



The Impact of Social Media Images on Youth: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Attitudes, behaviors, and sense of self-worth could be shaped by social media sites like Instagram and Snapchat as well as the images posted on these sites. According to research, social media exposure to idealized and unrealistic images of beauty and body types can have a negative impact on young people's development in a number of ways, including eating disorders, body dissatisfaction, and poor self-esteem. The way that young people see themselves and their interactions with others can also be impacted by social media images. Youth can benefit from social media, which has the ability to improve social connectedness and self-expression. Parents, teachers, and lawmakers must take into account the potential effects of social media images on young people and work to encourage positive body image and healthy social media use.

Keywords: Social media, Digital images, Impact, Social Comparison, Body Shaming, Cyberbullying.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of social media has brought about a revolution in communication and networking. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube have become a central part of modern society, particularly among youth. Social media images, in particular, have become an essential part of the online experience. The impact of social media images on the behavior and attitudes of youth has become a concern for parents, educators, and policymakers. This paper aims to review the literature on the effect of social media images on youth and to provide recommendations for mitigating the negative effects.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The impact of social media images on youth can be viewed in different ways. Firstly, social media images can affect body image. A study by Perloff (2014) found that viewing images of thin and attractive individuals on social media can lead to increased body dissatisfaction and negative self-perception among youth. This can result in eating disorders, depression, and anxiety. Social media images can also affect self-esteem. Valkenburg *et al.* (2016) found





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that social comparison on social media can lead to decreased self-esteem among youth. The study found that youth tend to compare themselves with others on social media, and this can result in negative feelings about themselves. It is generally true that including pictures in a post can lead to higher user engagement on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Studies have shown that posts with images receive more likes, comments, shares, and clicks than those without images. This is because images can capture the attention of users and make the post more visually appealing.

However, the effectiveness of images in driving user engagement can depend on various factors, such as the content of the image, the quality of the image, the placement of the image within the post, and the audience's preferences. Certain image characteristics can also induce more interaction and propagation than others. For example, images that are emotionally appealing, visually striking, or humorous tend to perform well on social media platforms. Additionally, images that are relevant to the post's content and are sized appropriately for the platform can also help increased engagement (eMarketer 2011; Vavrek 2012).

Impact of Social Media Images

The impact of social media images on youth can be both positive and negative. Social media images can have a positive impact on youth by providing them with a platform for self-expression, connection, and inspiration. However, it's important for young people to also be aware of the potential negative effects of social media, such as unrealistic beauty standards, cyberbullying, and social comparison.

A Positive Impact

Social media platforms can provide young people with access to a diverse range of images and ideas that can broaden their horizons, expand their creativity, and inspire them to pursue their passions. Social media can also provide a platform for youth to express themselves and connect with others who share their interests and perspectives.

- **Inspiring creativity:** Social media images can inspire young people to explore their creativity and express themselves through photography, art, and design.
- **Promoting diversity and inclusion:** Social media images can showcase a wide range of cultures, lifestyles, and identities, helping young people to appreciate diversity and become more accepting of others.
- **Fostering connection:** Social media images can help young people to connect with others who share their interests and passions, even if they live in different parts of the world.
- **Raising awareness:** Social media images can raise awareness about important issues such as social justice, environmentalism, and mental health, encouraging young people to get involved and take action.
- **Providing inspiration:** Social media images can provide inspiration for young people to pursue their dreams, set goals, and achieve their aspirations.

B Negative Impact

Social media images can also have negative impacts on youth. Young people are often bombarded with images that promote unrealistic beauty standards, materialism, and unhealthy behaviors. These images can lead to negative self-esteem, body image issues, and feelings of inadequacy. They can also contribute to the development of mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.

- **Body image concerns:** One consistent finding is that exposure to social media images can contribute to body image concerns among youth, particularly girls. A 2019 study published in the journal *Body Image* found that Instagram use was associated with increased body dissatisfaction and anxiety among adolescent girls. Another study published in the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* in 2020 found that girls who spent more time on social media reported higher levels of appearance comparisons and body dissatisfaction. Social media images often portray idealized and unrealistic beauty standards, which can lead to negative body image among the youth. The constant exposure to perfect and curated images can lead to feelings of inadequacy and lower self-esteem. The impact of social media images on youth can be viewed in different ways. Firstly, social media images can affect body image. A





study by Perloff (2014) found that viewing images of thin and attractive individuals on social media can lead to increased body dissatisfaction and negative self-perception among youth. This can result in eating disorders, depression, and anxiety. Social media images can also affect self-esteem. Valkenburg *et al.* (2016) found that social comparison on social media can lead to decreased self-esteem among youth. The study found that youth tend to compare themselves with others on social media, and this can result in negative feelings about themselves. Social media images can affect the perception of beauty. Social media images often promote unrealistic standards of beauty, leading to a distorted perception of beauty among youth. A study by Fardouly *et al.* (2015) found that exposure to images of thin models on social media can lead to an increase in body dissatisfaction and a desire for thinness among youth. This can result in unhealthy behaviors such as excessive dieting and exercise.

