MEDIA EFFECTS AND BODY IMAGE PERCEPTIONS ON YOUTH IN UAE

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Abstract

In the modern world of today, mass media has been a major tool of communicating viable information to the public, which has been instrumental in affecting their perceptions attitudes and the way of viewing things within their immediate surroundings. With the increased technological advancement and innovation, mass media has been revolutionary with the concept of social media taking a fore step in replacing the traditional Media, in particular with the Millennials. The purpose of this study is aimed at analyzing the impact of television advertising on the image and perception of youths in UAE. This however will be achieved by analyzing the following objectives: 1) To provide an overview on the effects of television advertisements on the image and perception of youths in UAE; 2) To understand the socio-cultural positioning of television advertisements in UAE, and how it has enhanced unhealthy lifestyles; 3) To analyze the psychological effects of modern technology and innovation towards television advertising on the youths in UAE. The methodology I used is the survey. This study is important since it tries to highlight the values and customs of UAE as a country, and how modern media of western cultures has affected the growth and development of youthful population in the country. It should however be understood that, despite the media effects of western cultures having entrenched into the cultural fabric of the UAE culture, it is the role of various entities within the country to ensure that they regulate the effects of such media and westernized content from affecting the perception and image of their youthful population.

Keywords: Media Effects, Body Image, UAE

1. INTRODUCTION

In the modern world of today, mass media has been a major tool of communicating viable information to the public, which has been instrumental in affecting their perceptions attitudes and way of viewing things within their immediate surroundings. With the increased technological advancement and innovation, mass media has been revolutionary with the concept of social media taking a fore step in replacing traditional media within our surroundings. Within their utilization, it has been found that the millennials of today who majorly consist of young adults and youths are the ones mostly affected by media within our immediate surroundings. In today's world, it is evident that media and body image are closely related, and these are the concepts that traditional media such as television has used to remain relevant among the youths, which has been significant in affecting the way the youths perceive their image within the public. Televisions advertising within our immediate surroundings have been found to affect the way we view ourselves within the public eye. This is because, an average child has been found to be subjected to over 20,000 television commercials annually, which highlights the amount of impact that these advertisements that utilize models

and able-bodied men, with unattainable body shapes to seem like the norm, to advertise their products (Mirror-Mirror.org, 2018). Within the United Arab Emirates, it is clear that media effects on body image perceptions mainly among the youths both male and female have been the rise. This is because, television advertisements have been found to impact young Emirati in varied ways, and this has resulted in a change of lifestyle among many youths within the country, which has affected the way they interact within their environments. Television advertising that utilizes models and celebrities to advertise products has been attributed to enhance unhealthy lifestyle and utilization of food supplements and other sliming medicines, which has affected many young people within the country (Jayadevan, 2012). Therefore, it is the role of this paper to try and analyze the impact of media effects on the body image specifically television advertisements, and how it has been crucial in affecting the perceptions of youths in UAE. The major problem statement which this research will try to highlight will be the significant impact of television advertisements as well as the media on the youths in perceptions on their product choices and overall image and gender role, in order to be able to determine the major effects that television advertisements that use celebrities and petit models have on the body image and the overall well-being of the youth. The purpose/objectives of this study are aimed at analyzing the impact of advertisements and the media on the perception of body image of the youth both male and female. This however will be achieved by analyzing the following sub objectives: a) To provide an overview on the effects of advertisements on the image and perception of the youth, b) To understand the socio-cultural positioning of television advertisements in UAE, and how it has enhanced unhealthy lifestyles, c) To analyze the psychological effects of modern technology and the means of media towards the youth. This study is important since it does not just cover the generic global effects but also tries to highlight the values and customs of UAE as a country, and how modern media, the effects of westernization and expatriates has had on the growth and development of youthful population in the country. It should however, be understood that despite the media effects of western cultures having entrenched into the cultural fabric of the UAE culture, it the role of various entities within the country to ensure that they regulate the effects of such media and westernized content from affecting the perception and image of their youthful population. Another significance is the focus on each gender individually and simultaneously, to understand the change in body image perception for each gender.

