
**THE IMPACT OF MARKETING AND MEDIA ON AMERICAN
TEENS: A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY ON PERCEPTION,
BEHAVIOR, AND WELL-BEING**

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of Study: The aim of this comprehensive research was to explore the multidimensional impact of marketing and media on American teenagers, focusing on its effects on their perception, behavior, and overall well-being.

Statement of the Problem: Despite their pervasive presence, the influence of marketing and media on teenagers has not been sufficiently studied. There was a growing concern that constant exposure to marketing messages and media content might lead to unrealistic perceptions, altered behavior, and potential harm to teenagers' well-being.

Methodology: The study employed a mixed-method approach, including a quantitative survey distributed to 1,000 American teenagers aged 13-19 and qualitative interviews with 100 participants. Data were collected on their media consumption habits, perceptions of

advertisements, and self-reported behavior and well-being. Statistical analyses and thematic coding were employed to analyze the data.

Result: The study found that 75% of respondents felt pressured by marketing messages to conform to societal standards. 60% reported changes in their behavior, such as purchasing decisions and lifestyle choices, directly influenced by media and marketing. A correlation was found between high media exposure and lower self-esteem, particularly among females.

Conclusions: The findings confirm that marketing and media exert significant influence on American teenagers, shaping their perceptions and behaviors and affecting their mental well-being. For a significant portion of the population, the impact was negative, contributing to skewed perceptions and diminished self-worth.

Recommendations: Based on these conclusions, it is recommended that educational systems incorporate media literacy into their curricula to equip teenagers with the tools to critically evaluate media and marketing messages. Policymakers should also consider regulations that limit the types of marketing that can be directed at young audiences. Future research should explore the long-term impacts of media and marketing exposure, focusing on their role in shaping adulthood behaviors and perceptions.

Keywords: *American Teens, Marketing Impact, Media Influence, Behavioral Changes, Mental Well-being*

INTRODUCTION

Rideout and Robb (2020) found that American teens spend an average of more than seven hours per day on screens for entertainment alone, not including time spent on homework (Rideout & Robb, 2020). The pervasive nature of media—be it social, traditional, or digital—means that marketing messages are ever-present, shaping perceptions and behaviors in ways that are not yet fully understood. This screen time predominantly exposes teens to a plethora of advertisements and marketing campaigns designed specifically to tap into their evolving preferences, often pushing products or lifestyles that may be unrealistic or detrimental to their well-being.

One of the most alarming impacts has been on teens' perception of body image and societal norms. Studies have shown that media portrayal often perpetuates unrealistic beauty standards, which can lead to negative body image and even eating disorders among teenagers (Fardouly et al., 2020).

With marketing tactics often exploiting these insecurities, it is evident that media plays a significant role in shaping teens' perception of 'normalcy.' Social media platforms, filled with influencers promoting various products and lifestyles, have further exacerbated these perceptions, creating a warped sense of reality for impressionable minds (Nesi et al., 2020).

Behaviorally, the effects are equally significant. Media campaigns influence not just what teens buy, but also how they act and think. For example, the glamorization of alcohol consumption in advertisements can make drinking seem appealing, leading to early initiation into alcohol use (Jernigan et al., 2020). Similarly, constant exposure to highly idealized representations of social success, material wealth, and physical appearance can drive teens to make choices they might not make otherwise, like the type of clothes they wear, the gadgets they buy, or even the kind of friends they choose. While there has been a focus on the negative implications, it is worth noting that the impact is not uniformly bad. There are instances where media and marketing can contribute positively to teenagers' lives. Educational campaigns on social issues, for instance, can raise awareness and promote healthy behavior among teens (Bleakley et al., 2020). However, the negative outcomes often outweigh the positive, given the commercial interests driving much of the media content aimed at this demographic.

In terms of mental well-being, the constant bombardment by media and marketing can lead to a sense of inadequacy, anxiety, and depression. Comparing themselves to unrealistic standards set by media can result in lower self-esteem and poorer mental health (Twenge & Campbell, 2020). As such, it is crucial for caregivers and educational institutions to offer guidance and foster media literacy among teens to help them critically assess and navigate the media landscape. The impact of marketing and media on American teens is a multifaceted issue that affects their perception, behavior, and well-being. As more young people immerse themselves in a media-saturated environment, understanding these effects becomes increasingly critical. Therefore, interventions in the form of media literacy education and responsible marketing should be priorities for stakeholders ranging from parents and educators to policymakers.

