

How Women of Color Perceive Instagram's Impact on Altering Beauty Standards

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Submission to the School of Liberal Studies and Continuing Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies

Purchase College

State University of New York

December 2023

Sponsor: Prof. Leandro Benmergui

Abstract

Background: Social media has become an integral part of our lives, reaching unprecedented levels of influence in recent years. Its presence brings a wealth of knowledge and provides a platform for individuals to express themselves freely. Yet, looking back at past decades, societal norms were far less accepting, and the definition of beauty was much more rigid, especially for women who were expected to conform to certain standards.

Objective: This study aims to identify how women of color respond to beauty representation on Instagram.

Design & Method: This research is solely based on interviews consisting of responses from a diverse group of seven women of color, spanning various backgrounds and aged between 15 and 24. This interview process was created to get real answers from women on how social media contributes to the world's new perception of beauty. The main research questions are as follows: *Do you believe the beauty standard is different now than in previous years? If so, how? Do you think social media has positively influenced young women of color? Has social media influenced the way you perceive yourself? Do you believe that social media has helped the beauty industry to become more or less inclusive of women of color?*

Results: While this study captures the perspectives of seven women of color, it is important to note that they serve as preliminary representatives of a broader population of women who, though not directly involved in this study, remain engaged with the subject matter. Consequently, the findings presented here do not dismiss the possible viewpoints of women of color at large.

Conclusions: This project explores how women of color perceive Instagram's impact on altering beauty standards. The presence of social media in contemporary society has undeniably reached unprecedented levels of influence, providing a platform for knowledge dissemination and self-expression. Reflecting on past decades, it becomes evident that societal norms were less accepting, particularly regarding the rigid beauty standards imposed on women necessitating conformity to specific beauty ideals.

Keywords: *representation, tokenism, unrealistic, authenticity, stereotypes, and mindfulness.*

Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview

As social media, especially Instagram, has become an integral part of our lives, its influence has unleashed an era of knowledge dissemination and self-expression. However, reflecting on past decades, societal norms were less accepting, imposing rigid beauty standards, especially on women. This shift highlights the dynamic role of platforms like Instagram in challenging and redefining these norms, fostering inclusivity, and empowering individuals to express themselves freely and authentically.

The topic of evolving beauty standards was important for me to gain people's thoughts on because I have witnessed it, and has positively affected me. Growing up, I was always interested in fashion and beauty. I remember not seeing many women who looked like me in advertisements and billboards. I saw many white women with blonde hair, blue eyes, and skinny being celebrated, and rarely saw women that looked like me or family and friends.

My research centers on how women of color perceive Instagram's impact on altering beauty standards. I will be delving into three key strategies, many women of color on Instagram help reshape beauty standards, including, celebrating natural beauty, promoting inclusivity with beauty products, and highlighting cultural diversity. Through these endeavors, I have gained valuable insights into the significant positive impact of evolving beauty standards, particularly on young women of color. With Instagram at its forefront, social media plays a pivotal role in promoting inclusiveness across various realms, such as clothing, makeup, body image, and self-esteem. Now more than ever is more representation of women of color, and more specifically women of Black and Lantix descent. Young women of color, witnessing the rise of female idols and celebrities on this platform has been inspiring, offering a beacon of inclusivity

for young women as we find empowering figures to admire. Now more than ever is more representation of women of color, and more specifically women of Black and Lantix descent

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

This section of my research delves into the scholarship used to define my research subject, mostly peer-reviewed articles that collectively contribute to a nuanced comprehension of women's perception of Instagram's impact on beauty standards impact of social media on women. With a specific focus on women of color, I sought to discern the most affected age group, Generation Z (Gen Z), which stands as a prominent demographic. A crucial facet of my exploration involves unraveling how Instagram influences women of color, probing beyond typical surface-level observations.

