
Miscellaneous

Álvaro Montúfar-Calle

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7845-7367>
alvaroignacio.montufar119@comunidad.unir.net
alvaro.montufar@udep.edu.pe
Universidad Internacional de La Rioja
Universidad de Piura

Beatriz Feijoo

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5287-3813>
beatriz.feijoo@villanueva.edu
Universidad Villanueva

Jesús Díaz-Campo

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5014-8749>
jesus.diaz@unir.net
Universidad Internacional de La Rioja

Henry Palomino-Moreno

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5839-8184>
henry.palomino@udep.edu.pe
Universidad de Piura

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Impact of influencer advertising related to body and diet on the self-perception of Peruvian minors

Abstract

The advertising of body and diet products by social media influencers is causing concern due to its potential impact on the physical and emotional health of minors. Influencer advertising often promotes unhealthy products and unattainable body standards, both of which represent threats to children's well-being. In addition, minors are generally unable to recognize such advertising and, consequently, cannot develop a critical attitude. This study analyzes the relationship between influencer advertising of body and food products on YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, and Peruvian minors' self-perception, their satisfaction with their physique, and the perceived social importance of physical appearance. A quantitative method was used, based on a nationally representative survey, applied to 1,020 adolescents aged 11 to 17. The results reveal high exposure to influencer advertising, significant discrepancies between minors' perceived ideal and their actual figure, and dissatisfaction with but great social relevance of physical appearance. An inverse relationship is observed between exposure on Instagram and TikTok, and perceived ideal figure and actual appearance. Yet, a direct link is observed with respect to social relevance. The study provides empirical knowledge that can contribute to the development of regulations and public policies to protect minors. It could also help to make these issues part of a national conversation and improve digital literacy, a task that cannot be postponed.

Keywords

Advertising, influencers, social media, social networks, adolescents, food, body care, physical self-perception, Peru.

1. Introduction

Social networks have become everyday tools to source information, and they occupy an important part of young people's lives (Aslan & Tolan, 2022), as there are over 4 billion users worldwide (Suárez-Álvarez & Pastor-Rodríguez, 2023). This figure amounts to 4.7 billion people or 95% of internet users (Forbes México, 2023), with children and adolescents representing one in three users (Unicef, 2017; Unicef América Latina y el Caribe, 2023). In Peru, 75% of internet users are accessing social media (Ipsos Perú, 2021), and of that proportion, 80% do so daily (Statista, 2024a). In addition, 6.2% of social media users are between 13 and 17 years old (We Are Social & Meltwater, 2023).

High exposure of minors to screens has increased concern for their well-being, especially as more than 1 million Peruvians aged 5 to 19 are expected to be overweight by 2030 (Unicef Perú, 2023). In this sense, the academic literature recommends replicating studies from other countries, analyzing the variables of sex and age, to consolidate knowledge about the impact of advertising content on self-perception and ideals of appearance (Andres et al., 2024; Sádaba, 2024). This study addresses this need, focusing on Peruvians aged 11 to 17 to examine the link between their exposure to influencer advertising on YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok—the most popular platforms among that group (IAB España, 2023; Vogels et al., 2022)—and the self-perception, satisfaction with, and social relevance of their physical appearance, separating the results by sex and age.

The research questions are:

RQ1. How frequently are minors exposed to influencer advertising related to body and diet on YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok?

RQ2. How do minors perceive their physical appearance, how satisfied are they with it, and how socially relevant do they deem that aspect?

RQ3. Do the variables sex and age affect minors' self-perception, satisfaction with, and social relevance of physical appearance?

RQ4. Is there a link between the frequency of exposure and minors' self-perception, satisfaction with, and perceived social relevance of physical appearance?

