qualitative, focus group, in-depth interviews, content analysis	N/A
Williams (2021); Unites States	Journal article	Content analysis	N/A
Thomas (2019); United States	Journal article	Data analysis, critical analysis	Behaviourist theory
Waters (2016); United States	Dissertation	Content analysis	Social learn theory, Erikson life span psychosocial model

Review of literature

Damage of body shaming on the identity of South African women on social media

Body shaming of Black women has become a global problem since these women are often body shamed by their followers on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, and even worse, they are body shamed by both strangers and people they know. Firdaus, Dewi, Dini and Suharyati (2022) reported that there is a growing number of Instagram and Facebook users daily, especially women. Black women are often the targets of body

shaming on Instagram, where jokes and disparaging remarks about their physical appearance are common. Social media body shame and harassment of Black women has a detrimental effect on their physical and mental well-being, because it perpetuates the stereotype of strong Black women as superhuman, emotionless, and capable of overcoming adversity (Stanton, Jerald, Ward & Avery, 2017). Black women who are portrayed in a stereotypical way on social media face negative effects on their mental health and low self-esteem (Jean, Neal-Barnett & Stadullis, (2022). It has been found that more women than men use Facebook and Instagram, which exposes Black women to body shaming and puts unnecessary pressure on them to look good due to social media's portrayal of ideal body images or pressure to succeed economically to attract men who do not think their curvaceous bodies are attractive (Mthethwa, 2018). It has been noted that Black women's body dissatisfaction and desire to reduce weight have increased as a result of body shaming on Facebook and Instagram. Moreover, Tighe (2023) opines that the prevalence of harassment on Instagram and Facebook, particularly targeting women, has had a detrimental effect on these women's emotional, physical, and financial well-being. Additionally, the longer and more frequently social media users use the platform, the worse their mental health becomes.

Due to the increasing criticism and comparison of their physical appearance with other racial groups on social media, Black women are under pressure to alter their pictures before posting on both Instagram and Facebook to avoid body shaming (Shamar, Major & Gautam, 2022). Theorists such as Mutugi (2021) maintains that social media plays a significant role in shaping social norms, Black women's body images, and the standards that society sets for how their bodies should look like. It also body shames women whose bodies do not fit the social media's body shape standards. Furthermore, Honore (2023) orates that Black women who do not conform to the ideal of European beauty have been marginalized as a result of the norms that social media has maintained. They then frequently experience self-doubt as a result of being body shamed on social media. "While social media has many benefits, such as staying connected with friend and family, it has also been associated with various negative effects, including its impact on body shaming" (Sultan, 2023:15). Furthermore, social media foster unreasonable beauty and body standards, which make the majority of Black women unhappy with their own bodies and appearances, which in turn negatively impacts their emotional health. It is still challenging for Black women to live with body shaming on social media as it discourages others not to participate or post any pictures on social media with the fear of being judged. It takes time to recover from body shame since it affects more than just one's physical appearance; it also affects one's self-esteem, making it difficult for one to feel worthy, good enough and belonging in society.

Role of social media among Black women

Social media has a variety of functions in African cultures and other cultures and has a big impact on the lives of Black women. People regularly engage with each other on social media sites like Facebook and Instagram, and this real-time interaction is something that people find enjoyable (Shamar, Major & Gautam, 2022). Under the "Black Twitter" movement, which began in 2009, social media sites like Twitter (now renamed X) have become more accepting of Black content and women. This has allowed Black women to express themselves without worrying about criticism (Monde, 2018). Social media's support for Black women in America has given them more self-confidence after they were made fun of and criticised for how they look and having natural hair. Because of this support, they were able to proudly go out in public with their natural hair after previously reporting feeling afraid to do so. They were given confidence, acceptance and validation of their skin tone and body type by the social media platforms (Ellington, 2015). In their study on social media contributions to strong Black woman ideal endorsement and Black women's mental health, Stanton, Jerald, Ward and Avery (2017) posit that Black women benefited from social media since it brought forth movements like #BlackGirlsRock and #CarefreeBlackGirl, which inspired and encouraged millions of Black women to feel confident in their unique skin tones, body types and womanhood.

During her talk about Black women Hassan (2018) acknowledges that social media gives Black women the chance to talk about cultural issues and find resources to help them deal with criticism about their appearance because they have historically been associated with being ugly. For historically marginalised groups, like Black women, social media serves as a communicator, providing them with a platform to show their digital potential on Facebook, Instagram and X. Tanskley (2019:13) further suggests that Black women are actively participating in various social media platforms that provide them with an opportunity to discuss issues of anti-Black racism. Using various hashtags, Black women use social media to express their concerns about discrimination, judgment and body shaming from social media users across the globe, while also protecting themselves from the emotional harm (Maragh, 2016). Park, Hallman, Liu and Hancock (2024) also argue that Twitter has established a platform called Black Social Media (Black SM) where Black women can share cultural knowledge and voice their concerns.

