

## Information Seeking and Use Behaviour on Beautification Product among Students of Higher Learning Institutions

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**Abstract:** This paper focuses on the information seeking and use behaviour on beautification products among students of Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) in Tanzania. A self-administered questionnaire was designed as an instrument to collect data from HLIs students. A survey was conducted and 150 students responded to the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data collected on information seeking and use behaviour among students. The results indicate that most respondents used different sources to seek information before deciding on using a particular beautification product. Most of the students indicated friends/colleagues as the most preferred sources of information regardless of gender, age, marital status and field of studies. Findings show students were aware of the number of side-effects associated with the usage of beautification products, despite continuous use. The use of the Internet, social networking and television were reported as sources when students sought information on beautification products. The study recommends that the Tanzania Food and Drugs Authority (TFDA), pharmacists, beauty specialists and traders work in harmony in order to protect the consumers. Early and clear dissemination of information on harmful products and chemical composition is pivotal before circulation of products in order to avoid capital and health loss.

**Key words:** Information seeking • Beautification • Side effects of cosmetics • Use behavior

### INTRODUCTION

The art of beautification is of ancient age. It can be traced back from the time when people painted their body for religious ceremonies, war and mating rituals. In other words, beauty quantifies an individual's social uniqueness in terms of physical appearance, personality traits and attractiveness [1-4]. Indeed, beauty plays a unique role which can be connected to the characteristics of having a preferred mate and being attracted to mates of a certain age. The traits accompanying beauty are not static; they change from time to time and from one society to another and are dependent on cultural perspectives. Despite all differences in the perspectives of beauty, the underlying essence includes confident looking, smartness and attractiveness.

In different societies, beauty perception has changed. In modern times, youthful complexion, slim body size or shape, tallness, long eye lashes and other criteria [3-17]

are increasingly recognized as the embodiment of beauty. In the same vein, beauty is no more the exclusive quality of women as men's interest in beautifying their bodies has increased [2, 4]. Previous studies conducted on cosmetics and beautifications have reported a number of males and females striving to maintain youth and beauty outlook [4]. Common practices include rejuvenation of the skin, hair appearance, hair transplant, augmentation of nose, lips and acne scar remover. Rhinoplasty, lipharoplasty and plastic surgery as well chemical peels and bone reconfiguration are also in widely used today [12,18, 19].

Advancement of technology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has increased competition among manufacturers of beauty products. Development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has also been used to promote cosmetics or beautification products [17] through demonstration of different means for undergoing beautification process. Further, development of ICT has also facilitated the transfer of information on marketing

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and advertisement on beautification products. From the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards there has been an increase in the circulation of various beautification products under the category of cosmetics such as those for cleaning body parts and changing skin tones which range from powders, body make-up, soap, shampoo, deodorant, perfume, hair relaxer, skin whitening products and toothpaste which whiten teeth quickly [3, 12]. Although the development of science and technology has increased the range of beautification products, some have been known to have undesired effects [5, 20, 16]. Some of the effects include brittle hair, skin disease like dandruff, itchy scalp, scalp burns, scarring of scalp, weak or breaking hair, loss of scalp hair, hair loss and change in hair colour [14, 15] as well as irritation, negative reactions, nail damage, ageing, premature wrinkles, pimples, acne, headaches, black spots, black eyes and skin dryness [20-25]. Some of the beautification products have been associated with reactions that lead to serious damage to the entire metabolism system, causing kidney failure, endangering the reproductive organs, increasing poor vision and causing cancer and other chronic diseases. In most cases, chemical effects are identified when the damage is severe and irreversible [6].

In Africa, the skin complexion of a woman is a valuable asset. In many African societies women with light complexion are highly sought after by bridegrooms. They also receive huge dowry compared to women with dark complexion. Because of this cultural influence, a lot of African women go the extra mile to have their skin color artificially altered to don a light complexion. In some countries, local entrepreneurs have seen this increased demand in beauty products as an opportunity to make quick money. Cases of increased cheap and low quality skin bleachers are becoming serious. Most of these products erode the skin pigmentation, sometimes to disastrous levels. At the very worst, some women already their skin texture are so damaged, that they encounter difficulties in recovering from injury. Sadly some of these beautification products may result in deep wounds that requiring stitches. In some case, consumers have reported failing to comply with instructions provided in enclosed leaf which leads to wrong application of these products. In other cases, consumers use poor quality and sometimes expired products [13, 6].