The study focused on the following research points as a mean of understanding the effects of media on the body image and perceptions of the youth: What is the significant impact of television advertisements on the youths' overall perception? How does the increased exposure to television, magazines and movies, the media in general, impact on unhealthy lifestyle habits among the youth? What are the key challenges that relevant stakeholders encounter in trying to control advertisements?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is evident that media has become a part of our daily lives, and its utilization within our surroundings has made us to be enslaved by them. However, within our utilization of media, we have failed to acknowledge the dire effects that these kinds of media's have on our younger generations. For instance, media effects of television advertising whereby petit models and muscled men are utilized to advertise products have been found to have effects on the overall perception of youths within our immediate surroundings, including the pressure both females and males face to achieve the standards for the ideal body image depicted through the media. This therefore highlights that more needs to be done at the national level and the home level in ensuring that television advertising and media effects on the younger generation are regulated in order to prevent further erosion of culture within UAE and effects of such media on the lives of these younger generation. This study is premised under the gatekeeping theoretical framework, which gives media all the freedom to filter information for dissemination be it for publication, broadcasting on even for advertising purposes so as to ensure that its content does not affect the public perception in a way or another. In line with this theory, it propagates for professional utilization of media in all its activities in order to ensure that all its contents are beneficial to the respective publics (Barzilai, 2009). Basing with this theoretical framework, the media engagement in their presentation of content can be passive by highlighting contents that are entertaining or active through highlighting educative information. Thus, within the understanding of the gatekeeping theoretical framework, it is evident that media outlets are called upon to air content which are educative and entertaining, which have limited effects on the cognitive development of young people within their respective surroundings.

2.1 Thorough Review of Relevant Empirical Studies and/or Qualitative Research

According to Joel (2018), media has been found to have effects on people, and people of the female gender are the ones most affected by the media portrayal within their immediate surroundings. Effects of television advertising with models weighing an average of 23% less than a typical woman has affected the way young teenage girls portray themselves, and this has affected their eating habits trying to fit in to the media

portrayal of women within their advertising. This in return has resulted in eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia. More so, celebrity advertising who are well-built and who have a certain ego has affected the public perception of young males within our surroundings, as this has made most of them to enroll in trainings and gymnasium to pack up muscles, which later results in the utilization of food supplemental and steroids which in turn affect them in their future. Therefore, young girls and teenage boys as well as adults need to educate themselves on the effect of television advertising and media as a whole to their perception and body image, in order to be able to diver their attentions on media portrayal and live their lives healthy within their immediate surroundings (Joel, 2018).

Samar (2011) highlights that western television contents which are tailored to the adolescence teenagers have been pivotal in affecting their overall perception in discerning what is wrong or right in line with the UAE's culture. According to Samar, many western television contents and advertisement in particular have been found to depict values that conflict with the Arab Culture, and thus this makes teenagers within the country to fail to understand the content as its depictions does not arise in their cultural context. As a result, children who are exposed to such content automatically try to ape and imitate the different values and cultural systems, which in the long-run resulting in huge repercussions within their imitating of such contents. This is because, stereotype presented within television advertising has been found to have profound effects on the perception of teenage population in UAE, which highlights that more needs to be done in order to protect our youthful population from manipulative advertising which can be detrimental to their health within their immediate surroundings.

In line with Marwan (2008), highlights that the United Nations Population Fund, it found out that around 34% of the population in UAE comprises of teens above the age of 15. Marwan also highlights that the Arab Information Revolution has seen more than 200 satellite television channels which are saturated with advertisements content is under the disposal and viewership of youths, with the number of television per 1,000 youths in UAE being pegged at 200, which highlights that television advertising in the country has dire effects on the body image and perception of youths in the country. Thus, based on these findings it is evident that youths in UAE are exposed to a variety of advertising contents in their utilization of television, which has been crucial in affecting how they view themselves within the public eye (Marwan, 2008). Therefore, this highlights that more needs to be done in order to protect the youths in UAE from further exploitation and manipulation by these media effects within their surroundings.