2. Literature review

2.1. *Influencer impact on physical appearance and diet*

Influencers advertising body and food products on social media have a great impact on the self-image and physical well-being of adolescents (Sádaba, 2024). Previous studies found that social acceptance is a key issue for children and relates to their physical appearance (Ehmke, 2024), as social networks are crucial for how they present themselves and try to impress others (Roccaforte & Cohen, 2024; Unicef España, 2021). Adolescents deem it essential to form and maintain positive impressions, but the social anxiety this need can produce affects their self-perception processes, especially when social networks are involved (Roccaforte & Cohen, 2024). The perceived need to leave a good impression can induce them to judge social acceptance based on social media interactions such as 'likes' (Ehmke, 2024). Evidence suggests that having to create a strong identity generates pressure and triggers anxiety, depression, and other derivatives (Roccaforte & Cohen, 2024).

The instrumental view of social networks has led to different phenomena related to problematic use or addiction (Yana-Salluca et al., 2022), such as FOMO, or Fear of Missing Out. This phenomenon refers to concerns of missing out on experiences (Royal Society for Public Health, 2017; Varchetta et al., 2020) as a result of constantly thinking that others lead more interesting and rewarding lives (Varchetta et al., 2020). This anxiety induces children to

remain connected via social media, affecting their mood and life satisfaction (Royal Society for Public Health, 2017), causing social withdrawal and preference for digital interaction (Varchetta et al., 2020). Thus, adolescents with poor social skills tend to prefer social media over personal interaction, which can cause anxiety related to appearance and affect their psychological well-being (Aslan & Tolan, 2022; Roccaforte & Cohen, 2024). In general, the addictive use of social media can affect health directly and indirectly (Unicef América Latina y el Caribe, 2023; WHO, 2022).

Directly, because the problematic use of social media means less exercise time (Unicef América Latina y el Caribe, 2023; WHO, 2022) and consequently a higher risk of obesity, which makes minors vulnerable to bullying, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, unhappiness, and insecurity (Unicef Perú, 2023). Adolescents spend 7.6 to 10.2 hours daily in front of a screen (Unicef América Latina y el Caribe, 2023), which represents a high opportunity cost for engaging in physical activities. It is also risky because images shared via social media, especially of women and girls, are often harshly evaluated in relation to physical appearance and attractiveness (Roccaforte & Cohen, 2024). According to a study, digital social evaluation is a very frequent reality for adolescents (Fatt & Fardouly, 2023).

Indirect problems emerge from greater exposure to influencers promoting food and beverages that are potentially harmful to health (Coates et al., 2019a, 2019b; Unicef América Latina y el Caribe, 2023; WHO, 2022), with adolescents (83%) being the most exposed to such advertising (Unicef América Latina y el Caribe, 2023). In the same vein, a German study highlighted that most audiovisual content sponsored by food influencers promotes unhealthy products (Winzer et al., 2022). Worryingly, the producers of these harmful products are increasingly investing in digital media, motivated by the effectiveness of digital marketing (Unicef América Latina y el Caribe, 2023).

Additionally, studies on such content found that by spending just 10 minutes on social media, 72% of Canadian children aged 7–16 were exposed to food advertising, with the promoted products having been high in fat, sugar, and salt (Potvin Kent et al., 2019). In the U.S., seven out of 10 minors follow food and non-alcoholic beverage brands on social media, and three out of 10 follow five or more brands (Unicef América Latina y el Caribe, 2023). High exposure to such advertising can significantly increase the consumption of unhealthy products and calorie intake (Packer et al., 2022; Unicef América Latina y el Caribe, 2023).

The impact of influencer advertising on body and diet and the well-being of adolescents has been analyzed in publications focused on several regions (Coates et al., 2019a, 2019b; De Jans et al., 2021; Lowe-Calverley & Grieve, 2021; Mason et al., 2022; Möri et al., 2022; Powell & Pring, 2024; Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020a, 2020b; Zhang et al., 2021). Some indicate that influencer advertising of unhealthy foods has a significant effect on increasing children's immediate energy intake (Coates et al., 2019b; Powell & Pring, 2024), while others revealed a positive relationship between higher concern over physical appearance and dissatisfaction, and perceived discrepancies between an ideal and the actual figure (Mason et al., 2022; Möri et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2021). Especially women become more dissatisfied with their bodies when exposed to influencer advertising (Lowe-Calverley & Grieve, 2021; Silva et al., 2021). These findings show that influencers' idealized body images have a significant negative effect on body image and mood (Powell & Pring, 2024).