This is something that was previously impossible because Black women were marginalized; as a result, body shaming persists on social media platforms.

Possible ways to prevent bullying of Black women on social media.

Bullying of Black women on social media has grown rapidly, and some of those who engage in these behaviours get away with it without suffering any repercussions. Bullying has to be given more legal weight and priority in South Africa, just as other forms of harassment and women's safety must be taken into consideration. However, it is something that can be avoided only if many people make commitments to the issue, both in South Africa and globally. It is imperative to raise awareness among different social media users about the negative effects of body shaming of Black women, particularly with regard to the victims, so that they understand that the bullying extends beyond social media and has a negative impact on Black women both emotionally and spiritually whereby some of these women lose their self-worth and esteem.

In his study, Williams (2021) argues that the author Sesali Bowen and a family therapist Phalande Jean have been promoting the Black women content on Instagram with the hope of reducing and eliminating the body shaming of Black women on social media platforms, which they called @VirgoSass by author Sesali Bowen about fat Black women and @BadFatBlackGirl, to stop Black women from being bullied and body shamed on social media by family therapist Phalande Jean. Programmes like the one created by author Thomas (2019) called "Hidden Curriculum" were created in response to the increasing and persistent bullying of Black women on social media platforms, which she discovered while working as a teacher. Black students were denied opportunities to participate in any activities because they were perceived as being "too black". This led to the development of Hidden Curriculum, which expanded to teach bullying and body shaming to both individuals and various communities. A programme was then established to prevent bullying, and its primary purpose was to stop Black women from being bullied and body-shamed on social media. Bullying Busters and the Oleos Bullying Prevention Programme significantly lessen bullying (Waters, 2016). Different programmes should be developed, particularly looking at the alarming number of Black women being body shamed on social media to eliminate this harassment.

Body shaming might be curbed or even eradicated if Black women could embrace the culture of speaking up as well as consulting with courts, legislatures and civil protection orders addressing abusive comments on social media regarding their physical appearances (Bennett, 2019). In addition, hate speech and racist slurs are illegal in South Africa under the Promotion of Equality and the Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000. Black women can consult this Act with the appropriate authorities to safeguard themselves from harassment on social media (Cornish & Tranter, 2022). Dunn and Falkof (2021:6) assert that Black women in South Africa utilize social media to establish their identities and gain recognition, and by utilising these kinds of opportunities might reduce the body shaming as they will be proudly defining who they are to their followers rather than followers reminding them that they do not look good as per their own opinions and social media body image standard. In American state such as Massachusetts, legislation has been proposed to criminalise the body shaming and weight base discrimination on social media platforms, which can be taken advantage of and used as a reference by South African Black women to defend themselves against body shaming (Clark, Lee, Jingree, O'Dwyer, Yue, Marrero, Tamez, Bhupathiraju & Mattei, 2021).

Limitations of the study

Only 22 peer-reviewed journal papers met all inclusion requirements, despite the researchers' belief that their varied search terms enabled them to find all pertinent publications in this topic. It is possible that the researchers overlooked papers that were not found in the databases they identified. Moreover, the research is confined to the South African context. It is possible that the researcher overlooked publications that are impossible to locate or identify. Because the study's scope is restricted to South African contexts, additional research must be done to raise awareness about body shaming and the social media body standards that Black women experience. There are also few studies on body shaming in general, which benefited the findings of this study. Thus, social science and social media researchers should continue with further studies on the difficulties, humiliations, and discriminations that Black South African women experience on social media platforms.

Conclusion and future direction of the study

This study focused on the daily challenges, humiliations, and discrimination Black women in South Africa face on social media platforms and the body shaming that takes place on these platforms. Social media is becoming more popular and most people, particularly women rely on it for a variety of reasons such as posting pictures of themselves and reaching out to friends and family. This research endeavour aimed to identify the challenges faced by Black women in South Africa, their usage of social media platforms and the social media culture in the country.

The study found that, the usage of social media by South African Black women has risen and this heavy usage of social media exposed them to the body shaming. The following important recommendations is being made by the researcher in light of the results of the systematic review: **(1)** social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook should provide Black women with a freedom of their own bodies without being judged and body shamed; **(2)** Black women should be knowledgeable of social media potentiality of damaging once's reputation, self-esteem and self-worth through body shame from followers; **(3)** Black women should consider and think before they post and expose their bodies on social media platforms as anyone can comment on their posts without considering their feelings and emotions; **(4)** Black women should find possible ways of protecting themselves from body shaming on social media platforms; and **(5)** online freedom should allow Black women to enjoy using social media.

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