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## SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE ADOLESCENTS PERCEPTION OF GROOMING

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### Abstract

This paper focused on the social media and its influence on the adolescent's perception of grooming.The various factors that aid the influence of social media in adolescent grooming were highlighted. Such factors discussed include peer pressure,societal projections about grooming,role of advertisements, influence of celebrity followership on social media,and cyber-bullying. Based on the factors and critical issues raised, recommendations were made for reducing the influence of social media on the adolescent as regards grooming.

Keywords:Social media,perception,grooming,adolescents,peer-pressure

### Introduction

Decades after the introduction of the internet and the birth of social media and networking,the profound influence the internet and its brainchild (the social media) exerts on individuals is quite unimaginable. Its influences spans from the manufacturing sector, to education, to engineering, medicine and public health, among others. However, its most significant influence is felt in public relations and marketing communication although with constant changes on how communication can be undertaken on these channels, communication professionals are continually grappling with the complexities of effective utilization of the emerging digital tools (Men & Muralidharan. 2017).The emergence and growth of different types of communication platforms and electronic ways of interacting in these different sectors led to the discovery of what is today referred to as Social Media (Ajikc & Nwaokoby, 2016).Web-based technologies such as the social media now encompass the socializing features of virtual spaces turning them into arenas for information sharing, collaboration,and community formation and extension (Suter, Alexander, & Kaplan, 2005). The focus of this paper however, is

### Journal of Vocational Education Training & Research, Outlining the influence of social media on the perception of the adolescent as regards grooming.

Grooming as a concept here,refers to activities of personal care geared towards improving one's appearance which involves care given to the hair,the nail and the skin towards an improved appearance aimed towards self-satisfaction. It is a form of personal impression management which involves improving one's physical appearance and social perception (Van Paasschen,Walker, Phillips, Downing & Tipper, 2015). Hence, good grooming primarily refers to the proper care given to the body in order to improve one's appearance, ensure comfort and acceptability within a social setting. An individual's grooming is often a resultant effect of the interaction between a number of influences ranging from social,political, economic and religious factors(Chang'orok & Kasamba, 2014).Other factors that also influence grooming include marital status, personal values, climatic conditions and social media.

Social media in its simplest form refers to internet-based technologies which aids users to carry out information sharing

activities such as reading content, creating content, and communicating with individuals far and near. Social media" refers to text-messaging, blogging, video sites, forums, wikis, mobile applications, social networks and more, characterized by interrelated communication technologies that allow people to interact with others in their locality and other individuals in the global community digitally (Byron, Albury & Evers, 2013; Pfeiffer, Kiceb. Mbelwa & Ahorlu, 2014). It spans from instant messaging and video apps (such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram etc.). microblogging sites (c.g. Twitter), internet based social networking sites (c.g. Facebook), media sharing sites (c.g. YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat) online news platforms among others. These examples give credence to the definition of social media offered by Aida, Behrang and Behrooz (2014), as "web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a limited system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system". Due to the communication between individuals within this system, ideas from people of different backgrounds, culture, and perception, are shared within the media. Hence, individuals who use social media are influenced either positively or negatively.

Several research studies have documented the negative impact that traditional media such as magazines and television have on people's perception about grooming (Grabe, Ward and Ilyde, 2008; Barlett, Vowels and Saucier, 2008; Myers & Crowther, 2009). Due to the advent of information and communication technology, the popularity of these media types like television and magazines has been overtaken by the popularity and availability of more online interactive media, particularly among

adolescents (Tiggemann & Miller, 2010; Bell & Dittmar, 2011). These older traditional media have been somewhat replaced by instant messaging and video apps (such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram etc.), microblogging sites (c.g. Twitter), internet based social networking sites (c.g. Facebook), media sharing sites (c.g. YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat etc.) online news platforms among others. The increasing popularity of social media is perhaps the reason why television networks and magazine companies have created their online platforms in form of internet televisions and e-magazines respectively, and accounts in all trending social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, among others. Given the increasing popularity of social media, researchers are beginning to investigate the possible consequences that these new media formats have on body image and grooming (Fardouly and Vartanian, 2016).