2.2 The Impact of Media on Female Perception of Body Image

There have always been unrealistic beauty standards in the media in which women would compare themselves with actresses and models with extremely thin figures. It leads the average women to feel continuously dissatisfied with her body image with effects of low self-esteem and eating disorders (Bozsik and L. Bennett, n.d.). However, recently there has been a trend of the media, especially social media, targeting women displaying not just extremely thin women but muscular as well. A 1980 study compared the average body weights of women with those shown in the media, the results found that while the average weight of women kept increasing through the 50s to 70s the women featured in the media kept getting thinner (Bozsik and L. Bennett, n.d.). This all contributes to the dissatisfaction of their own body image that the average women face, leading to the over concern with weight loss and body augmentation through surgery.

2.3 The Impact of Media on Male Perception of Body Image

Mass Media is widely believed to be a motive for females to be negatively impacted on their perception of their own body image, however little research was done in terms of the exposure media has on the males' body image (Agliata and Tantleff-Dunn, 2014). An experiment was conducted to evaluate males' perception of body image, in which the male participants were either exposed to advertisements of what is considered the ideal male body image which is significantly more muscular or to advertisements of neutral male body image. The results indicated that those exposed to the ideal body image became depressed and extremely dissatisfied with their own body image, while the other participants had no such effects (Agliata and Tantleff-Dunn, 2014). Moreover, males nowadays face more pressures to fit this body image standard of being over muscular and fit which leads to the use of steroids, with the mentality that the ends justify the means. The male body image standards keep getting harder and harder to achieve, Markham Heid (2017) states that "Superheroes today are a lot more shredded than they used to be. The original Superman and Batman look almost willowy compared to our muscle-bursting modern-day versions." All the recent superhero blockbusters depict very high standards of the male body image, in which actors have to get intense professional help to achieve that image while pressuring the average male on their own body image. Since the ideal male body images gets more muscular the average male gets more dissatisfied with their own, leading to the use of steroids with potentially dangerous medical side effects (Heid, 2017).

To conclude, television and media as a whole play a crucial role in enhancing information sharing and entertainment within our surroundings. However, basing on the above findings, it is evident that its utilization within UAE has profound effects on the youthful populations, and this therefore calls for protective efforts in controlling and mitigating these effects. This is because, if nothing is done on it, it is evident that moral decay on the fabrics of the countries cultural and traditional customs will be witnessed in the coming years.

3. METHODOLOGY

The objective of this paper was to analyze how the media influences body image perceptions primarily from the youth of today. In order to do so, quantitative and qualitative date were gathered through online research and a survey. The qualitative aspect was gathered through various online articles and journals covering relative topics within the UAE and globally. Although the survey was primarily quantitative, a qualitative question at the end of the survey was set up to obtain each individuals' own thoughts on the perception of body image.

Survey design

The Survey was conducted online through typeform, a site specializing in online form building and online surveys, and it consisted of 10 primarily quantitative questions. The decision to conduct the survey online was in consideration of the demographics of the target respondents whom are younger and will more likely find technology more convenient. Using an online survey also provides an important advantage of having a wider and quicker reach to respondents than a traditional method would. The sample of the survey focused on the younger generation of the current millennials and consisted of 80 respondents both male and female. The survey started with an introduction to the survey as to be aware of what the responses are going to be used for and consisted with 9 closed ended questions, in which respondents had to choose from the available options relevant to the research objective as well as 1 open ended question, in which the respondents voiced their own opinions. Rating scales used in the survey provided an equal number of positive and negative choices, allowing respondents to express stronger opinions. Rating scale questions offer flexibility and precision of the perception and opinions of the participants.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Question 1: The first question was to assess the ratio of female to male respondents as the goal was to try to get an equal number from each as possible in order to get the perceptions of each gender. The results are shown below in form of a pie chart.
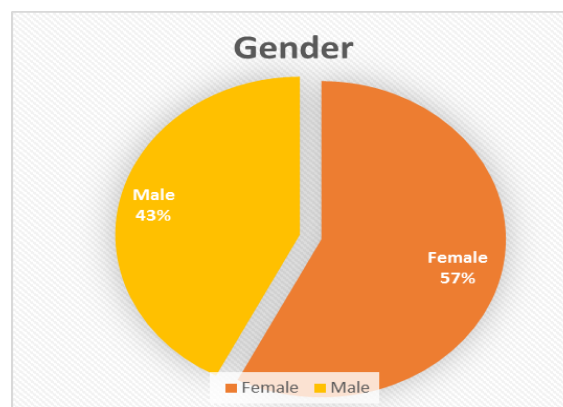

The results show that 57% was female and 43% was male. Although the majority was female, priority was to make the difference between them as small as possible in order to get an accurate representation from the sample chosen.

