

## Media Exposure on Body Image and Sensation Seeking among Adolescents

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### Abstract

Media today has become a powerful tool in dispersing information to the masses. It has had positive impact on society in many ways, however; there have been many voices in society criticizing media and its negative influence specifically on adolescents. With Information being readily accessible at a click of button, at finger tips the pervasiveness of screens and their prominence in everyday life has drawn criticism and concerns. The present study focused on understanding the exposure of media on variables like body image and sensation seeking among adolescents. Qualitative research design was used for the present study. Perception of media exposure was taken from the adolescents through interview technique. The responses were analyzed using thematic and content analysis. Four major themes were developed. Thematic analysis shows that body image has become a major concern for the present generation. Sensation seeking has become a choice for the present generation. Adolescents expose themselves to risky situations or take risks for the pleasure. This attitude has been supported by media through programs, which are very adventurous in nature. Media has a greater effect on interpersonal relationships. Samples have identified the positive and the negative effect of media exposure. The study shows that, media has both positive and negative effect of media on adolescents.

**Keywords:** Media Exposure Body Image Sensation Seeking Adolescents.

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### INTRODUCTION

Media in general refers to the tools of mass communication. Media today consists of television, Internet, cinema, newspapers, radio, magazines, direct mail, fax, and the telephone. The mass media permeate the everyday lives of people (Tiggermann, 2006). Children today are encouraged to use media tools in school and are expected to have a general understanding of the various technologies available. The internet is arguably one of the most effective tools in media for communication as an integral part of the daily lives of adolescents that revolves around the Internet Tools such as e-mail, Skype, Facebook, Instagram. Social media has brought people closer and created new online communities. However, some may argue that certain types of media can hinder face-to-face. The impact of Facebook, texting and other cyber technology on psychological health in adolescents is often contradictory. Few studies state the advantage and some highlight the disadvantages, but one common factor in these studies is that technology seems to amplify emotions not only in adolescents, but also in adults (Barth 2014).

**Body Image:** "Body image is a multidimensional, subjective and dynamic concept that

encompasses a person's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about his or her body" (Neagu 2015). How we see ourselves and how we feel about our body constitutes body image. Body image, in most modern definitions, involves two key elements: a mental picture of one's physical body (including size, shape, and appearance), and one's attitude toward the physical self (such as thoughts, feelings and beliefs about one's body) (Hoggan *et al.* 2008).

**Sensation Seeking:** Sensation seeking is "a trait defined by the seeking of varied, novel, complex, and intense sensations and experiences, and the willingness to take physical, social, legal, and financial risks for the sake of such experience" (Zuckerman, 1994, p. 27). Sensation-seeking, also called thrill-seeking or excitement-seeking, is the tendency to pursue new and different sensations, feelings, and experiences.

The concept was developed by Marvin Zuckerman of the University of Delaware. Zuckerman began researching the personality trait he came to call "sensation seeking" in 1969. Zuckerman argues that sensation-seeking is one of a handful of "core traits" that can be used to describe human personality.

Although other researchers including Eysenck, and Costa and McCrae considered the trait to be related to extraversion, factor-analytic studies conducted by Zuckerman suggested that sensation seeking is relatively independent of other major dimensions of personality. Sensation seeking can be explained based on a model influenced by genetic, biological, psycho-physiological, and social factors (Zuckerman, 1983, 1984, 1990, 1994, 1996; Zuckerman, Buchsbaum, & Murphy, 1980), which influence certain behaviors, attitudes, and preferences (Roberti 2004).

### Review of Literature

The impact of media on adolescents has been well researched. Although some research findings outline the benefits of media for learning and few on the negative impact. Saluja & Karan (2016) studied portrayal of body image through media and its implications. The study suggests that body image among individuals develops slow, something that comes in time. Media shows people what is ideal, it also can spread awareness. Individuals are equally responsible of their own understanding to make things better. A study conducted on the stresses on the Hazards, Pitfalls and Opportunities for Growth on Adolescent Development due to social Media. The impact of media on the body image can be well thought-out while looking at the study conducted on the impact of media exposure on male's body image Agliata *et al.* (2004). Participants were blocked on dispositional body image and attitudes toward appearance variables to assess for moderating effects. Results indicated that participants exposed to ideal image advertisements became significantly more depressed and had higher levels of muscle dissatisfaction than those exposed to neutral ads. A study by Morris, *et al.* (2003) showed that the influence of the media on the development of an adolescent's self-perception, body image, weight concerns and weight control practices has been made along with how media content might be attended to and positively incorporated into the lives of children and adolescents.