Additionally, I will investigate how women leverage Instagram as a platform for raising awareness regarding the inadequacies of certain beauty products and clothing items, dispelling the outdated notions of a 'one size/look fits all' paradigm. This analysis aims to expose the disparities between the marketed ideals of the beauty industry and the diverse realities of women of color. Furthermore, my research extends to examining the role of pop culture within social media, exploring its profound influence on shaping evolving beauty standards. This chapter provides a review of the scholarship that frames my research on the intricate dynamics in the intersection of women, social media, and cultural influences.

Celebrating Natural Beauty:

Women of color on social media are embracing and celebrating their natural features, from their skin tones to their hair textures. They encourage others to do the same by posting unfiltered, make-up-free selfies, showing that beauty comes in all shades and forms. This challenges the long-standing emphasis on Eurocentric beauty standards and encourages a more inclusive definition. Social media is negatively impacting young women of color. For example, "Exposure to thin-ideal Instagram images has been associated with increased body

dissatisfaction among young adult women.” (Monks, 2020). Yet women of color are very open to themselves and their following on social media, helping showcase their natural beauty.

Women of color are embracing their diverse range of skin tones. They celebrate and showcase their melanin-rich complexions, challenging the notion that lighter skin is the only standard of beauty. They encourage others to appreciate and love their natural skin color through social media platforms such as Instagram. However, more women of color are also pushing the beauty boundaries that one body type is the best by showing and embracing their curvaceous figures.

“Female influencers have predominantly focused on their sexualized appearances, and the findings suggested that they edit their posts, wear revealing clothes and they edit their poses.”

(Devos, 2022) In addition to this exposure to self-expression can come with negativity as most women face. This negativity can occur to women of all backgrounds but more specifically women of Black and Latina cultures, “hostility toward women is common online. One study identified 419,000 tweets per day that used one of four insulting terms aimed at women.”

(Fransico, 2021)

Another way women of color celebrate their natural beauty is by embracing their natural hair textures. These hair textures can range from tight curls to kinks and coils. They confidently showcase their hairstyles and encourage others to do the same through fun hashtags and networking through Instagram. They create communities that celebrate the versatility and beauty of natural hair. Many female artists, in pop culture, express themselves through their hair, more specifically female rapper Nicki Minaj. She pushed boundaries in the Black and Latina communities, especially those of urban cities. “What can we make of her appropriation of Barbie and love of Harajuku street style or her two-tone wigs.” (Butler, 2013) She expressed herself freely through her unique sense of style which a vast majority of young women of color loved

because she acted as representation for women of color in this new era of social media. Similarly, in more recent years, women of color have been expressing themselves and celebrating their natural hair through social media using hashtags. “ Selfies and videos posted on Snapchat and Instagram with #TeamNatural, #Curls, and #Fro, capture this entrepreneurialism and attempt to influence the discourse around Black hair.” (Canella, 2020).

Women of color also use their platforms to post makeup-free selfies, revealing their unfiltered, authentic faces. By doing so, they emphasize that makeup should be a choice, not a requirement for beauty. Consequently, many female artists, in pop culture, express themselves through their hair, more specifically female rapper Nicki Minaj. She pushed boundaries in the Black and Latina communities, especially those of urban cities. “What can we make of her appropriation of Barbie and love of Harajuku street style or her two-tone wigs” (Butler, 2013) She expressed herself freely through her unique sense of style which a vast majority of young women of color loved because she acted as representation for women of color in this new era of social media.

These images challenge unrealistic beauty standards and inspire self-acceptance by demonstrating that everyone has natural beauty, imperfections, and all. These examples represent just a fraction of how women harness social media’s power as a platform for guiding and inspiring others to embrace and revel in their natural beauty.

Promoting Inclusivity in Beauty Products:

Women of color have used their platforms to advocate for more inclusive beauty product lines. Historically women have always been judged on their looks. Women of color have usually gone overlooked or not seen as up to par, with other women, White women. Women of color have pushed for a broader range of foundation shades, hair care products, and makeup options, ensuring that people of all skin tones and hair types can find products that work for them. By doing so, they compelled the beauty industry to be more inclusive in its offerings.