Although the beautification products have been used worldwide by millions of consumers, their side effects are not frequently reported or even seen. It should be noted that most of the ingredients used for beautification formulas are potent chemicals whose prolonged

application might result in undesirable or systemic side effects [5]. As such, many countries have devoted to endorse regulations and precaution measures for the external application of beautification products.

Tanzania, like other countries, has experienced an increase in production and supply of beautification products (cosmetics and personal care products). In order to protect consumers, Tanzania has assigned responsibility of controlling quality and educating the masses on the side effects of substandard beautification products to the Tanzania Food and Drugs Authority (TFDA). TFDA examine cosmetics and personal care product compliance to standards in order to safeguard the consumer [21, 22, 23]. Despite the efforts made by this regulatory authority, substandard beautification/ cosmetics products still find their way in the country. Some of these products contain harmful chemicals such as mercury and hydroquinone. Yet the majority of these products passes through unofficial routes and is sold in black markets which create difficulties in controlling their circulation.

Generally, health information particularly those concerned with beautification products are of paramount importance for consumers because of their widespread use, irrespective of age and gender. Nonetheless, beauty parlor professionals do not always comply with standards for cosmetics and some of them are not competent specialists on beautification career [6, 13]. Based on the most reported side effects associated with the usage of the beautification products, users are advised to have timely and accurate information on these products. This is due to fact that information is one of the most valuable resources for selection and usage of cosmetics [24, 25].

Access to correct information will facilitate decision making as it will enhance awareness on the product sought. Availability and accessibility to right information will stimulate individual absorption of information. Moreover absorption of information will definitely vary among active and passive users of information [10]. Passive use of information always denote information that just stored in a person's mind for future use, whilst active utilization of information encompasses activities such as reading, taking part in discussions, questioning, thinking and social and personal activities [11, 26]. However, in order to alleviate the consequences of making the wrong choices and usage of beautification products, essential information is of paramount importance. Students of Higher Learning Institutes (HLIs) are more likely to be active users of information. Thus, availability to

information on beautification products could enable users to comprehend information before embarking on selection of products.

**Statement of the Problem:** In today's world of Information Communication and Technology, modern industries offer a wide range of beautification products while paying for attractive advertisements on televisions, magazines and the Internet. Different sources of information have facilitated accessibility to the services from home, salons, beauty parlor, massage centers and spas. The majority of consumers of beautification products depend on media advertisements in making decision about which product to use without thoroughly investigating the usefulness and possible effects. However, increased competition and production place an additional dilemma on consumers in deciding which product to use. The majority of users are not primarily concerned about understanding the ingredients and its contra-indication prescribed in the leaflets, only the cost. Users cannot digest all promotion messages before attempting to use the products. Obviously, some beautification products in the market are not safe and effective. Instances of inaccurate information to users such as those claiming to offer protection from UVA radiation, rejuvenation of the skin and recovery of lost hair are becoming fashionable [13].

Most students from HLIs in most developing countries do not know what information they lack; at the same time, they do not know that information is available to help them to solving immediate concerns [24]. Despite the upsurge of consumption of beautification products among both genders, little attention has been given to studying the information seeking and use behaviour of beautification products. The lack of studies in this domain has triggered the interest in the researcher to undertake this research to shed light on this particular topic by identifying HLI students' information seeking and use behaviour of beautification products.

**Objectives of the Study:** The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To investigate the demographic profile of beautification products users from among Tanzanian students of Higher learning Institutes (HLIs).
- To identify the information seeking behaviour of HLIs students on beautification products.
- To assess HLIs students' awareness on the side effects of beautification products.

- To identify the preferred sources of information used by HLIs students in making decision on the selection of beautification products.