Question 2: The objective of this paper was to prioritize the youth and so that took part in the grouping of age. The youngest was between 15-19 this was chosen to target high school students and university freshmen. The next age group of 20-24 was our main target as they represent the youth to most likely take action on body image concerns such as make purchases or reverts to steroid use. The third age group was between 25 -29 to get the perception of the youth with a bit more experience in life. The last group of ages 30+ was for any outliers as to not exclude any survey participants.
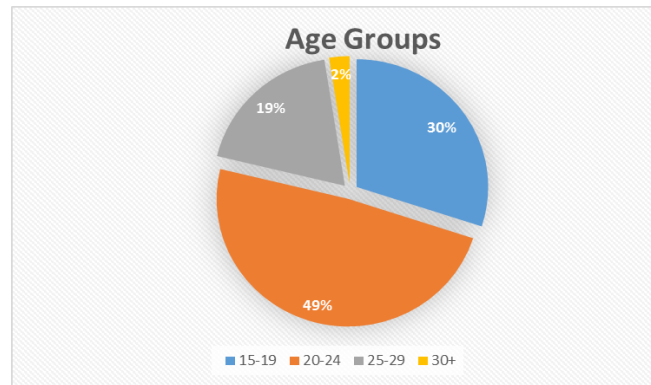
Age Groups

The results show that the respondents were primarily between the ages of 20-24 at a 49%, the second highest age group are the youngest between the ages of 15-19 at a 30%, the more mature group of ages 25-29 at a 19%, and finally the lowest percentage of 2% of ages 30+ are the outliers of this paper. The research objective of targeting the youth was met as per the results.

Question 3: This question was to figure out where advertisements are viewed the most by the targets of this paper. The source media used to view advertisements is relative to various factors such as age, preferences, and social groups. And so, the question provided four options that represent both traditional and digital media. Youtube and TV commercials represent the traditional and digital ways to watch what interests you while both showcasing heavy advertising. Internet pop-ups are influences by browsing history and other factors and such providing advertisements of what would most likely interest you, while social media heavily relies on influencers with high followings and the concept of going viral to spread advertisements.

Where Ads are viewed the most:
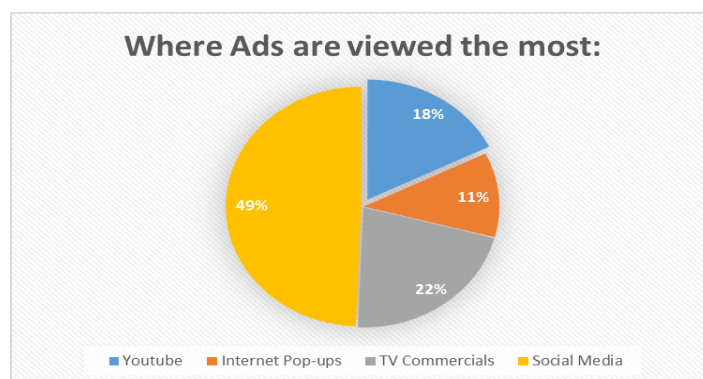
The results show that the media medium where advertisements are most viewed on is social media at 49% which is almost half of the respondents, TV commercials at 22%, Youtube at 18%, and Internet pop-ups at 11%. This goes to show that the youth are more likely to be on social media and so would view advertisements the most on the various platforms of social media such as twitter and Instagram.

Question 4: The forth question was to analyze the respondent's perception of whether or not the models used in advertisements represent true and attainable beauty standards in terms of the average body image. "Do advertisements for the most part use models that represent an average body image?"
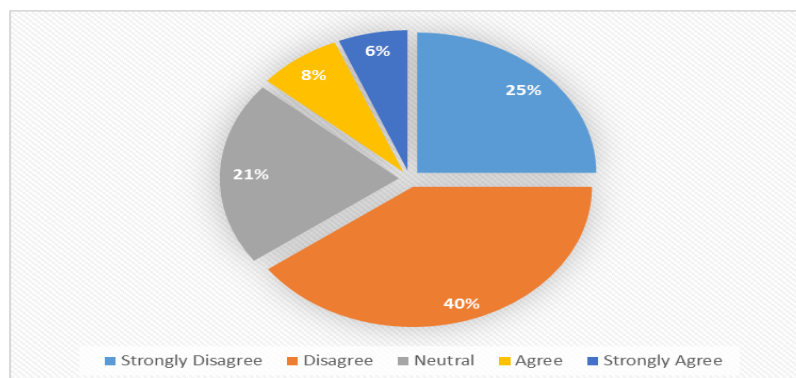
The results indicate that the majority of the respondents 40% disagree however 21% of the respondents are