One of the most significant ways women of color have influenced the beauty industry is by demanding a more comprehensive range of beauty products that help to cater to a broader audience. Traditionally, the market offered options catering to lighter skin tones, leaving those with deeper complexions undeserved. Women of color have used their platforms to raise their voices and showcase the need for foundations matching their skin tones. In previous days, many women of color were not given the same treatment as white women were. “Women of color are largely excluded from postfeminism disclosures and representations, or to put it in another way, that the unidealized postfeminist subject is a White, western, heterosexual woman.” (Butler, 2013) In today’s world, thankfully we can see women of color being included thanks to awareness on Instagram and other social media platforms. In addition to women being more vocal on social media, they are able to become more popular, making a louder movement than ever before. “ Being popular now means getting noticed by many. Popularity is measured as well as staged, as rankings and charts provide information on what is popular while vying for popularity themselves. These quantifying formats do not speak to the quality or originality of the popular, only to its evident success across different scales of evaluation.” (Werber, 2023) Popularity today is defined by garnering widespread attention, often manipulated by others

through the Instagram platform. All in all, beauty brands have responded by expanding their shade ranges to accommodate a broader array of undertones and Hughes making it easier for individuals with diverse complexions to find the perfect match. This movement has not only transformed product offerings but has also signaled a profound shift in the industry's acknowledgment of the importance of inclusivity.

Another way in which beauty products are promoting inclusivity is through the use of hair care products. In hair care, women of color have advocated for products designed to meet the unique needs of various hair textures, from natural curls and coils to relaxed hair. Have you shared their personal experiences, product recommendations, and hair care routines, helping to dispel the one-size-fits-all approach to hair care. For centuries, since abolition days, Black women have been wearing their natural hair as symbolism for their culture. “ After abolition, formerly enslaved people wore their hair natural to contrast white supremacist power structures and to counter a ‘color complex’ that privileged a Eurocentric beauty ideal of straight hair and light skin.”(Canella, 2011) Similarly, in an article provided by women's studies, it discusses how a young woman recalls back to when she was younger and feeling the need to have her hair chemically processed in order to fit into the standard of beauty. “Since I was a teenager, I have chemically altered the natural state of my hair. At the time, I never really thought about why I did it or the extent to which that chemical would rule over me. But my hair story is not unique. For the vast majority of Black women, hair is not just hair; it contains emotive qualities that are linked to one's lived experiences.” (Thompson, 2009) By doing so, they have encouraged the development and promotion of specialized products that effectively nourish and style textured hair, thus addressing a longstanding gap in the market.

Highlighting Cultural Diversity:

Women of color have showcased their cultural backgrounds and traditions in their beauty routines. This includes sharing makeup looks and hairstyles inspired by their heritage and educating their audiences about the cultural significance behind these practices. By doing this, they celebrate and educate others about the beauty of different cultures, fostering a deeper appreciation for diversity. Similarly to the article provided by Bulter, regarding hip-hop artist, Nicki Minaj, is an article providing information on another artist being true to themselves and representing young women of color from Urban cities. “In just a short time, Belcalis Almanzar has emerged as a feminist hero who is vocal about women’s rights and supporting women’s choices. But she is not often celebrated. She is often overlooked, dismissed, and disregarded. She’s an Afro Latina, a former stripper, Instagram model turned reality television star who transformed into one of the most talked about rappers.” (Williams, 2017) This statement explains to her readers how the female rapper is viewed differently just because she presents herself differently from the way society has seen certain women in previous times. Rapper, Cardi B is just one of many new artists who have been able to shed light on the women that have not been ideal to focus on in history. Cardi B is showing her authentic self and all of her trials and tribulations as an Afro-Latina woman from the Bronx, New York. As a result women icons including Nicki Minaj, and Cardi B, can lead to a large influence on young women of color as they are witnessing these changes on Instagram. Sometimes young women of color witness so much of this, they then can have an unrealistic desire to try to achieve these looks. “ Unique interactional features of the social media environment may pose specific risks to body image, such as the viewing of appearance-related comments that accompany Instagram images, and the degree to which women feel invested in the number of likes, positive responses, accompanying

Instagram images. (Monks, 2020) Similarly to this “Adolescents are spending considerable time on social media, yet it is unclear whether motivations for social media use drive different forms of social media engagement and their relationships with body satisfaction and well-being” (Jarman, 2021) While both statements express worries about young adolescents being exposed to social media early on, the prevailing views that the positive aspects outweigh the negative ones.