**Methodology:** The study employed the survey research method, where the data were collected through online survey. Since it was impossible to obtain a sampling frame for this study, convenient sampling was used to select respondents from students' Facebook accounts. Respective institutes' social networks were consulted in order to collect email addresses. In some cases, the researcher contacted students' group administrators to get the emails of current students in Facebook circles. Active Facebook members were contacted and asked to participate in the study. Students from the Institute of Social Work (ISW), University Computing Center at the University of Dar es salaam (UCC) and College of Business Education (CBE) participated in the study. A sample of 250 students was identified from three different HLIs residing in city of Dar es salaam. The response rate was 80%, accounting for 200 structured questionnaires delivered. Among the delivered questionnaires 150 (75%) respondents gave quality feedback while 25% contained missing data, hence were discarded. At the end of the questionnaire, a final query was added, "the most preferred source of information is..." This query was intended to measure the respondents' reaction to the preferred information sources. All other questionnaire statements were designed based on the premise of measuring information seeking and use behaviour on beautification products.

**Data Collection Techniques:** A structured questionnaire was developed using information seeking and use behaviour on beautification products. The questionnaires employed multiple items with five point Likert scales from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" where number 1 indicated "Strongly Disagree" and number 5 indicated "Strongly Agree". The decision to employ Likert scale was based on the fact that it had widespread appropriateness of measuring attitude. Other questions asked the respondents to tick/check response as they deem suitable to their attitude.

**Analysis:** The study collected data on the demographic information of respondents which comprises of gender, age, field of study, level of education and current year of study. One hundred and fifty respondents participated in the survey; out of 150 respondents, 89 respondents' age ranged from 19-24 years, 42 respondents were at age from 25-29 years old while 19 respondents were 30 years old and above.

Table 1: Demographic Information of Respondents: Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage
19-24	89	59
25-29	42	28
>30	19	13
Total	150	100

Source: Online Survey Data, 2014

Table 2: Demographic Information of Respondents: Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	49	33
Female	101	67
Total	150	100

Source: Online Survey Data, 2014

Table 3: Demographic Information of Respondents: Marital Status

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	64	42.7
Married	86	57.3
Total	150	100

Source: Online Survey Data (2014)

Table 4: Level of Education Undertaken

Level of education	Frequency	Percentage
Certificate	47	31
Diploma	39	26
Bachelor Degree	64	43
Total	150	100

Source: Online Survey Data, 2014

Table 5: Field of Study

Field of Study	Frequency	Percentage
Social Sciences	48	32
Computer Science	41	27
Arts & Humanities	30	20
Business studies	27	18
Other(s)	04	03
Total	150	100

Source: Online Survey Data, 2014

Table 6: Year of Studies

Year of Study	Frequency	Percentage
First	34	22
Second	60	40
Third	37	25
Fourth	19	13
Total	150	100

Source: Online Survey Data (2014)

The study collected data for both genders, where 49 (33%) respondents were males and 101 (67%) respondents were females. Further, out of 49 male respondents ten were aged of 19-24, fourteen were aged between 25-29 and twenty five respondents were 30 years old and above.

In comparison, 25 female respondents were between the ages of 19-24, 53 were between the ages of 25-29 and 23 were 30 and above.

The study collected data on respondents' marital status. The results show 64 (42.7%) respondents were single while 86 (57.3%) respondents were married. Most single students were in certificate or diploma programmes. Further, out of 86 married respondents, 67 (78%) were females and 19 (22%) were males. The results reveal that a large number of married respondents were females.

The study collected data on respondents' level of education they were pursuing. Results shows forty-seven (31%) were pursuing certificate courses, 39 (26%) were pursuing a diploma and 64 (43%) were undertaking Bachelor's degree courses.

The study collected data on respondents' field of study. The responses indicate that 48 (32%) of the respondents were studying Social Sciences, 41 (27%) in Computer Science, 30 (20%) in Arts & Humanities, 27 (18%) in Business studies and 4 (3%) were taking other fields other than the mentioned disciplines.

The data collected in regards to year of studies indicate that 34 (22%) were in the first year of their programme, 60 (40%) of students were in their second year, 37 (35%) were in the third year while 19 (13%) of respondents were in the fourth year of the programmes.

