

The Influence of Social Media on Perception of Body Image and Beauty Standards on Young People

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Abstract. Through different sections, this paper discovers the complex relationship between social exposure and body image perceptions among young individuals. In the era of technological development, the significance of media exposure to young people cannot be underestimated. The Causes and Consequences section is divided into the previous studies and theories and the consequences of frequent media exposure. These two parts separately discussed the possible reasons for media influencing young people and the results, for instance, anxiety, lack of confidence, or dissatisfaction with their body image. It examines how these portrayals reinforce traditional gender roles, cultivate body dissatisfaction, affect interpersonal relationships, and shape societal norms and expectations. The third part introduces some mitigating factors and interventions. Including education initiatives and media literacy programs to support young people's critical thinking and viewing skills when facing media exposure, it also includes policy interventions through government agencies and health services to improve young people's mental health. This research fosters a healthier relationship between young people and media exposure.

Keywords: Media exposure; Body image; Young people.

1. Introduction

The evolution of technology has closely followed the widespread adoption of the internet, mainly through various forms of media. This influence began with television and movies and has now extended to include videos and streaming media. Over the past few decades, this rapid technological advancement has significantly impacted individuals, especially the younger generation, who have grown up in this media-centric era. These positive and negative effects are particularly evident in how unrealistic beauty standards have been shaped.

While society has always placed importance on beauty ideals, the rise of media and easy access to the internet has exponentially amplified this phenomenon in the digital age. Young people, in particular, are constantly exposed to manipulated images and narratives depicting distorted body ideals, which have, in turn, started to define beauty standards. Social media platforms play a crucial role in perpetuating these standards.

Media exposure is nearly ubiquitous among young people in today's digital landscape. According to a 2019 study by Common Sense Media, American youths aged 13 to 18 spend an average of over seven hours per day engaging with various media forms, including television, video games, social media, and online content [1].

This research paper explores the intricate relationship between media exposure and young individuals and how this exposure influences their perceptions of body image. This topic holds substantial sociological significance, as it has far-reaching consequences on societal norms and values. The primary focus of this investigation is to analyze how media exposure shapes young people's perceptions of their bodies and to understand the sociological implications of these influences in perpetuating unattainable beauty standards.

2. Causes and Consequences related to media exposure

2.1. Previous studies and theories

The internet's and technology's rapid development immediately demonstrates the significance of this social issue. The connection between media exposure and how people perceive their bodies has become more important with the rapid diffusion of information. Television, magazines, social media, movies, and advertising are just a few examples of the media that greatly impact how individuals perceive their bodies. In this literature review, we will focus on the social aspects of unrealistic beauty expectations to explore the key themes and conclusions about the effects of young people's exposure to body images.

Recent studies have revealed the significant role of media exposure in shaping body image perceptions among young individuals. One such study by Perloff [2] examined the interesting features of social media and its distinctive content. He found that it has a significant impact on body image issues through unfavorable social comparisons. According to this study, the exposure to "ideal" bodies on TikTok and Instagram frequently was linked to negative comments about body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem.

Another study by Fardouly et al. [3] looked at the impact of media exposure, including viewing digitally manipulated photos, on young women's body image dissatisfaction. Others who used social media said they felt more depressed than others who stayed on the control page. In addition, when browsing social media sites versus the control page, women who tended to compare their appearances reported higher differences in their facial features, hair, and skin. According to this study, photo altering on social media could make people feel less positive.

There are also sociological consequences of media-driven beauty standards. They are rooted in complex mechanisms that connect with societal norms and expectations. Tiggermann and Slater[4] examined, focusing on the internet, how exposure to media affects preteen girls' anxieties about their bodies. The internet was concluded to represent a potent sociocultural force among pre-teenage girls. The pressure caused girls to keep focusing on the internet's ideal body image information, at last resulting in body image concern.

Additionally, Groesz et al.'s study [5] examined how media exposure can cause people to internalize social standards for beauty and thinness, which eventually contributes to unfavorable body image evaluations. After viewing thin media images as opposed to photos of average-size models, plus-size models, or inanimate objects, participants' body image was much more unfavorable to themselves. Participants under the age of 19, who participated were more likely to have their thinness schemas activated showing this impact was more severe.

The social comparison theory is also applied to media exposure topics. This theory was initially proposed by social psychologist Leon Festinger in 1954, and it focused on the belief that people try to gain accurate self-evaluations by comparing with other people. According to a study, more women are making upward comparisons and evaluating themselves by the inflated expectations set by the media [6]. Self-perceived resemblances to role models on social media can also impact men's and women's self-esteem. Self-esteem can be boosted by feeling more like a role model and lowered by feeling less like one [7].