Health studies found a link between social networks, especially visual ones, and minors' propensity to develop eating disorders (Bajaña Marín & García, 2023; García Puertas, 2020), thinness and low self-esteem (García Puertas, 2020; Lozano-Muñoz et al., 2022). Other studies highlighted a relationship between social media use and psychological health, linked to self-

esteem and anxiety (Aslan & Tolan, 2022; Ehmke, 2024; Paricio del Castillo et al., 2023; Primack et al., 2022; Royal Society for Public Health, 2017; Varchetta et al., 2020), and sleep disorders (Primack et al., 2022; Royal Society for Public Health, 2017). Overexposure to influencer advertising and idealized images can deteriorate minors' mental health (Paricio del Castillo et al., 2023) and cause low self-esteem, shyness, anxiety (Ehmke, 2024), a search for perfectionism, frustration, depression, and dissatisfaction with physical appearance (Royal Society for Public Health, 2017).

However, these mental health conditions can have multiple causes besides social media use. A study focused on the United Kingdom found a relationship between social media use and anxiety, recognizing three factors that reduce anxiety and five that increase them (Anto et al., 2023). A Spanish study that analyzed social media use and factors that facilitate the development of eating disorders (Bajaña Marín & García, 2023) showed similar results. The relationship between social media use, including advertising, and adolescent mental health is very complex, influenced by multiple factors and can have positive and negative effects (Yue & Rich, 2023).

2.2. Influencer advertising on social networks

Global market value of the influencer marketing industry reached US\$19.8 billion in 2024 and is expected to grow to US\$22.2 billion in 2025 (Statista, 2024b). In Peru, it is estimated that investment in influencer advertising reaches US\$28.86 million in 2025 and an annual growth rate of 7.19% from 2025 to 2030 is projected (Statista, 2024c). According to another report, Peru allocated US\$22.39 million to activities with online influencers in 2023, a growth of 16.95% over the previous year. This same report highlighted that influencer advertising represents 5.3% of total investment in digital advertising (We Are Social & Meltwater, 2024). These figures suggest the influencer advertising industry still has major growth potential.

Influencer advertising (Gross et al., 2023; Janssen et al., 2022; Kim & Kim, 2021; Lou, 2022; Núñez-Cansado et al., 2021; Pur Damayanti et al., 2024; Rosengren & Campbell, 2021; Suárez-Álvarez & Pastor-Rodríguez, 2023; Um, 2023) is a type of native advertising, which is integrated into influencers' editorial social media content to promote products (Pur Damayanti et al., 2024) in a non-intrusive way, making it difficult to distinguish it from other content (Janssen et al., 2022; Kim & Kim, 2021; Martins et al., 2023; Núñez-Cansado et al., 2021). This unconventional but effective and efficient (Janssen et al., 2022; Rosengren & Campbell, 2021; Rundin & Colliander, 2021) form of product promotion seeks to avoid traditional advertising and distrust in brand narrative (Martins et al., 2023), capturing more attention (Kim & Kim, 2021).