Several researches have shown an astronomical increase in the usage of social media by adolescents. In the year 2013, ninety percent (90%) of 16-24 year olds in the United Kingdom (Office for National Statistics, 2013), and 90% of 18-29 year olds in the United States (Pew Research, 2013a), use social networking websites. As at then, Facebook was the most popular social media platform with growing membership (Pew Research, 2013b). Since then, these statistics have tripled and Facebook, which had dominated the social media landscape among teenagers then, is no longer the most popular online platform among teens according to the latest Pew Research Centre survey. YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat are the most popular online platforms among teenagers with a percentage of eighty five percent (85%), seventy two percent (72%) and sixty nine percent (69%) respectively (Pew Research, 2018).

Social media and its sites have become part of the daily life experiences for an ever-increasing number of people. Socializing through the internet has become an increasingly important part of the life of adolescents as the popular image of adolescents is often with their faces glued to screens while they are constantly texting, checking e-mail, or updating their Facebook pages. This stresses the fact adolescents are increasingly becoming disconnected from the world around us. Adolescents invest more time on social media platforms and due to this socialization occurring, the social media exerts its great influence on the ever-exploring adolescent.

Exploring the extent of usage of social media by adolescents, one can infer that use of social media has become a habit and a medium that adolescents depend on for information both for themselves and the world around them. Among adolescents, females have been reported to spend more time on social media especially on social networking sites (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015). Given that body image concerns are particularly salient among young women (Bearman, Presnell, Martinez and Stice, 2006; Neighbors and Sobal, 2007; Berg, Frazier and Sherr, 2009), this demographic has been the focus of much of the research on social media and grooming. Issues arising from the influence of social media are various, including body dissatisfaction (Bearman, et al., 2006), drive for thinness/muscularity (Norton, 2017), self-objectification, growth of hair and depilation (Williamson, 2015) among others. Hence there is need to look into the factors that reinforce the influence of social media on the adolescents' perception of grooming with the purpose of suggesting workable strategies to curb the influence of social media.

## Factors that Reinforce the Influence of Social media on the Adolescents Perception of Grooming

From literature, a lot of factors have been identified as acting as reinforcement in the ever-increasing influence of social media on the adolescent. Such factors include but are not restricted to peer pressure, societal projections about grooming, advertisements, influence of celebrity followership on social media, cyber-bullying among others.

### 1. Peer Pressure

Peer pressure simply refers to the influences exerted on an individual by other individuals with whom he shares a common ground which could be ideological, age oriented, and class or based on position/rank. On social media platforms peers exert influence in multiple ways as they actively participate in discussions and thus seek out information from their fellow peers, gain their approval, and respond with their opinions (Chu & Choi, 2011), hence individuals imitate their peers and are easily influenced through social interactions (Wang, Yu, & Wei, 2012). Peer pressure can be direct for instance, through direct attempts by peers to instigate or prevent behaviours, or subtler for instance, when peers avoid or ostracize individuals who do not conform to group norms (Manzoni & Lotar, 2011). Hence, the individual may decide to conform to group norms, as humans tend to bow to peer pressure in real life hence, virtual environments such as in social media are not left out as it influences an individual's ability to think independently (Men & Muralidharan, 2017).

Peer pressure thrives on social media because social media platforms are built on three pillars: "profiles", "friends" and "comments", which are brought to the public

sphere and made visible to others (Pfeifer et.  
al.,2014).The adolescent whom has failed to

conform to peer influence and lifestyle is punished by ignoring his/her texts, tweets, messages, pictures posted among others. This makes the adolescent to seek acceptance among his/her peers thereby conforming to their norms. Hence, as a result of limited capacity in terms of self-regulation and easy vulnerability to peer pressure, adolescents are susceptible to a myriad of peer related risks as they navigate and use social media (Olasinde, 2014). Previous research studies have shown that certain previously perceived offline behaviours such as clique forming, bullying, and sexual experimentation have found their way of expression frequently expressed online and has led to cyber-bullying (Reid & Weigle, 2014; Nesi, Choukas-Bradley, & Prinstein, 2018), privacy issues and "sexting" (Undiyaundeye, 2014; Tartari, 2015).