Sensation seeking seems to be at its peak during adolescents. This can be seen in the study conducted by Harden, *et al.* (2011) where three findings have been reported that supports this view, each consistent with the dual systems model of adolescent development. The first major finding in relation to the average population-level age trends in impulsivity and sensation seeking. Mean levels of impulsivity were found to decline through adolescence and then level off as youth reached their mid-20s, which is consistent with neurobiological research indicating that cortical regions involved in impulse control and planning continue to mature through early adulthood. In contrast, mean levels of sensation seeking were found to sharply increase until mid-adolescence, peaking around age 16 years, and then slowly decline through the mid-20s.

This age trend is consistent with neurobiological research indicating that sub cortical regions that respond to emotion, novelty, and reward are more responsive in middle adolescents than in either children or adults. This has been claimed to the first report of such age trends from longitudinal data. Another study conducted by (Romer *et al.* 2007) tests an alternative biosocial-affect model in which favorable affect attached to behavior leads to discounting of risks. Models of brain development which suggested that this phenomenon is partly the result of increased adolescent sensation seeking unaccompanied by maturation in ability to evaluate risks. A study conducted by Naan, (2011) on the Influence of Television Viewing and Sensation Seeking on Adolescents 'Unrealistic Perceptions about Smoking and Smokers: Evidence From a National Survey. This study investigates the influence of TV viewing and sensation seeking on adolescents' estimates of smoking prevalence and perceptions about smokers. Analysis of a nationally representative sample of adolescents (N = 6,792) indicates that more TV viewing is associated with higher estimates of smoking prevalence. Heavier TV consumption and higher sensation-seeking tendency both predict more favorable perceptions about smokers. Sensation seeking moderates the relationship between TV viewing and perceptions about smokers such that the relationship holds stronger for high- versus low-sensation seekers.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Question

- What is the impact of media on body image among Adolescents?
- What is the impact of media on sensation seeking among Adolescents?

### Objectives

- To study the impact of media on body image among Adolescents
- To study the impact of media on sensation seeking among Adolescents.

### Operational Definitions

**Media:** The term media, which is the plural of *medium*, refers to the communication channels through which we disseminate news, music, movies, education, promotional messages and other data.

**Body Image:** Body image is a person's perception of the aesthetics or sexual attractiveness of their own body. It involves how a person sees themselves, compared to the standards that have been set by society.

**Sensation Seeking:** Sensation seeking is a personality trait defined by the degree to which an individual seeks novel and highly stimulating activities and experiences.

**Interview Method:** The interview method of research is a conversation with a purpose and is non-experimental in design. The interviewer in one-to-one conversation collects detailed personal information from individuals using oral questions.

#### **Inclusion Criteria**

- Adolescents residing in Urban areas of Bengaluru.
- Adolescents who have been enrolled into formal education system.
- Adolescents living with both the parents.
- Adolescents who can understand English.

#### **Exclusion Criteria**

- Adolescents who do not have access to media are not considered for the study.
- Adolescents diagnosed with any psychological/physical issues.

#### **Sampling Technique**

- Convenient and snowball sampling technique was used for the study.

#### **Sample**

- Adolescents between the age group of 10 to 19 years (N=10)

#### **Tools of Assessment**

*Open Ended Questions* for Interview developed by the research scholar under the scrutiny of three experts. **Content Validity:** The content validity was done for questions framed for the interview. The procedure for content validity is given below

- Stage 1: 15 questions were framed.
- Stage 2: Questions were sent to the guide for scrutiny and 10 questions were selected
- Stage 3: Selected questions were mailed to three experts.
- Stage 4: As per the suggestions given by the experts, few modifications were made in framing questions. The final 10 questions were selected for the study.

#### **Procedure**

Selected samples were given consent forms to take their consent to be a part of the study. After receiving their consent, the scholar had an in-depth interview session with them. Each sample was interviewed with the open-ended questions developed by the scholar. Samples were informed about recording the interview session for further analysis. With the approval from the samples, each of the interview session was recorded.

#### **Analysis of Data**

- Thematic and Content Analysis was followed.

## **RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

The present study has taken up to understand the effect of media on body image and sensation seeking among Adolescents. Thematic and content analysis has been executed based on the responses given by the samples. Four Themes have been developed by the scholar based on the responses given by samples through interview technique. Detailed analysis of the themes has been given below.