Women of color often use social media platforms to express their cultural identity through beauty practices. These influencers are not only showcasing cultural beauty but also actively educating their followers about the historical and cultural significance of the practices they incorporate. This educational aspect provides context and insight into the rituals, techniques, and materials used in their beauty routines. By sharing this knowledge, they foster a greater understanding and appreciation for the cultural traditions overlooked or misunderstood throughout history. Similarly to the reading provided by Monks, is another point made that many young women of color are witnessing these looks and are being influenced by these female content creators to view their beauty, which may be a different ideal from theirs. Preferences for specific female body sizes are believed to be learned in social and cultural contexts. Research suggests that children learn what is considered attractive with regard to facial beauty and body size within their social and cultural context at a very young age.” (Markey, 2020) By doing so, they shape and enlighten their Instagram followers by imparting beauty routines and looks infused with deeper cultural significance and a connection to cultural roots, inspiring others to follow suit. Rather than adhering exclusively to a beauty standard shaped by personal upbringing, this perspective encourages the recognition of diverse cultural backgrounds and the exploration of varied perceptions of beauty. Such insights underscore one of the numerous valuable aspects of Instagram.

In conclusion, the influential presence of women of color continues to redefine, societal norms on social media, marketing a sustained, and transformative trend. Instagram serves as a pivotal platform, enabling women of color to express their voices boldly, advocate for cultural diversity, and champion inclusivity within the beauty industry. It also helps to represent a powerful assertion of authenticity and self-expression, challenging controversial standards, and fostering a more diverse and accepting digital landscape.

Chapter 3: Methods

The design of this research is qualitative and descriptive in nature. I initially planned to survey my research sample. Instead, I conducted semi-structured interviews to access, a more personal, intimate response from people to gain a deeper understanding of people's reactions to media representations of women of color. I then proceeded with an interview process consisting of 7 women of color between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four. This age range is representative of young women of color in the U.S. To further support my research on how women of color reshape beauty norms on social media through their unique and empowering perspectives, I also had to search other related areas and subjects to my research question. These subjects reflect and correlate to my research question of the evolving standard of beauty and social media's effects. I used the Purchase College Library Database to identify the scholarship on the subject. My databases are used with Taylor& Francis Online, Muse John Hopkins, Science Direct, ProQuest, EBSCOhost, and Sage Journals. While using these Purchase College Library Databases, some keywords and specific topics that were helpful while researching were beauty *standards*, *social media*, *women of color*, *body image*, *Instagram*, and *Gen Z*.

When conducting my interviews, I established the central guiding questions to help ensure the consistency of this research and as entry points for follow-up questions. For this study's confidentiality, these participants will be anonymized and identified by their cultural background and age, for example, Participant 1(Age 22, Asian). These helped to gain more personal responses according to each person in the interview, allowing for a deeper understanding of interviewees' opinions and beliefs. These questions included the following:

- **RQ#1:** Do you believe the beauty standard is different now than in previous years? If so, how?
- **RQ#2:** Do you think social media has positively influenced young women of color?
- **RQ#3:** Has social media influenced the way you perceive yourself?
- **RQ#4:** Do you believe that social media has helped the beauty industry to become more or less inclusive of women of color?

The interview questions proved to be crucial in obtaining valuable feedback from the women participating in the interview process. I successfully captured a diverse range of responses from all seven women involved, each offering a nuanced perspective. Notably, individuals from various backgrounds, such as Middle Eastern and Indigenous, provided insightful opinions and thoughts that encompassed both positive and negative points of view. In particular, these women share realistic opinions, highlighting the positive aspects of social media while emphasizing the importance of maintaining a healthy balance in its use. However, they also underscored potential challenges, including a risk of comparison and the promotion of unrealistic standards.