neutral and so this indicates that the perception might be that although they disagree they also seem to favor the models presented. 6% strongly agree while 8%agree that the models represent the average body image. The results suggest that the youth requires further education on beauty standards and body image as to not be so influenced by the media and be able to personally distinguish between unattainable standards and accurate representation of the average body image.

Question 5: This question was aimed to analyze the respondents' own self-awareness of whether the media has any significant change in their own perception. With the use of a Likert-type scale we were able to determine their opinions more accurately from a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree. "Have advertisements and the media in general changed your perception of your own body image?"
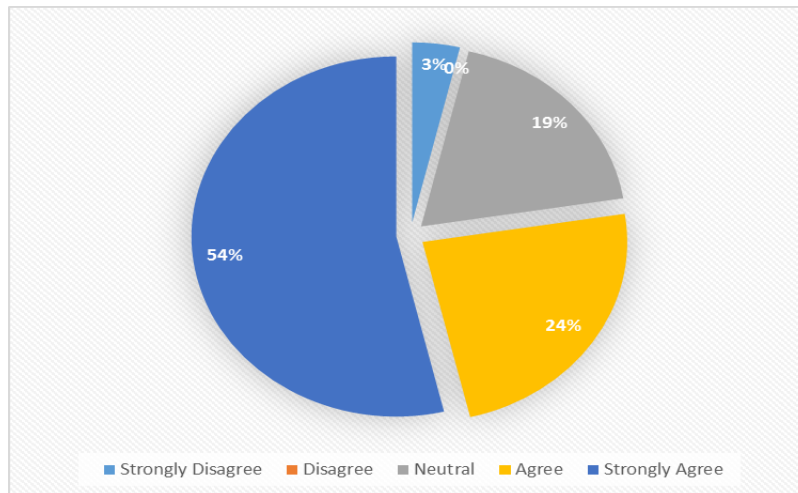

For question 5 it is evident that the media does indeed impact change in the perception of body image within the youth. The results show that 54% of the respondents admit and strongly agree while 24% agree that their own perception has been changed. 19% of respondents are neutral about the matter, 3% strongly disagree and 0% disagree.

Question 6: This question addresses the effectiveness of advertisements to influence the youth to make purchases by convincing them that it will help them achieve the ideal body image portrayed by the media. "Have you ever purchased supplements or slimming products as a result of Ads showcasing them?"
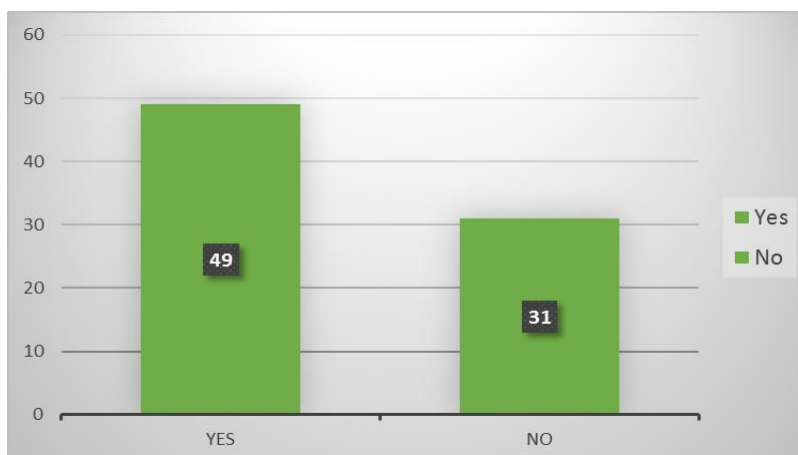

The results show that the majority of respondents 49 out of 80, which is 61%, have indeed made purchases of slimming products and supplements as a result of being exposed to media. The rest 31 out of 80 respondents, which is 39%, have claimed to not be encouraged to make such purchases.