## 2. Societal projections about grooming

The society and culture of a people as projected on the social media platform exerts another form of influence on the adolescent. Adolescence being a transitional and exploratory stage (Larson & Wilson, 2004) can see teens trying out different things learnt from various cultures which may or may not be acceptable to his/her immediate society.

Aside this, the society is increasingly tilting its ideals to endorsement of the thin ideal. The concept of "thin ideal" is a widespread term used to describe the specific body type that has been understood to be the ideal shape of a woman often portrayed by models in advertisements and fashion magazines which represent an unrealistic, unhealthy, and underweight body type that does not match up to the actual average body type of a woman (Sheehan, 2013). When such adverts or fashion articles are portrayed in social

media, it causes social comparison. Social comparison refers to a process in which people compare themselves and significant others to other people who they perceive to represent ideal and realistic goals (Festinger, 1954 in Sohn, 2009). For the males, the society is slowly endorsing the muscular ideal. This serves as a precursor to the selective exposure to specific social media contents focusing on body image and body improvements (Sohn & Jonason, 2002).

Individuals whom do not conform to these are typically subject to ridicule and abuse by comments on their posts that question their femininity or masculinity, sexuality, hygiene and morality, and assume aggressiveness, animalistic traits, poor education, or mental health issues (Terry and Braun, 2013). This form of 'social policing' is often executed by significant others and loved ones (Terry and Braun, 2013). The impossibility of most individuals achieving these ideals leaves them perpetually dissatisfied about their bodies, leading them to engage in multiple time-consuming, costly and potentially harmful beauty regimens to modify their appearance (Williamson, 2015).

## 3. Advertisements

Advertising plays a fundamental role in forming grooming habits and greatly affects adolescents grooming decisions. It involves promotion and creation of trends, by revealing or making visible new realities so that they can be accepted by the public; or by creating certain social roles, standards of beauty or values in general, with the intention of being acquired quickly among the population (Jiménez-Marin, Garcia & Bellido-Pérez, 2017). Advertisements by cosmetic and body care companies in their adverts make use of digitally altered images to promote their products. They project unrealistic images of the ideal body shape while sending out a false impression of how

real and attainable these body shapes are. For Sohn (2009) and more recently Norton (2017), adverts on the social media affects the adolescents' perception and satisfaction through constant depictions of extremely attractive individuals. In other words, media depictions of such ideal body shapes increase the distance between the adolescent's actual self-perception and the ideal self. Trampe, Stapel, & Siero (2007) summarized across six studies that participants with body dissatisfaction were more affected by media images than women who were satisfied with their body image.

In spite of public concerns about the pervasiveness of the 'thin ideal' presented by the social media and the negative impacts of these images on the body images of the audience, thin-idealized media images are still constantly used to promote products, services, and brands as fashion marketers assume that thin-body images in fashion advertising will lead to more favourable brand attitudes (Yu, Damhorst & Russel, 2011). Women who were unhappy with their body image were more prone to social comparison, affected by both attractive models and real women they see daily on the social media platforms (Trampe, Stapel and Siero, 2007; Sheehan, 2013). Also, Sparhawk (2003) and Shoieb (2015) stated that many popular magazines for females and even male-oriented magazines, tell individuals to focus on their physical, outside attributes (i.e. body shape, muscle tone, bone structure, hair, makeup, clothing, etc.) When adolescents access such information on the social media platforms, it affects their self-perception as regards what good grooming entails.