The respondents were asked to indicate problems they usually encounter that necessitate them to seek for information on beautification products. For this question, the respondents were asked to tick as many responses as possible. Responses show acne to be the most problematic issue they face and it had been mostly checked more as its frequency was 112 (12.54%), followed by pimples 108 (12.09%) and blackheads 96 (10.75%). The least problems affecting HLIs students which necessitate them to seek information on beautification products were sensitive skin 28 (3.15%) followed by dry skin 34 (3.81%) and dandruff 62 (6.94%).

The study collected data on respondents' perceived value of information sources by ranking according to the degree of importance. The results indicate friends/colleagues as being the mostly consulted for beautification products, followed by beauty parlor or salon. Similarly, Internet, newspapers, magazines, television, shop keepers and social networking were also favourable source of information before selecting beauty products.

However, parents, siblings, leaflets, health practitioners and the radio were rarely consulted on beautification products. This pattern of information

Table 7: Types of information needed in regard to beautification problems

Respondents' problems	Frequency	Percentage
Acne	112	12.54
Pimples	108	12.09
Blackheads	96	10.75
Spots	91	10.19
Hair loss	87	9.74
Hair breakage	79	8.84
Oily skin	68	7.61
Lighten Skin	65	7.27
Wrinkles	63	7.05
Dandruff	62	6.94
Dry skin	34	3.81
Sensitive Skin	28	3.15
Total	893	100

Source: Online Survey Data (2014).

Table 8: Perceived value of sources of information according to degree of importance

Sources of information	Frequency	Ranking based on its significance
Friends/colleagues	75	1
Beauty parlor/salon	71	2
Internet	65	3
Newspapers	63	4
Magazines	60	5
Television	58	6
Shopkeepers	55	7
Social networking	53	8
Branded product	50	9
Parents	47	10
Siblings	45	11
Manufacturing country	40	12
Leaflets	28	13
Health practitioners	25	14
Radio	19	15

Source: Online Survey Data (2014)

sources used by HLIs' students has been demonstrated in many studies conducted in developed and developing countries such as the study conducted by Hunter [18] on the emerging Halal cosmetic and personal care market in Malaysia.

The study also looks at the preferred sources of information according to particular needs of beautification products. For the case of acne problem, most students preferred shopkeepers of beautification products while for pimple control students preferred to consult their friends/colleagues and the Internet mostly. For controlling black heads, students sought information from leaflets and magazines and in cases of spot control or removal social network and television were the preferred sources. For problems on hair loss, students extracted information from friends mostly, for hair break problems students mostly consulted friends and social network. For oily skin and dandruff concerns, students sought information from

Table 9: Preferred information sources according to information needs

Information Needs	Friends/colleagues	Internet	Newspapers	Magazines	Television	Shopkeepers	Beauty parlor/salon	Social networking	Parents	Siblings	Leaflet	Dermatologist	Radio
Acne	78%	82%	54%	68%	50%	88.3%	70%	54.6%	44.6%	60%	60%	64%	26%
Pimples	90%	90%	50%	74%	58.6%	65%	54.6%	65.3%	25%	51.3%	62%	48%	28%
Blackheads	52.6%	50%	30%	78%	45%	56%	65%	72.0%	32%	40%	78%	45.3%	10.6%
Spots	66%	46%	54%	50%	76%	45%	62%	76%	40%	56.6%	14%	42%	23.3%
Hair Loss	85.3%	78.6%	26.6%	51.3%	46.6%	46%	66%	54%	32%	43.5%	34.5%	25.3%	2.0%
Hair Breakage	78.6%	46.6%	6.6%	32%	32.6%	72.6%	59.3%	78.6%	28%	37.3%	26.6%	33%	3.3%
Oily skin	45.3%	76%	60%	45%	48%	22%	77.3%	66.6%	0%	68%	5.3%	24.6%	1.1%
Wrinkles	54%	59.3%	30%	24%	57%	30%	64.6%	45%	12%	28%	32.6%	20%	6.6%
Lighten skin	40%	56%	32%	46%	45%	66%	68.6%	46.6%	54.6%	44%	43.0%	68.8%	4.6%
Dandruff	84.6%	83.3%	60%	45.3%	42%	70%	84.6%	72%	25.3%	30%	34%	28%	0%
Dry skin	30%	22%	28%	26%	34%	42%	72.6%	68%	42%	39.3%	37.6%	34.6%	25.3%
Sensitive skin	12%	0%	0%	18%	46.6%	24.6%	37%	38.0%	25%	20%	19.3%	54%	5.3%