### **Theme 1: Impact of Media on Body Image**

A few of the female adolescent samples were of the opinion that media influenced their fashion trends, their diets and health. They said that they usually take tips on healthy diets and fitness programs from media. One of the samples said "I would like to color my hair red like the favorite character on T.V". They opined that during adolescence it was natural for girls to want to look attractive and dress up well as it was part of the process of growing up. One of the samples said "I want to look beautiful not because I see beautiful models on T.V but because I am a teenager." With or without media influence, adolescents do pay attention to look attractive, though they may pick up a few fashion tips from Media. But media did not influence their idea of good looks, body type or height. Few of the samples said that they were basically keen on fitness and they do take tips from media on how to stay fit. One of the respondent said that "I follow the diets of famous personalities or celebrities' not to look like them or have a body exactly like theirs but just to be fit". Though most of the samples stated that they were not impacted by perfect body image on media one of the samples said that, "when I watch the perfect body and complexion of my favorite characters on T.V I do wish I had that kind of body and when I see the posts of my friends on Instagram I think if I was thin like her even I would wear short dress and post my pictures". The study showed adolescents were influenced by media about their body weight and wanted to have flawless complexion like the models on media. Majority of the samples stated that they did take tips from media on Fashion, Fitness and Diet.

### **Theme 2: Impact of Media on Sensation Seeking**

Majority of the adolescents enjoyed watching Horror movies. They said it made them forget all their anxiety and gave them a feeling of excitement. They were so casual about watching very scary movies like exorcist. During night outs they would watch horror movies together that gave them a feeling of having an adventure together. Few of them said playing games like PUBG and Call of duty gave them a thrill equal to being in a real situation in which they were fighting their enemies. "I am sweating and my heart is racing when there is shortage of weapons and I have to kill my enemies, the challenge feels real" said one of the samples. A clear example of the influence of media on sensation seeking behavior was seen when one of the

samples said that “When I play this game called call of duty where I have to save my friend from the enemies and I am short of weapons I start sweating and my heart starts beating fast and I have this intense satisfaction when I am successful”.

While few of the samples watched these adventurous series and played games purely for the thrill. There were few samples who said that they played this high thrill game or watched these movies only as a source of entertainment or to spend more time with their friends and it could never come close to the rush that they feel during an adventure game or an outdoor activity like skating, cycling, racing would give. Example the respondent said “I play PUBG only to spend time with my friends but it does not come close to the feeling that I have when I go on a giant wheel so it’s defiantly not for the adrenaline rush”. So while few of the samples did satisfy their sensation seeking behavior through various mediums in media, few thrived for the real adventure and were not satisfied with the virtual thrill that the media offered.

### Theme 3: Impact of Media on Building new relationships

Media often acts as a platform for forming new relationships, though none were influenced by media to develop new relationships they did opine that they looked for a particular kind of relationship based on the relationships portrayed in media. One of the samples said that “there are a set of friends in my serial and they have an amazing bond so I expect to have that kind of relationship with my friends but it never happens”. So it was seen that there was an expectation mismatch in certain relationships due to the influence of media.

Few of the samples said that they formed virtual relationships based on the games they played online. “we have a group where all of us play PUBG and none of us have ever met nor do I think we will ever meet but we can relate to each other” was the response by one of the samples. Few did agree with the fact that they were satisfied with this virtual friendship rather than having friends in reality, as this relationship was less complicated and required very little emotional investment. However few of the samples stated that they could not think of having virtual friends. One of the samples said “ I can never be friends with someone I have not met. All my friends are from school and neighborhood”. Few of them had a group of friends formed as they watched the same kind of movies, one of the respondent stated that “I love watching horror movies so we have group of friends from school we have night outs together so we can watch these movies together and I feel we are friends because we share the same interest in these movies otherwise we don’t have much in common.

On the contrary they were few who felt left out as they were not allowed to use social media. As a result of which they felt like they did not fit into any group especially when their friends talked about what was posted on social media. It is noticed that gaming and social media may act as a platform to build relationships.