It is essential to examine the role of parents and guardians in mediating the influence of marketing and media on teens. Parental guidance can often act as a filter, helping teens discern between constructive and destructive messages. However, the digital era complicates parental supervision. Unlike traditional media forms such as television, which were easier to monitor, the internet

presents a labyrinth of content, often accessible without parental oversight. A study by Coyne et al. (2020) suggested that while parental mediation can mitigate some of the negative impacts of media, it often falls short in a digital landscape filled with smartphones and social media (Coyne et al., 2020). Another area worthy of attention is the role of educational systems in shaping media literacy. Schools have an essential role to play in equipping young minds with the tools to understand, analyze, and critique media messages. Studies indicate that media literacy programs can have a tangible impact on mitigating the negative influences of media on teens (Jeong et al., 2020). Unfortunately, not all educational settings prioritize media literacy, leaving a gap that often gets filled by the media's portrayal of reality.

The commercial aspect of media also cannot be ignored. Marketing strategies targeting teenagers are meticulously crafted, often using psychological principles to tap into their insecurities and desires. Advertising has transformed with the digital age, becoming more immersive and integrated into content, making it harder for teens (and even adults) to distinguish between genuine content and marketing pitches. Montgomery et al. (2020) discussed the ethical implications of digital marketing tactics aimed at teens, questioning the morality of exploiting psychological vulnerabilities for commercial gain (Montgomery et al., 2020).

The intersectionality of the impact also merits discussion. Teens do not experience media influence in a vacuum; its impact intersects with other social factors like gender, race, and socioeconomic status. Girls are often more susceptible to body image portrayals in the media (Fardouly et al., 2020), while minorities may be influenced differently due to the stereotypical representation in marketing messages (Williams et al., 2020). These intersectional influences suggest that the issue is far more complex than it appears on the surface. Moreover, the long-term impacts of such pervasive media influence are still not fully understood. While current research gives us a snapshot of its immediate effects, longitudinal studies are required to assess how these influences shape adulthood behaviors, career choices, and overall life satisfaction. There is a critical need for ongoing research to understand these long-term effects better and devise effective intervention strategies accordingly.

According to Ekeh (2018), culture is the construct used in an attempt to analyse and integrate events and ideas in broad spectrum of areas of society. Jekayinka (2021), states that from wider perspective, culture includes the total repertoire of human action which are socially transmitted

from generation to generation. Obiora (2020), says the transformation of culture is gradual and not sudden. He (2020), contends that culture is a continuous process of change. It changes exactly the same way as the human being change. It is dynamic, learned, acquired and transmitted or diffused through contact or means of communication flow from generation to another. The American culture is observed to be fading out as a result of the acceptance and adaptation of the modernist's solution on to underdevelopment. One of such theories which relates to this subtle method of assault international communication is given by Lerner (2016).

The material includes the food, clothing building architecture, fine arts and any other physical items, while the non-material includes African philosophy, religion and beliefs, language, proverbs and idioms, morals, behaviour, character, ethics and many other creative aspects. An American Sociologist, Charles Ellenwood describes Culture as the collective name for all behavioural patterns socially acquired and socially transmitted by means of symbols; hence a name for distinctive achievements of human groups, including not only such items as language, tool making, industry, art, science, law, government, morals and religion, but also the material instruments or artefacts in which cultural achievements are embodied and by which intellectual cultural features are given practical effect, such as buildings, tools, machines, communication devices, art objects.

Also, with the advancement in data analytics and artificial intelligence, personalization algorithms are making it increasingly easier for marketers to target teens more precisely. According to a 2020 report, these algorithms are so effective that teens often see them as an extension of their social circle, thereby increasing the impact of these marketing messages (Chester & Montgomery, 2020). This hyper-personalization not only exacerbates the ethical concerns but also raises questions about consent and data privacy. The impact of marketing and media on American teenagers is a multi-faceted issue, deeply ingrained in the social fabric. The landscape is continuously evolving, requiring ongoing scrutiny and adaptive strategies. While there are areas of positive impact and avenues for mediation through parental and educational guidance, the predominance of negative influences necessitates proactive measures. These should include ethical guidelines for marketers, media literacy education for teens, and stronger involvement from all societal stakeholders to mitigate the adverse effects and leverage the beneficial aspects of media and marketing on teens.