#### 4. Influence of Celebrity followership on Social Media

Models and celebrities and their flamboyant lifestyles have been over time continually been presented on various social

media platforms. Their followers whose population is mainly made up of adolescents and young adults often key into their grooming ideas. Such grooming patterns are named after celebrities whom inspired such looks. This can be seen in hairstyles (e.g. Rihanna hairstyle), articles of clothing and other grooming tips. The flawlessness of these models and celebrities is, in fact, an illusion created by makeup artists, photographers, and photo editors, with each image being painstakingly worked over: teeth and eyeballs are bleached white and such 'imperfections' as; skin blemishes, wrinkles, and stray hairs are airbrushed away (Kilbourne, 2016). This repeated exposure to ideal beauty as portrayed on the various social media platforms has caused detrimental effects in individuals (Sharp, Tiggemann & Matisse, 2014; Hoffmann, 2016).

#### 5. Cyber-bullying

Cyber-bullying is the willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices (Bennett, 2013). "Cyber-bullying, often used interchangeably with online harassment is the act of deliberately using digital media to communicate false, embarrassing, or hostile information about another person" (Olasinde, 2014). The ability to bully peers on unmonitored electronic devices through social media gives bullies a sense of freedom. This differs vastly from traditional bullies who are more closely monitored by teachers (in schools) or adults around (in the home).

Due to the sense of freedom use of social media breeds, the bully coerces the adolescent into taking decisions he/she might not have taken as regards their grooming choices. A cyberbully may share hurtful and degrading information about the adolescent and when such is disseminated to thousands of people in the matter of

seconds. This damaging content may be in form of derogatory comments as regards adolescent's looks, pictures, or other content. This influences the teenagers grooming choices as he/she would try to stick to grooming options that makes them less susceptible to cyber-attacks.

### Recommendations

As a way forward, the following recommendations are made to combat the influence of social media on the adolescent;

1. They should be safe reporting protocols as one third of 12 to 14 year olds reported that they do not report cyberbullying incidents out of fear that they will get in trouble with their parents (Bennett, 2013) and out of fear that their parents may restrict them from using the internet.

2. Parents and guardians alike should as well exercise some control on what their children and wards engage in online through the various parental control features installed on applications which can be downloaded.

3. Faith based institutions (such as churches, mosques etc.) which exert great influence on the lifestyles of individuals in Nigeria have a role to play. Faith based institutions should start campaigns against social media led lifestyles geared towards the adolescent population.

4. The Home Economist as a social engineer of proper family living also has a role to play. Home Economists need to advocate and liaise with government through relevant agencies and ministries to start up and intensely mount reorientation campaigns geared towards discouraging excessive use of the social media.

5. Enlightenment programmes and literature should be developed and geared towards reducing the unnecessary attention society is giving to unrealistic and unnecessary grooming ideals and improving good grooming ideals.

6. Workshops, seminars and conferences should be organised by the government, NGOs, and other stakeholders on educating adolescents and supporting them to question and challenge the social, cultural and media pressures that drive the pursuit for a flawless body.

7. The mass media and the movie industry can also give enlightenment moves. The mass media should create awareness programmes and platforms geared towards educating the adolescent as regards proper grooming. The movie industry should ensure that the rate at which the thin ideal is portrayed in movies is reduced.

### Conclusion

Social media which consist of various social networking sites (such as Facebook, Twitter) and media platforms (such as YouTube and Instagram) have a myriad of application in the world. Some of its gainful usage includes aiding socialization, providing chances for enhanced learning opportunities, communication, entertainment, political participation, among others.

However, this paper x-rayed the influences of social media on the adolescent's perception of grooming. The paper outlined some of the most influential factors aiding the effect of social media on the grooming decisions made by adolescents. The factors discussed are peer pressure, societal projections about grooming, role of advertisements, influence

of celebrity followership on social media, and cyber bullying. There is need to emphasize that adolescence is as a transitional state, that can be fraught with difficulties and insecurities. Adolescents face a range of developmental issues. experience a variety of biological changes, cognitive changes, and social changes (Hashmi, 2013, Jcaba & Premraj, 2017). This influence exerted by social media, if left unchecked, the adolescent whom is still trying to get a foot hold on the changing world may make mistakes that may have short term or long-term effects in their life. Such negative experiences may shape the individual's self-understanding for life. Hence, recommendations were made to help curb this ever-growing influence of social media on the adolescent's perception of grooming.

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