- Self Esteem: Negative self-perception: When youth are constantly exposed to highly edited images of others, it can lead to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. They may start to compare themselves to the unrealistic beauty standards or luxurious lifestyles depicted in these images, leading to negative self-perception.
- Social comparison: Social media can also contribute to social comparison among youth, which can negatively impact self-esteem and well-being. A 2018 study published in the journal Computers in Human Behavior found that social media use was associated with increased envy and decreased life satisfaction among young adults. Similarly, a 2019 study published in the Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology found that social media use predicted higher levels of social comparison and depressive symptoms among college students.
- Negative self-perception: When youth are constantly exposed to highly edited images of others, it can lead to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. They may start to compare themselves to the unrealistic beauty standards or luxurious lifestyles depicted in these images, leading to negative self-perception.
- Fear of missing out: Social media images can create a sense of missing out on social events or experiences that others are enjoying. This can lead to anxiety, stress, and a sense of isolation.
- Pressure to conform: Youth may feel pressure to conform to the norms and trends represented in social media images, leading to a loss of individuality and creativity.
- Social Isolation: When young people are bombarded with images of their peers appearing to lead perfect, exciting lives, they may feel inadequate or left out if their own experiences do not measure up. Additionally, social media can create a sense of distance between people, despite the appearance of connectedness. Online relationships can feel shallow or insincere, and young people may feel like they don't have anyone they can truly confide in.
- Woods and Scott's (2016) article on social isolation provides a comprehensive review of the current research on the topic. The authors define social isolation as the objective lack or reduction of social contacts, relationships, and social participation, as opposed to loneliness, which is a subjective feeling of social disconnectedness. One potential limitation of the article is its focus on Western societies. While the authors briefly discuss social isolation in other cultures, the majority of the research cited comes from Western countries. This limits the generalizability of the findings to other cultures and societies.
- Cyber bullying: Social media images can be used to bully and humiliate the youth. This can lead to a range of negative consequences, including low self-esteem, anxiety, and even suicide.
- Mental Health: Social media can also impact mental health of the youth. Excessive use of social media can lead to feelings of anxiety, depression, and loneliness, especially if the images they see do not align with their reality. Social media can also exacerbate existing mental health issues. Youth who are constantly exposed to images of perfect bodies and lifestyles may feel pressure to conform to these ideals, which can lead to anxiety and depression. Additionally, social media can create a sense of social isolation, which can exacerbate existing mental health issues. For example, a study conducted by Woods and Scott (2016) found that social media use was associated with higher levels of anxiety and depression in youth.
- Influence on behaviors: Social media images can sometimes promote risky behaviors such as drug and alcohol use, and can expose youth to explicit content that can be harmful to their psychological and emotional development.

Overall, it is important for young people to be aware of the potential impact of social media images on their well-being, and to engage with social media in a responsible and mindful way. It is also important for parents, educators, and other adults to be aware of the impact of social media on youth, and to support young people in developing healthy habits around social media use.





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Techniques to Overcome Negative Impact of Social Media Images

Educating youth about the positive and negative impact of social media images is important to help them develop a healthy relationship with social media and to prevent them from developing unrealistic expectations about themselves and others. Here are some steps that you can take to educate youth about the impact of social media images:

- Start a conversation: The first step in educating youth about the impact of social media images is to start a conversation with them. Ask them what they think about social media, what they like about it, and what concerns them.
- Teach critical thinking skills: Teach youth how to critically evaluate social media images by asking questions such as: Who created this image? What is the message behind it? Is it realistic? Is it promoting a healthy or unhealthy body image?
- Discuss the effects of social media images: Discuss the positive and negative effects of social media images on mental health, self-esteem, body image, and relationships. Use real-life examples and statistics to illustrate your points.
- Encourage positive content: Encourage youth to post positive and uplifting content on social media, such as quotes, inspiring stories, or positive news articles.
- Promote self-care: Encourage youth to take care of themselves by limiting their social media use, practicing self-care, and seeking help if they are struggling with mental health issues.
- Be a role model: Set a good example by modeling healthy social media habits yourself. Limit your own social media use, post positive and uplifting content, and be mindful of the impact of social media images on your own mental health and self-esteem.

By taking these steps, we educators can help youth develop a healthy relationship with social media and make informed decisions about the content they consume and create.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the impact of social media images on youth is a complex and multifaceted issue that requires our attention. As we have seen, social media images can have both positive and negative effects on young people's self-esteem, body image, and behavior. On the one hand, social media can provide a platform for promoting positive body image and self-expression, and can also help young people connect with peers and find support. On the other hand, social media can also promote unrealistic beauty standards, perpetuate harmful stereotypes, and contribute to the development of negative body image and disordered eating behaviors. To address these issues, we need to take a more holistic approach to social media use. This means promoting media literacy and critical thinking skills, advocating for more diverse and inclusive representations in media, and creating safe spaces for young people to express themselves online. We also need to support initiatives that promote positive body image and self-esteem, such as body-positive campaigns and mental health services. In the end, it is up to all of us to be mindful of the impact our social media use can have on young people, and to take steps to promote a healthy and empowering online environment for everyone. By working together, we can help young people navigate the complex world of social media and develop a positive relationship with their bodies and themselves.

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