Source: Online Survey Data (2014)

beauty parlors and friends while they go to the Internet to overcome problems concerning wrinkles. Finally, students consulted beauty parlor and dermatologists for dry skin and lighten skin problems.

Generally, students consulted different sources of information in order to meet their desire of beautifying their body. However, some of these sources were not authentic in provision of information. On the another hand, this result contradicts Teng [24] which indicates parents and family were the most preferable sources of information on Halal cosmetics and personal care products [8, 9]. Generally, the findings show that students trusted shopkeepers more as they selected products. Yet, the knowledge of beauty shop attendants on product contents and skin specification was doubtful. According to Orfanos [16] argues that the skills of cosmeticians may be questionable. Moreover, students' usage of the Internet to seek information on beautification seems to be minimal compared to friends, beauty parlor and social network.

The researcher was interested to look on the relationship between demographic variables with beautification problem necessitates students to seek information on the products. The results show 15 (37%) males have acne problems, ten (24%) males have trouble with pimples, eight (20%) with blackheads, five (12%) with dry skin and three (7%) with dandruff. None of males reported to be troubled with spots, hair loss, hair breakage, oily skin, wrinkles, lighten skin and sensitive skin. However, more female students were reported to be adversely affected by both skin and hair problems namely

Table 10: Side of effects encountered with the use of beautification products

Side of effects some of beautification products usage.	Frequency	Percentage
Dandruff	98	10.9
Skin irritation	95	10.6
Hair loss	93	10.3
Allergic reaction	82	9.1
Thinning eyelashes	78	8.7
Dermatitis	71	7.9
Skin cancer	65	7.2
Hair breakage	64	7.1
Weakening of hair	57	6.3
Change in hair color	55	6.1
Scalp burns	51	5.7
Scarring of scalp	47	5.2
Skin appear aged	44	4.9
Total	900	100

Source: Online Survey Data (2014)

acne, pimples, blackheads, spots, hair loss, hair breakage, oily skin, lighten skin, wrinkles, dandruff, dry skin and sensitive skin compared to the males.

The results show that students aged between 19-24 and 25-29 were more affected by pimples, acne, blackheads and spots than those who were at the age of >30. However, respondents at the age of >30 faced problems of wrinkles and dry skin while sensitive skin shows insignificant relation to both age groups. The results show that their fields of study and gender have significant interaction with their awareness of cosmetics side effects.

The study also looked at the preferred sources of information on beautification products between female and male students. The results show that most information sources preferred by males are Internet, beauty parlor/salon, dermatologists and friends ( $\chi^2=8.652$ ,  $p<0.10$ ). However, female respondents tend to seek information on beautification products from friends/colleagues, beauty parlor/salon, Internet and the newspapers. However, friends or colleagues remain the best top five sources of information on beautification products and it rank first for females and fourth for males.

The respondents were also asked to indicate if they were aware of the side effects of using beautification products over a long period of time. A large number of respondents, 125 (83%) indicated that they were aware of the side effects of beautification products while only 25 (17%) were unaware of the side effects of beautification products. In addition, respondents were asked to check for possible side effects associated with prolonged usage of beautification products or if they have been affected with or have come across a person who have been

affected by beautification products. The results show that dandruff (65.5%), skin irritation (63.3%), hair loss (62%), allergic reaction (54.6%), thinning eyelashes (52%), dermatitis (47.3%), skin cancer (43.3%), hair breakage (42.6%), weakening of hair (38%), change in hair colour (36.6), scalp burns (34%), scarring of scalp (31.3%) and skin appear aged (30%).