This theory implies that the rapid development of technology can negatively affect people's health. Through the years, more and more social platforms will be created, and the time young people are willing to put in is also increasing. Therefore, the chances of young people gaining negative influences are also increasing. The significance of this social issue is also growing.

Other than theories, there is a new trend of beauty filters and technological ways of improving our body shape. To pursue beauty ideas, beauty filters have evolved. There are pros and cons to the widespread use of beauty filters on social media. While new technologies offer creative and enjoyable ways to enhance one's appearance, they exacerbate issues that blur the line between reality and digital

constructs, exacerbating body dissatisfaction and unrealistic beauty standards [8]. This research indicates that the growth of digital media brings the consequences of illustrating romantic body images.

This paper will continue to be based on this literature as we move forward to understand the cases and the consequences we obtained from this issue.

2.2. Media Portrayals of Unrealistic Beauty Standards

In this society, media significantly shaped people's beauty ideals and perpetuated unrealistic standards of attractiveness. In this section, the paper will discuss the different impacts of various medial portrayals of unrealistic beauty standards.

Advertisement and fashion have been the two essential components of perpetuating distorted body image. Advertising is crucial in projecting idealized beauty standards since it is a pervasive and compelling medium. Models and celebrities who follow particular physical standards are frequently used as brand ambassadors. Their representations allude to the consumers that their standards are easy to reach. Research like those by Grabe, Ward, and Hyde [9] has examined how viewers' exposure to images of idealized beauty in advertising can cause them to feel unsatisfied with their bodies. Such representations encourage a consumer culture that combines the pursuit of an idealized appearance with the use of products. The emphasis on thinness has also been an essential motif in fashion. These slender body standards, have been questioned for their propensity to accelerate body image problems [10]. This emphasis on thinness upholds a limited definition of beauty by ignoring the diversity of body types and shapes.

Popular culture, including movies, television, and other entertainment media, maintains and promotes false beauty standards. These media greatly influence young people's perceptions of themselves and others, frequently presenting beauty as a crucial quality intimately connected to success, attractiveness, and desirability. Characters that meet traditional beauty standards commonly appear in mainstream movies and TV shows. Leading actors and actresses, whose appearances are frequently extremely managed, who become cultural icons representing beauty's predominant ideals. Children who watch these values on television often may acquire the impression that they are desirable and attainable.

The impact of these images is shown by research by Tiggemann and Slater [4], which shows that media representations of muscularity and thinness indicate more general societal norms related to our usual appearance and value.

The influence of entertainment media is influential throughout adolescence and young adulthood. Identity exploration, self-discovery, and an increased sensitivity to societal norms and expectations are characteristics of these life stages. Young people are more receptive to media messages that define beauty ideals and frequently compare their appearance to these arbitrary standards.

Social media and other digital channels have emerged as essential tools for spreading beauty standards in the modern era. Online personas are deliberately curated by social media influencers, celebrities, and users, who frequently present an idealized picture of themselves [2]. Due to people's tendency to make upward social comparisons, creating well-maintained online personas impacts how people perceive beauty.

2.3. Consequences of Unrealistic Beauty Standards

Unrealistic beauty standards will cause various consequences, including the reinforcement of gender roles, the cultivation of distorted beauty ideas, and interpersonal relationships. This section will focus on the sociological consequences of these standards.

The media frequently reinforces traditional gender norms while also maintaining artificial beauty standards. These depictions have a disproportionately negative impact on women. Women are commonly portrayed in the media as objects of desire, with physical attractiveness taking advances

over other qualities. People are expected to follow to cultural ideals of femininity and beauty, and women's agency and opportunities may be restricted by this reinforcement of traditional gender norms. Men are also not exempt from these effects since media depictions of muscularity and physical perfection are increasingly common. Promoting these values might cause problems with body image and harmful body behaviors in young males.

Teenagers' growing body dissatisfaction is one of the most critical societal effects of unattainable beauty standards. Numerous studies [3] show that media exposure and body dissatisfaction are directly related. People frequently believe they fall short of the idealized pictures in the media, which lowers their self-esteem and causes them to have unfavorable judgments of themselves. This body dissatisfaction can negatively impact relationships, mental health, and general well-being. Particularly in young people going through a sensitive time, it can contribute to the emergence of mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression.

The distorted standards may also influence interpersonal relationships, especially in romantic relationships. One person may be affected by unrealistic beauty standards through the media and ask for requirements or pressure the other half to achieve a perfect body. It will bring tension and insecurity into the relationship; after all, it can impact the dynamics and stability of a relationship.