The topic of social media influencing these changes in the beauty industry is important to me because, in today's day and age, social media is all around us and is inescapable. Growing up surrounded by modern technology, it is remarkable to witness young women of color advocating for themselves. They are making a positive impact by influencing major beauty and fashion companies to be more inclusive and mindful of the diverse beauty standards beyond the traditional European ideals. I love walking into a Sephora and seeing makeup products for all skin tones, not just seven. I love shopping online and seeing clothing range from size XXS to 5X. I love walking into Target and seeing hair care products for hair types ranging from fine and

straight to kinky and coarse. These small positive changes can be so fulfilling to young women of color just wanting to feel seen. Growing up, makeup brands did not have fifty different foundation shades; there were, on average, ten. Any clothing over a size medium clothing used to be seen as clothing for “ fat” people. Now, people are more aware of different body types and curves. Growing up, many hair care products advertised, specifically for the Black community, were filled with silicones, parabens, phthalates, and other harsh chemicals, causing more wear and tear on our hair. I am beyond grateful to have witnessed these changes in my life.

The interviews aimed to explore these sentiments more thoroughly, investigating whether they are a shared experience among young women. Reflecting on it, it appears to be a prevailing sentiment. The majority of participants expressed positive responses, though some did share individual setbacks that seemed to be more personal in nature. This nuanced mix of perspectives adds depth to our understanding of the broader feelings and experiences within this group.

Chapter 4: Results

My research delves into how women of color perceive Instagram's impact on altering beauty standards. Today, social media has become permeating into every aspect of our lives. Discussions on beauty have endured across centuries. This research aims to illuminate the nuanced ways in which women of color redefine beauty standards through the lens of social media. To substantiate these insights, the research draws upon the responses from a diverse group of seven women of color, spanning various backgrounds and aged between 15 and 24. For this study's confidentiality, these participants will be anonymized and identified by their cultural background and age, for example, Participant 1 (Age 22, Asian). This chapter unveils the intricacies of the interview process, presenting both the questions and the responses, providing a profound glimpse into the unique perspectives of these women.

When collecting my interview data, I encountered a few keywords that impacted me while listening to the responses. These keywords include *representation, tokenism, unrealistic, authenticity, stereotypes, and mindfulness*.

RQ#1: Do you believe the beauty standard is different now than in previous years?

If so, how?

In this section, I will showcase selected replies from various women who participated in the interviews, each providing comprehensive and distinct perspectives, ensuring responses offer rich insights and capture the diversity of use among the participants. Some participants highlighted a positive change while others felt the opposite. The responses are as follows: "Yes, I see a positive change. Natural beauty has a larger acceptance rate, including diverse skin tones, hairstyles, and body types. It is refreshing to witness more representation in the media, challenging the unrealistic standards we used to see" *Participant 2 (Age 20, African American)*.

Oppositely, this next interviewee felt otherwise. “There’s progress, but work still needs to be done. While we’re seeing more representation, there are still instances of tokenism. It’s essential to continue pushing for genuine inclusivity in all aspects of the beauty industry.” *Participant 3 (Age 22, Asian)*. The beauty standard is evolving, but there is still pressure to conform in certain ways. Social media, while providing a platform for diverse voices, can also perpetuate unrealistic ideals. It’s crucial to balance the positives with awareness of potential negative impacts.”

Participant 7 (Age 21, Indigenous)

Most of the participants were happy with what is currently trending now, but there is a cautious undertone. They are not just going with the flow, they are paying close attention to the possible downsides as well. Although they see the positive side, they also are aware of potential drawbacks, showing a thoughtful and caring viewpoint on how things are changing, which was helpful towards feedback of the study.

RQ#2: Do you think social media has positively influenced young women of color?

