

Abstract

This study examined how television advertisements for female beauty products influence self-image and perceptions among undergraduate female students at Egerton University, Kenya. It is grounded in Cultivation Theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976), which argues that long-term and repeated exposure to television shapes viewers' perceptions of reality by transmitting dominant cultural values, including ideals of attractiveness, success, and social acceptance. Through repeated exposure, television advertising may normalize idealised beauty standards, encouraging audiences to internalise these representations and compare themselves against them. Over time, this can contribute to the belief that beauty is closely linked to happiness, success, and social belonging. A qualitative research design was employed to explore participants' lived experiences in depth. The study used purposive sampling to select 60 female undergraduate students from all four academic years who frequently viewed televised beauty product advertisements. Data were collected through eight focus group discussions using a semi-structured interview guide. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data, involving systematic coding and refinement of emerging themes. Findings indicated that repeated exposure to idealised beauty images encouraged social comparison and body dissatisfaction among participants, which in some cases led to increased consumption of beauty products. However, some participants reported positive outcomes, including improved self-care practices and heightened awareness of personal grooming, suggesting a dual and nuanced effect of beauty advertising. The study concludes that televised beauty advertisements significantly influence female students' self-image and perceptions. It recommends that universities strengthen media literacy programs to enhance critical engagement with beauty narratives in media. It also suggests that media regulators promote more realistic and diverse representations of beauty to support healthier self-perceptions among young women.