The last societal consequence will be that distorted beauty ideas will be extended to other aspects of individuals' lives. Some social media users frequently criticize others' body shapes; however, these standards appear in other spaces where people may see beauty over other essential qualities, fostering a superficial view of beauty. The societal consequences usually extend to workplace dynamics, where appearance-based judgments can influence hiring decisions and working treatments.

In conclusion, there are numerous and widespread sociocultural effects of the exaggerated ideals of beauty promoted by the media. They strengthen cultural norms and expectations, foster body dissatisfaction, affect interpersonal interactions and promote established gender roles. These repercussions significantly affect young people's mental health and self-perceptions, underlining the need for critical analysis and suggesting ways to change media and cultural structures that promote beauty standards.

3. Mitigating Factors and Interventions

3.1. Education Initiatives and Media Literacy Programs

This section will examine the potential media literacy programs and educational initiatives. Those methods will help young people to set up healthy values and beauty standards. Other than concentrating on the impact of distorted body image caused by media, cultivating young people by promoting diverse media representations, empowering critical consumers, and providing educational initiatives can be helpful.

For young people, media literacy can be a tool for empowerment. The process of advancing media literacy skills is known as media literacy education, and its goals are to increase awareness of media influence. This can foster an engaged attitude toward both consuming and producing media. Young people who receive such education are more equipped to evaluate media content critically and challenge authorities. They give people the abilities to realize the photo manipulation, the business motives behind advertising, and the sociocultural settings that influence media portrayals [11].

At the same time, incorporating educational initiatives can help the influence of raising awareness of media impact. Formal education can mitigate the sociological influences. Schools can integrate media literacy classes as an interdisciplinary curriculum to discuss body image, self-esteem, and critical media analysis. These educational initiatives aim to raise awareness and foster resilience against media-driven beauty pressures [2].

There is another path to mitigate the consequence of media exposure. When schools and institutions can help young people establish a healthy beauty standard, film companies and other institutions can

eliminate the negative consequences of unrealistic beauty ideas by promoting diverse media representations. Introducing more diverse body images can effectively challenge the social norm and contribute to a more inclusive and accepting media landscape. Collaboration with the media industry is also essential in this endeavor. Encouraging responsible media practices, such as the disclosure of digital retouching in advertising, can contribute to transparency and help young people differentiate between manipulated images and reality.

Media literacy and education initiatives aim to empower young individuals as critical consumers of all media products. Critical thinking can actively challenge unrealistic body standards when equipped with the tool. As long as enough people have a critical mind, media influence will substantially decrease.

Aside from school and the education system, policy implications and interventions could also be extremely useful. This section discusses potential policy implications and interventions that can mitigate the sociological consequences of unrealistic beauty ideals among young people.

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Media Regulation and Accountability can be improved by government agencies. Government agencies can be vital in regulating the media sector, especially advertisements. Consumers can make informed decisions if policies are implemented to ensure that advertising discloses the use of digital retouching and photo editing. Regulating excessively digitally altered images in advertising can also encourage openness [2].

Also, mental health services should include the mental health implications of unrealistic beauty standards. Policymakers should allocate resources to support mental health services, particularly for young individuals. Accessible and affordable mental health resources should be available to those struggling with body image issues and related psychological challenges, including counseling and therapy.

In conclusion, policy implications and interventions are vital tools in addressing the sociological consequences of unrealistic beauty standards perpetuated by the media. Through a concerted effort involving policymakers, media organizations, educators, and advocacy groups, it is possible to create a media landscape that fosters a more inclusive, responsible, and empowering portrayal of beauty ideals, benefiting the well-being and self-esteem of young individuals.

4. Conclusion

This research paper has reviewed the intricate relationship between media exposure and body image perceptions, which has a sociological focus on the reasons, consequences, and actions we can take to prevent more severe consequences from happening.

Advertising, entertainment, and social media are just a few places where media reinforce conventional gender roles, promote body dissatisfaction, affect interpersonal interactions, and influence societal norms and expectations.

This essay has also emphasized potential protective suggestions enabling young people to interact with media more critically. They will be taught under media literacy initiatives and educational programs to question irrational notions of beauty and understand more critical content behind the media. Furthermore, the collaborative role of governments, media companies, schools, and advocacy groups in creating a more responsible and inclusive media environment is underscored by policy implications and interventions, ranging from media regulation to diversity programs.

The connection between media exposure and young people's conceptions of their bodies continues to be a dynamic and changing phenomenon as we continue in the digital age. It requires ongoing investigation, discussion, and action. We want to create a future where young people interact with media content with assurance, resiliency, and a genuine sense of self-worth by identifying the complex social effects of media-driven beauty standards and implementing educated regulations and solutions. By doing this, we support a society that honors variety, inclusivity, and the appreciation of beauty.

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