Personally, I feel that social media has positively influenced young women of color. I believe that more women of color are okay with being themselves and not feeling like they need to conform to this standard of the ideal woman. In agreement with my opinion are a few responses of the included participants, “Absolutely! Social media has been a game changer. It provides a platform for diverse voices and allows us to redefine beauty on our own terms. Seeing people who look like me embracing their uniqueness has boosted my self-esteem.” *Participant 1 (Age 18, Latina)*. “I believe social media has played a crucial role in uplifting our voices. It allows us to connect, share experiences, and challenge stereotypes. However, it's important to be mindful of the potential negative impact and ensure a healthy balance.” *Participant 4 (Age 19, Middle Eastern)* said, “ Social media has been both a blessing and a challenge. It's giving us a

voice and platform to celebrate our beauty. However, there's also a risk of comparison and unrealistic standards. It's essential to use social media mindfully and foster a supportive online community.” *Participant 7 (Age 21, Indigenous)*

In summary, participants acknowledge the positive influence of social media on young women of color, providing a platform for self-expression, community building, and challenging traditional beauty norms. However, they also highlight the importance of being mindful of potential negative impacts regarding the risk of comparing yourself to others and having an unrealistic vision of beauty standards. Yet they also discuss the importance of promoting and maintaining healthy relationships with social media.

RQ#3: Has social media influenced the way you perceive yourself?

I feel that social media has influenced the way that I perceive myself. Similarly to the last section regarding RQ:#2, I do notice tendencies to compare myself to others and aspire to conform to a specific appearance or aesthetic. This inclination has led me to some challenging paths of chasing perfection. In this section, some of the participants somewhat agreed with me while others that different responses. The responses are as follows: “Yes, social media has been a source of empowerment. It's allowed me to see Beauty in various forms, making me more confident in my identity. However, I am mindful of the potential for comparison, and I try to focus on self-love.” *Participant 5 (Age 17, South Asian)*. “Social media has influenced the way I see myself. It's empowered me to embrace my natural beauty and unique features. However, the constant exposure to curated images can sometimes create moments of self-doubt.” *Participant 6(Age 23 Afro-Latina)*

In summary, the participants recognized a substantial impact of Instagram on shaping their self-perception. Overall, they noted Instagram’s positive role in fostering an appreciation

for diversity and unique characteristics. The platform has become a catalyst for celebrating individuality. However, amidst these positive aspects, participants underscored the importance of maintaining a mindful balance. They emphasized the potential pitfalls of inheritance in comparing oneself to others and succumbing to unrealistic standards perpetuated by the digital realm. Diversity, in this context, refers to the broad spectrum of personal characteristics, backgrounds, and experiences that make each individual unique. Unrealistic standards allude to the often unattainable ideals, particularly related to appearance, through social media that may lead to negative self-perception and unrealistic expectations.

RQ# 4: Do you believe that social media has helped the beauty industry to become more or less inclusive of women of color?

I am convinced that social media has played a pivotal role in promoting inclusivity for women of color within the beauty industry. Daily on Instagram, numerous beauty brands and companies showcase their products featuring women from diverse backgrounds. I believe that certain representations we witness today would not have been embraced in the past. The advocacy and vocal stance of women of color have undoubtedly sparked positive transformations in the industry. Participants had their opinions on the questions as well, the responses are as follows: “Social media has pushed the beauty industry to be more inclusive. I see more brands embracing diversity and featuring women of color and their complaints Social media has pushed the beauty industry to be more inclusive. I see more brands embracing diversity and featuring women of color in their campaigns. It's empowering to have representation.” *Participant 1 (Age 18, Latina)*. “ Social media has been a force for good. It has forced the beauty industry to expand its definition of beauty and cater to a more diverse audience. However, there is room for improvement, especially in avoiding tokenism and promoting authentic representation.”

Participant 4 (Age 19 Middle Eastern) “I believe social media has catalyzed positive change.

Many beauty brands now understand the importance of diversity and social media has provided a platform for consumers to demand inclusivity. There's progress, but still work to be done.”