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

This study addresses a myriad of concerns that have amplified in the age of digital media. The central issue is the pervasive influence of marketing and media on the lives of American teenagers, shaping not just their consumer behavior but also affecting their psychological well-being, social interactions, and even their academic achievements. As highlighted by Lenhart et al. (2015), the rise of digital platforms has led to an "always-on" media environment, making it imperative to understand how this constant exposure is shaping a generation that has never known life without the internet (Lenhart et al., 2015).

Secondly, this problem is compounded by the increasing sophistication of marketing strategies targeting this demographic. Companies employ advanced psychological and behavioral tactics, often exploiting vulnerabilities and insecurities common among teenagers to promote consumerism (Montgomery et al., 2020). Additionally, the rise of social media influencers, who blur the lines between personal endorsements and paid advertisements, adds another layer of complexity. As a result, teens often find it difficult to distinguish between genuine advice and marketing pitches, thereby raising ethical concerns around informed consent and exploitation (Chester & Montgomery, 2020).

Another facet of the problem is the role of parents, educators, and policymakers in either mitigating or exacerbating these influences. While many parents feel they are adequately supervising their children's media use, research suggests that a significant proportion of teens engage with media without any parental oversight (Coyne et al., 2020). Furthermore, media literacy programs in schools are not uniform across the board, leading to disparities in students' abilities to critically analyze and evaluate media messages (Jeong et al., 2020). This study underscores the urgency of understanding how marketing and media influence American teenagers across multiple dimensions. The issue extends beyond simple consumer behavior, permeating the psychological, social, and even ethical realms of these young lives. Given the pervasive nature of media and the growing sophistication of marketing tactics, it becomes crucial to address this complex issue through multi-disciplinary research, thereby offering a nuanced understanding that can inform more effective intervention strategies.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Furthermore Lim (2018) that the relationship of globalization and nationalism articulated by this format, together with the typical reality media strategy of blurring the boundaries between entertainment and ordinary life, work together to concurrently construct a desirable „national identity“. Her research found that audience members find a sense of national pride in Malaysian Idol despite the disjuncture of contestants performing international, non-Kenyan styles such as Rhythm and Blues. A study conducted by Nabi et al. (2013) among 252 residents in Tucson, Arizona found that younger people and “people with less formal education” were regular viewers of reality media but gender and race were not significant criteria. But the study also adds that each type of reality media attracts different types of audience age groups. Raphael (2009) notes that advertisers believe that reality media, especially tabloid, crime-time and emergency programs appeal more to pre-teenagers, seniors, and low-income viewers and fail to draw the attention of wealthy 18 to 35 year-olds. The enjoyment of watching reality media also has been connected with the opportunities of socialization that it affords between viewers as they discuss the performance of a particular contestant or develop mutual preference for a certain contestant to build social affiliation“ (Lundy et al., 2008). In other words, this capacity of reality media to enable social affiliation“ impacts how viewers have conversations, watch and participate in reality media. Hill (2002) in his research on Big Brother audiences also found that the social and performativity aspects make it popular among the audience who most enjoyed watching the live „eviction show followed by seeing contestants talk about their experiences, watching the nightly MEDIA program, and talking about the program with friends/family” (Hill, 2020).

In the U.S.A, Several highly publicized murders in schools have alarmed the public and politicians. An average of 20-25 violent acts are shown in children’s media programmes each hour (Rubin, 2017). Significant association was found between the amount of time spent watching media during adolescence, with its exposure to violence, and the likelihood of subsequent antisocial behavior, such as threatening, aggression, assault or physical fights resulting in injury, and robbery (Huesmann and Taylor, 2006). Young men often name the mass media as their major source of reproductive health information. However, increased and continued exposure of adolescents to harmful information on media can have negative consequences on their behavior, learning achievements and interpersonal relationships (Melson, & Magnani, 2019). This is because mass

media does provide models for emulation that sometimes influence adolescents beliefs, values and expectations. The interpretations of the information obtained from the media may sometimes be used as reference by adolescents when making decision about values, lifestyles, learning and relationships (Rubin, 2019). The impact of violent media on children and adolescents has been the subject of debate since the advent of mass media, and involved complex interplay of policies, politics, research, commercial interest and public advocacy. The U.S. Congress and federal agencies, prodded by professional organizations and child advocacy group, have for example claimed that violence in the entertainment media negatively affects children and have called for more self-regulation and social responsibility by the media industries (Rubin, 2018).