Question 7: The seventh question refers to the previous question of whether advertisements have made them make purchases in order to understand what makes the advertisement viewers trust those advertisements. The options vary from influencer recommendations which is mostly through social media, health expert recommendations, brand name, results of other customers, and models used. "What makes those Ads seem the most reliable?"
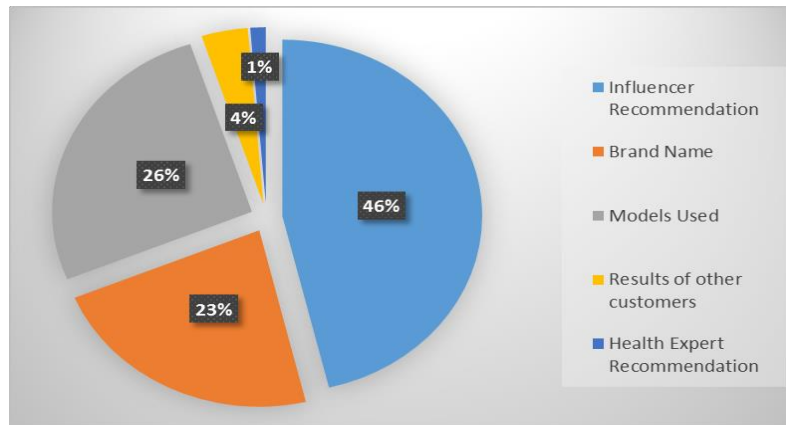
The overwhelming choice of influencer recommendation at 46% indicates that the youth more likely trust influencers on social media than Health Experts that had a result of 1% from respondents. Perhaps the influencers seem more reliable due to the large following and lifestyles similar to those of their followers. The second highest was models used at 26% which emphasizes the importance of appearances and its highly effective impact on the youth and their decisions. Brand name had a result of 23% while results of other customers had a 4%.

Question 8: This question was important to figure out whether the respondents would actually act out on how the media has changed their perception of their own body image by considering to augment their body surgically. "Would you ever consider augmenting your body surgically to meet a certain body image standard?" For this question a Likert-type rating scale was used at a more a more flexible manner in order to measure their opinions and likelihood to do so more precisely.
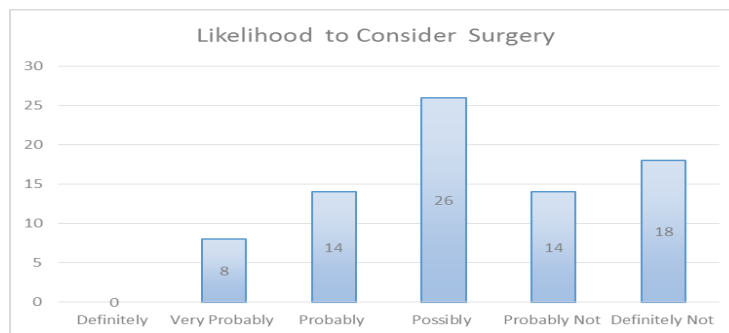
The respondent's majority 26 out of 80 are neutral about the matter and keep it as a possibility while the other majority provided a more negative answer as to not consider surgery 14 respondents answered probably not while 18 respondents answered definitely not, this indicates that the youth is not fully convinced to go to such drastic measures to fit the ideal body image. 8 out of 80 perceptions are more likely to consider it however to is a small rate considering none are definite about considering surgery.

Question 9: This question addresses the use of steroids, which is more common with males, however the goal of this question is to get the perception of both genders on the use of steroids to achieve a certain body image goal easier and quicker. "Do you think the use of certain steroids is acceptable in order to get fast results?"
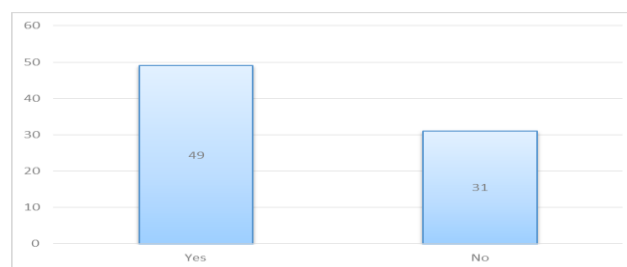
The results are more favorable to the use of steroids to get fast results while working out. 49 out of 80 respondents think that the use of steroids is acceptable to get fast results, while 31 out of 80 respondents disagreed with the use of steroids. This suggests that the youth have to be further educated on the dangerous consequences of the use of steroids as well.