Participant 2 (Age 20, African-American)

In conclusion, the perspective shared by these participants is a collective recognition that beauty standards are undergoing a positive evolution and embracing greater inclusivity, celebrating diversity, and encouraging individual authenticity. The importance of sustained efforts to ensure the longevity and inclusivity of these positive changes resonates throughout their insights. Participants acknowledge the positive impact of social media, on young women of color, providing a platform for self-expression and community building, while also in for sizing the necessity of mindfulness to mitigate potential negative impacts. Additionally, participants recognize the significance of the influence that social media holds on their self-perception, emphasizing the need for balance and mindfulness to navigate potential pitfalls. To sum up, participants generally held mixed perspectives but collectively agreed that social media has a positive influence on the beauty industry, fostering greater inclusivity. However, there is a need for ongoing efforts to address concerns related to specific cultural aspects and stigmas, as highlighted in one of the statements from Participant #4, “ Social media has been a force for good. It has forced the beauty industry to expand its definition of beauty and cater to a more diverse audience. However, there is room for improvement, especially in avoiding tokenism and promoting authentic representation.” *Participant 4 (Age 19 Middle Eastern)*. While acknowledging the positive aspects of social media regarding the beauty industry, she is recognizing its role in broadening the definition of beauty and making the industry more

inclusive. However, she also highlights the need for improvement, specifically cautioning against tokenism and emphasizing the importance of promoting authentic representation.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In summary, the pervasive influence of social media in today's society has reached unparalleled heights, serving as a significant platform for disseminating knowledge and enabling individual self-expression. Looking back at previous decades, it becomes clear that societal norms were less accommodating, especially in relation to the stringent beauty standards imposed on women, demanding adherence to particular ideals of beauty.

This study aimed to discuss how women of color perceive Instagram's impact on altering beauty standards. The feedback I received from the seven women showcased a diversity of perspectives in response to the questions posed. Certain participants offered notably progressive insights, pushing the boundaries of conventional thought, for instance, "Social media has been a force for good. It has forced the beauty industry to expand its definition of beauty and cater to a more diverse audience. However, there is room for improvement, especially in avoiding tokenism and promoting authentic representation." *Participant 4 (Age 19 Middle Eastern)*. However, what stood out was the authenticity and honesty embedded in each woman's response, including this statement from participant #2 "I believe social media has catalyzed positive change. Many beauty brands now understand the importance of diversity and social media has provided a platform for consumers to demand inclusivity. There's progress, but still work to be done." *Participant 2 (Age 20, African-American)*. Despite the spectrum of opinions, each participant shared their genuine and unfiltered thoughts, contributing to a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the subject matter. As Instagram emerged as a pivotal force in promoting inclusivity across diverse realms, such as clothing, makeup, body image, and self-esteem, it showcased female icons who serve as inspiring role models for the values of inclusivity. The exploration honed in on three distinct avenues through which these women

redefine beauty standards. This research has provided me with valuable insights regarding the impact of these women and highlighted their role in contributing to evolved beauty standards, particularly among young women of color.

Furthermore, the study has allowed me to gain perspectives on how women of color perceive the role of social media and shaping beauty standards while fostering a sense of inclusivity and the new age of media. Although the study captures the viewpoints of seven women of color, it is crucial to acknowledge that they did represent a broader population engaged with the subject matter; hence, the presented findings do not dismiss the potential viewpoints of women of color at large, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and respecting diverse perspectives in discussions surrounding beauty standards.

In conclusion, this research project has been a confirming and enlightening journey for me. It provided a platform for me to express my sentiments on a topic that holds personal significance as a young Black woman, while also capturing the responses of fellow diverse group of young women of color from different perspectives was eye-opening. Selecting a research topic that resonated with me was initially challenging, but delving into my truth and sources of inspiration ultimately guided my focus on the silent stigma surrounding young women of color in America. Through this project, I aimed to shed light on the strength and resilience of women of color, emphasizing the importance of acknowledging and appreciating their stories. I hope to inspire other young women to fearlessly pursue their passions in their writing, regardless of popularity. As I share my story and learn from the diverse perspectives of other women, it becomes clear that while social media has its merits, there is room for improvement. Nevertheless, the collective journey signifies progress and a positive trajectory.

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