Indeed male consumers from different age groups seemed to be very much concerned with beautification products' side effects during selection of products compared to female students ( $\chi^2=9.331$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Regarding marital status, the results show single respondents were not very much concerned with the side effects as they were not aware of these side effects compared to married respondents. In other hand, their level of study influenced the respondents as those pursuing bachelor's degrees were more aware of the side effects of usage of beautification products compared to those doing certificate and diploma programme ( $\chi^2=7.345$ ,  $p<0.10$ ).

Respondents were asked to indicate if they acquaint themselves with enclosed leaflets and adhere to directions given by beauty specialists during usage of beautification products. The results indicate that 33 (22%) of the respondents use the cosmetics in ways they feel comfortable rather than following the prescription. Twenty-two (15%) of the respondents indicated that the information on the enclosed leaflet was not clear or understandable. This is due to the fact that some of these leaflets were presented in languages which they were not familiar with such as Chinese, Arabic, French or others. Eighteen (12%) of the respondents reported following salon/beauty parlor specialists instructions, while 17 (11%) follow shopkeepers' prescription. However, relying on friends' directives was reported by 15 (10%) respondents, directives from the Internet, social network, journals and television were reported to be followed by 12 (8%) respondents, dermatologists (10 or 6.5%), directive prescribed in closed leaflet (10 or 6.5%), leaflet information that is self-explanatory (6 or 4%), siblings and parents (4 or 3%) and directive prescribed in magazines (3 or 2%). However, in 2012, TFDA has issued instructions that all cosmetics and medical products must include a leaflet and container label clearly legible with indelible letters in Kiswahili or Kiswahili and English languages [23] so that Tanzanian users can understand them.

**Limitation of the Study:** Notwithstanding the intrinsic worth of the study, it has certain limitations that should be recognized. The study was conducted in Tanzania mainland only, where selected students from higher

learning institutes were involved. However, selection of respondents was randomly derived from email lists and Facebook accounts; only students with active Facebook accounts were contacted while those without Facebook and email accounts were not selected to participate in the study. Subsequently, the study examined only limited respondents (150) where the choices of respondents were under purposive and convenient sampling. However, the information seeking and use behaviour on beautification products in different higher learning institutions may be dissimilar in various aspects. Therefore, those factors should be unequally effective in making decisions on the overall information seeking and use behaviour on beautification products among students. Therefore, this study also needs to be studied from the psychological viewpoint in order to examine individuals' preferences and decisions to use particular products as by nature, society beautification criteria is dynamic.

### CONCLUSION

Information seeking and use behaviour on beautification products among students from higher learning institutions in Tanzania is highly influenced by friends, the Internets, magazines, beauty parlor/salon, product brand, siblings, social networking, manufacturing countries, parents, enclosed leaflets, newspapers and the radio. Despite numerous sources of information available, the mostly preferred sources are friends/colleagues followed by beauty parlor/salon and the Internet. In this regard, students' consideration of parents and health professionals as the most useful sources of information on beautification was minimal. Further, usage of the Internet sources was obscured with friends/colleagues, while usage of magazines, newspapers and the radio were negligible.

**Recommendations:** Recommendations have been drawn from careful delineation of the findings of the study for the betterment of students and society at large on information seeking behaviour and use behaviour on beautification products. These are as follows:

- Dermatologists and beauty specialists should collaborate in finding better ways to disseminate information on selection and usage of beautification products. This is due to the reason that cooperativeness brings teamwork and improves the overall environment which ultimately helps to improve the well-being of the consumers of beautification products.
- The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and the Tanzania Food and Drugs Authority (TFDA) should continue to inform the society by educating the public on the side effects of the beauty products. Provisions of different trainings and seminars for increasing awareness on identification of beautification products while increasing the understanding of different ingredients and chemical compositions found in those products are mostly recommended.
- Parents and the education system should build confidence in the younger generations in using these products in the right way as they have been prescribed by the specialists. This is due to the fact that human beings have different skin combinations and most HLIs students are still young and encounter a lot of hormonal changes which bring problems to their appearance, so depending solely on friends/colleagues or shopkeepers is not the right way. However, future research possibilities are wide open in this regard where appropriate models could be utilized to examine the process of information seeking and use behaviour.

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