Question 10: The last question was an open-ended question in which the respondents were provided the option to word their own opinion on this topic. "In a few words what is your perception of body image in today's society?" By providing them with an open-ended question it removes any restrictions and provides an insight at what they truly feel and think about body image in today's society. The majority thought that society today is over concerned with appearances by being leaner and fit and correlating happiness with being what is considered to be attractive. One respondent stated "Because of the media body image became important for first impressions" this goes back to the third research objective to analyze the psychological effects on the youth, which appears to be that in order to feel presentable they have to fit the standards portrayed by the media. Various female respondents seem to think that the pressures are more intense on females as a result of social media while the males think there is a lot more internal judging of other people's appearances and so to be more muscular is to be more attractive.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The research did achieve and acquire data concerning the research objectives and goals. The research review gave a more intensive outlook at the issues at hand, while the survey conducted provided with data directly from the target of the research. The limitations of this research include two mains points; the question limit of the survey since the site Typeform only permits a maximum of 10 questions and by adding more questions we would have been able to further evaluate the perceptions of body image from the participants of the survey. The second limitation is the reach the research had in which the research could not have a global scale but instead focused on the UAE.

In conclusion, media outlets and advertisements are enticed to be more entertaining and attention grabbing with every day. Viewer can be selected with what grabs their attention and what they choose to send their time viewing. Most advertisements face issues such as zapping or zipping in the traditional sense of TV commercials, while advertisements in social media are usually more effective due to intensive usage of social media by the youth. The media in terms of movies and TV shows also seek to get the most popular Actors/Actresses to grab the attention of the viewers, and also pressuring the actors or models hired to look a certain way. This leads to the assumption that although beauty standards that are high and hard to attain are what viewers want to see and what grabs their attention so that perception in society has to start changing in order of the media to be forced to portray more diversity in beauty standards and body image. This can be achieved be educating children while they are still developing in order for the next generation of youth to be more aware of body acceptance.

The first research objective "What are the significant impact of television advertisements on the youths' overall perception?" was identified by measuring the lengths the youth goes to by comparing themselves to the ideal body image portrayed in the media. The significant impact on their perception is not being satisfied with their body image until they achieve that is portrayed to be ideal. While the second objective "How does the increased exposure to television, magazines and movies, the media in general, impact on unhealthy lifestyle habits among the youth?" focuses on how the youth act upon their changed perception of body image. The youth are more likely to use harmful means such as steroids and slimming products as well as surgery to achieve the ideal body image. The third objective "What are the key challenges that relevant stakeholders encounter in trying to control advertisements?" refers to the control of advertisements. Putting more pressure on advertisers to be more socially responsible is necessary however it is challenging as the demand for more entertaining and attention seeking ads keeps increasing. As answered in the survey as to what makes ads more reliable a great number of respondents choose Models used, while backs the claim for the need of more attention-grabbing media.

6. RECCOMENDATIONS

1. The youth have to be further educated on how advertisements have an effect on their perception of body image.

2. The youth have to be further educated on the acceptance of all body types and be able to recognize how the media is portraying selective standards.

3. The youth have to be further educated on the harmful use of steroids and slimming products.

4. Advertisers and media outlets can be more inclusive of all standards of beauty and provide content with diversity.

5. Society has to provide easy access to information on healthy ways to lose weight and get in shape if an individual seeks to do so.

6. The youth have to be further educated on the consequences of surgery and be provided with natural and

healthier alternative to self-satisfaction.

7. The government could offer a free mental health expert to support individuals that face extreme self-doubt and self-consciousness in order for those individuals to be more confident and be more inclusive and help in the prosperity of society.

8. Families could also be educated on the portrayal of body image in society in order to teach their children from a younger age to be more aware.

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