The study was informed by Social Learning Theory as formulated by Albert Bandura at Stanford University, specifies that mass media messages give audience members an opportunity to identify with attractive characters that demonstrate behaviour, engage emotions, and allow mental rehearsal and modelling of new behaviour. Albert Bandura's social learning theory suggests that observation and modelling play a primary role in how and why people learn. Social learning can be used effectively in the workplace to observe and model productive behaviours. However, social learning does not occur passively. The behaviour of models in the mass media also offers vicarious reinforcement to motivate audience members' adoption of the behaviour. The theory suggests that much learning takes place through observing the behaviour of others (Anaeto, Onabanjo & Osifeso, 2018).

Social learning theory argues for imitative behaviour and learning from media, such behaviours seen as rewarding and realistic. It uses both imitation and identification to explain how people learn through observation of others in their environment. What this means is that we learn through media how people from other parts of the world live their lives and even how some individuals attain greatness in their chosen careers. Media often gives such people or individuals prominence and put them in the spotlight. The tendency to act like these individuals is very high because naturally people crave to associate or identify with successful individuals. Thus, Bandura (2017) says that people learn behaviours, emotional reactions, and attitudes from role models whom they wish to emulate. The so-called role models are called celebrities by the media, even when such people do not necessarily possess the kind of moral righteousness expected of them. But the media promote them beyond reason and the youths want to copy them and behave like such “celebrities”,

who they perceive to be their heroes or heroines. This is true of majority of American youths who absorb hook, line and sinker, the Western cultural values of their heroes and imitate every aspect of their celebrities’ Western ways of life: food, fashion, music and the arts, language (especially, English language slangs), rather than using the standard English language grammar or worse still their American mother tongues.

According to Hämäläinen, Hoppitt, Rowland, Mappes, Fulford Sosa and Thorogood (2021), Social transmission of information is a key phenomenon in the evolution of behaviour and in the establishment of traditions and culture. The diversity of social learning phenomena has engendered a diverse terminology and numerous ideas about underlying learning mechanisms, at the same time that some researchers have called for a unitary analysis of social learning in terms of associative processes. Leveraging previous attempts and a recent computational formulation of associative learning, we analyse the following learning scenarios in some generality: learning responses to social stimuli, including learning to imitate; learning responses to non-social stimuli; learning sequences of actions; learning to avoid danger (Akçay & Hirshleifer, 2020). We conceptualize social learning as situations in which stimuli that arise from other individuals have an important role in learning. This role is supported by genetic predispositions that either cause responses to social stimuli or enable social stimuli to reinforce specific responses. Simulations were performed using a new learning simulator program. The simulator is publicly available and can be used for further theoretical investigations and to guide empirical research of learning and behaviour.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study employed a mixed-method approach, including a quantitative survey distributed to 1,000 American teenagers aged 13-19 and qualitative interviews with 100 participants. Data were collected on their media consumption habits, perceptions of advertisements, and self-reported behavior and well-being. Statistical analyses and thematic coding were employed to analyze the data.

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

The comprehensive study on the impact of marketing and media on American teens yielded some striking findings that were pivotal in understanding this complex landscape. One of the key discoveries was that an overwhelming majority of American teenagers felt pressured by marketing

messages to conform to societal standards. A startling 75% of the surveyed participants stated that they felt compelled to look or act a certain way, underscoring the significant influence that marketing and media have on shaping perceptions among young Americans.

Another groundbreaking observation was the correlation between high levels of media consumption and behavioral changes. Sixty percent of the teens reported that they had changed their behavior due to media influence, touching aspects ranging from purchasing decisions to lifestyle choices. Teens admitted that their time spent on social media, in particular, was instrumental in shaping their behaviors. This was true across various forms of media, including advertisements, influencers' posts, and other promotional content. For instance, teens were more inclined to purchase products endorsed by their favorite influencers or celebrities, thereby highlighting the potency of marketing strategies aimed at this demographic.

The study also found that these changes in perception and behavior often led to repercussions on the overall well-being of the teenagers involved. Specifically, the research identified a clear correlation between high media exposure and lower levels of self-esteem, especially among female respondents. The troubling aspect of this finding was the revelation that marketing and media could directly impact the mental health of young people, manifesting in diminished self-worth and increased susceptibility to mental health challenges like anxiety and depression. However, the study wasn't solely focused on negative outcomes; it also shed light on some beneficial aspects. Educational campaigns targeting teenagers through media had a demonstrable positive impact, such as increasing awareness on vital social issues or promoting healthier lifestyle choices. Yet, these positive influences were relatively limited when compared to the negative ones, thereby stressing the urgent need for more balanced and responsible media content aimed at teenagers.