### Theme 4: Impact of Media on Adolescents

Samples have identified positive and negative impact of media. Thematic analysis of the theme has been categorized into two. *Positive Impact*: It gave them hope as there was so much of violence and sadness in the world which made their anxiety and worry seem trivial. Media improved their general awareness of things going on around the world. They felt connected to different cultures. “with the George Floyd Incident it was like the whole world came together to fight for justice” said one of the samples. It improved their relationship with their parents as they watched series together, they also said that social media like Instagram and Facebook has brought the generations together. One of the samples said “I can discuss dating and sex in a casual manner which I do not think would be possible if my mother and I did not watch teen dramas together”. Another positive aspect pointed out by one of the samples was that social media gave the best platform to voice their opinion. One of the samples expressed “I have seen my friends who would hesitate to speak in a group or class could say a lot more on social media”. *Negative Impact*: Addiction to pornography. Substance abuse as the messages posted on social media made smoking and drinking look “cool” so a lot of people start to smoke and drink to look hip on social media. Media has a tendency to spread Hate and tends to glorify negative Characters, for example one of the samples said “I watch a lot of movies and series where the main character plays a negative role but we like him because he is the hero, this is at times do clash with the values that we have learnt”.

It was seen that the samples had identified more of positive impact of media like the increased Information, communication, cultural awareness, opportunities, general knowledge, bringing the generations together, keeping one connected with the friends and family and very few the negative impact, like over exposure of sexual content and political issues that could be blown out of proportion.

## DISCUSSION

The primary focus of the research was to see the impact of media on body image and sensation seeking. A study conducted by Marika (2006) aimed to investigate prospectively the direction of the relationship between media exposure and body image disturbance. It was seen that body image variables showed that no media exposure variable predicted

change in any body image measure. Neither did body image predict change in media exposure. Appearance schemas, however, did predict change in body dissatisfaction. It was concluded that, for this age group, media exposure and body image co-occur, but that neither one is temporally antecedent to the other. Thus the study demonstrated no causal role for media exposure in the body image of adolescent girls. The result from the present study also showed that there is no significant effect of media on body image as the adolescents interviewed did not form a negative or a positive body image based influenced by media however they did take certain tips from media.

In reference to the impact of media on sensation seeking a study conducted by Zukerman and Aluja, (2018) states that the arousal potential of movies affects their attraction for high sensation seekers and avoidance for low sensation seekers; highs like horror sexually explicit films and fast-moving action films. The current study showed a mixed response from the sample where few admitted enjoying horror and thrillers while few did not. It was also noted that there was a huge interest for games like PUBG and call of duty among the sample. These games can be considered as fuel for sensation seeking however here again the responses were mixed as few reported the reason that they played was to spend time with friends while others just enjoyed the rush or high that the game provided. This reinforces the core concept of sensation seeking as defined by Zukerman that people with a trait of high sensation seeking was attracted to the specific content in media such as horror or games like PUBG but others were not.

The present study identified through interview method that, media has both positive and negative influence on adolescents. Adolescents show their maturity level in understanding their role, behaviour and decisions in life with respect to their body image and sensation seeking. The scholar observes the enthusiasm and interest among adolescents when talking about media, keeping themselves updated with the types and apps available in media and usage. Samples have expressed the benefits of media and also the negative influence of media. Samples showed their awareness about the impact of media on them.

The study highlighted the importance of identifying the impact of media on body image, sexual orientation and sensation seeking among adolescents. Media has always been an influencing factor on behaviour among all age groups, whereas, adolescence is the age which follows the trend shown in media. Media can influence an adolescent to focus on body image in terms of maintaining a figure fitting to the generation or having a healthy body for health benefits. Similarly, media has a greater role in orienting adolescents towards sexuality. Gender role, gender

identity has seen major changes in media. Adolescents learn their role according to the generation they fit it. Sensation seeking is an individual's choice based on their personality factor. Media shows varieties in sensation seeking. This influences the adolescents' in exploring themselves in new areas.

## CONCLUSION

The overall purpose of this study was to explore the media influence on body image and sensation seeking behavior among adolescents, between the age group of 10 and 18. Information obtained during the interview indicated a high degree of exposure to media, television being less dominant and social media overtaking the usage of television. All participants reported owning a phone and spending an average of 5 -13hrs per day on their mobile. The study has shown that there is significant media exposure, however the impact of it seems to be both negative as well as positive on body image and sensation seeking among adolescents. Media is influencing adolescents to focus on their body shape, and influence their sensation seeking behaviour. Media is trying to give a definition for adolescents and their behaviour. This is having a greater impact on adolescents. The present study has shown that media plays a major role on body image and sensation seeking among adolescents.

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