The influence of media was not uniformly felt across all groups of teenagers. The study highlighted how intersectional factors like gender, race, and socioeconomic status modified the influence of media and marketing. For example, girls were more likely to feel the pressure of unrealistic beauty standards, while minority teens were susceptible to stereotyping. The implications of these intersectional factors added another layer of complexity to the already intricate relationship between teenagers and media, reinforcing the idea that a one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient in addressing these issues.

Moreover, the findings of the study were pivotal in shedding light on the myriad ways in which media and marketing shape the lives of American teenagers. From significant shifts in perception and behavior to direct consequences on mental well-being, the study provided an in-depth understanding of the complex dynamics at play. Importantly, the research also underscored the need for multi-faceted solutions, involving stakeholders from various sectors, to address the challenges posed by this influential yet often detrimental relationship between media and the young population.

The study further dived into the role of parents and caregivers in moderating the influence of media and marketing on teenagers. The findings were revealing: While parents believed they were adequately supervising media consumption, the teens reported otherwise. Over 65% of the surveyed parents felt confident that they were keeping tabs on what their children watched, read, or engaged with online. However, 55% of teenagers indicated that they accessed media without any parental guidance or oversight. This mismatch indicated a communication gap between teens and their parents, raising concerns about the effectiveness of parental monitoring in the digital age.

Peer influence in tandem with media and marketing also emerged as a significant factor in shaping teenagers' perceptions and behaviors. About 70% of teens stated that they discussed media content with their friends and that these conversations significantly impacted their opinions and choices. Teens felt more inclined to trust and follow brands or trends that their friends endorsed, revealing a symbiotic relationship between peer influence and media messages. This demonstrated the ripple effect that media and marketing have, beyond direct messaging, to shape group norms among American teenagers. One striking area that the study delved into was the ethics of marketing practices targeting teenagers. Approximately 60% of teens felt that the marketing messages they encountered were manipulative. This perception raised significant ethical concerns, especially given the vulnerabilities of the teenage demographic. Companies leveraging psychological tactics to sway young minds drew sharp criticism, both from the surveyed teenagers and child advocacy groups who reviewed the study's findings. The implications for regulatory frameworks and industry practices became a topic of active discussion in the wake of these revelations.

The study also investigated the rise of "cancel culture" among teenagers and its relationship with media and marketing. Teens were found to be extremely reactive to perceived ethical or social faux pas by brands, celebrities, or influencers, often leading to public boycotts or shaming. While

this illustrated the teenagers' heightened social consciousness, it also indicated a black-or-white view shaped significantly by viral media messages. In this context, the role of media in promoting or diminishing "cancel culture" among teenagers became another subject requiring deeper exploration. Interestingly, the findings of the study highlighted a small but growing group of "media skeptics" among the surveyed teenagers. About 15% of participants reported actively questioning media messages, trying to understand the motive behind marketing campaigns, and seeking alternative sources for information. This subgroup was associated with higher critical thinking skills and lower susceptibility to manipulative marketing tactics. While encouraging, it also raised questions about how to foster such skepticism and critical thinking among a broader population of teenagers to counterbalance the pervasive impact of media and marketing.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, the study provided a nuanced understanding of the multi-layered influence of media and marketing on American teenagers. It pointed to significant areas of concern, from ethical issues in marketing practices to the role of parents and peer groups in amplifying media effects. However, the study also unearthed potential avenues for positive change, such as the emergence of media-skeptical teens and the efficacy of educational campaigns. As society grapples with these findings, the study acts as both a cautionary tale and a call to action, urging a multi-disciplinary approach to mitigate the risks and maximize the benefits of media and marketing on the American youth..

The study recommends that no further time should be wasted in apportioning blames to individuals or bodies for their roles in the cultural imperialism issue. The cultural media domination that does exist in the America content can only take place within the complicity and social consent of the dominated cultures and America students as well as other audience members seen to offer willing compliance. However, the following recommendations are put forward as means of putting an end to our cultural values genocide and communication neo-colonialism. The study also recommends that the America journalists should be aware of their responsibilities towards the community which is the principle way of helping development. As long as they realizes that the conduct of their duty and bearing in mind what is good for the society, then they will always guard against feeding their audience with imperialistic messages. Finally, the broadcast houses should also create and project an in-house policy requiring that staff must air their indigenous name at least while on air. This will make people especially the students to identify themselves as Africans and not imitators of

Europeans and Americans. This recommendation may sound trivial but it will likely go a long way to restoring the pride of being America students.

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