Its tactical purpose focuses on short-term objectives, with influencers being the main actors, leveraging their ability to sway followers (Rundin & Colliander, 2021). The approach rests on influencers' reputation (Um, 2023), their skills to create proximity and accessibility, and their popularity (Janssen et al., 2022; Um, 2023). This form of advertising takes advantage of communities that are interested in the opinions and content of certain people (Kim & Kim, 2021). Unsurprisingly, influencers are considered opinion leaders, information sources, and brand ambassadors (IAB España, 2022). Considered a profession (IAB España, 2022), it is one of the 10 most desired careers in the world (Remitly UK, 2022). Thus, influencers have become pillars of a more interconnected digital and social advertising system, which also comprises advertisers, consumers, and content (Rosengren & Campbell, 2021). Influencer advertising helps to reinforce digital marketing actions in the awareness and consideration phases (IAB Perú, 2023b). It can also boost brand recognition, value, and revenue (IAB España, 2022; Pur Damayanti et al., 2024), in addition to web traffic (Gross et al., 2023), all based on the trust

influencers generate with their followers (IAB España, 2022; IAB Perú, 2023b; Pur Damayanti et al., 2024).

But adolescents facing influencer advertising are vulnerable because native advertising entails greater difficulty to distinguish persuasive intentionality from other content (Martins et al., 2023). This difficulty is heightened as influencers often resort to the hybridization of messages to improve acceptance (Suárez-Álvarez & Pastor-Rodríguez, 2023; Sweeney et al., 2022), which blurs the line between persuasive purpose and entertainment or editorial content (Martins et al., 2023; Rozendaal et al., 2022; Rozendaal & Buijzen, 2023; Sweeney et al., 2022; Van Reijmersdal & Rozendaal, 2020). Another factor that affects the ability to recognize such advertising is the disclosure of sponsorship. Studies highlighted its effect on the competition to recognize the persuasive intent of influencers, which is where its relevance (Kim & Kim, 2021; Liu & Zhao, 2024; Lou, 2022; Rozendaal et al., 2022) and imperative ethical necessity lie (Van Reijmersdal & Rozendaal, 2020). However, there is still resistance among advertisers and influencers (Liu & Zhao, 2024). This scenario suggests that especially young adolescents are not skilled enough to recognize such advertising if it is not effectively signposted (Liu & Zhao, 2024; Rozendaal et al., 2022; Sádaba, 2024; Zozaya-Durazo & Sádaba-Chalezquer, 2022).

The difficulty to recognize such advertising is worrying, since social cognitive theory suggests that influencer advertising can model the behavior of followers through observation and imitation (Bandura, 2020). But precisely in this way, influencers promoting body and diet products could foster positive effects, such as motivation to adopt healthy habits (Cohen et al., 2021; Sádaba, 2024). Yet, they can also reinforce negative effects, such as the consolidation of idealized standards, pressure, and dissatisfaction related to physical appearance (Bell et al., 2024; Cataldo et al., 2021; Dahlgren et al., 2024; Sádaba, 2024). The relevance of images shared via social networks has caused adolescents to focus on the body and how it is perceived (Roccaforte & Cohen, 2024). In fact, 10 million images are uploaded daily to Facebook alone, which invites comparisons about appearance (Royal Society for Public Health, 2017). Likewise, the leak of a confidential Facebook study revealed that Instagram, a mainly visual platform, affects the mood and well-being of young people, increasing their dissatisfaction with their self-perception and attractiveness (Milmo & Skopeliti, 2021).

Evidence suggests that minors are overexposed to mainly visual social media content, including influencer advertising, which can lead to social comparisons and dissatisfaction with their appearance (Aslan & Tolan, 2022). Images of attractive bodies increase this pressure (Ehmke, 2024). It is even claimed that traditional and social media both disseminate idealized body images (Dahlgren et al., 2024; Monks et al., 2021), which results in greater dissatisfaction and causes anxiety about appearance (Aslan & Tolan, 2022; Ehmke, 2024; Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020a, 2020b). It can also cause self-objectification or a tendency to evaluate oneself based on appearance, affecting physical and mental health, and the emotional state (Primack et al., 2022; Roccaforte & Cohen, 2024; Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020b).

2.3. *Panorama in Peru*

Recent projections indicate that more than 1 million Peruvians between the ages of 5 and 19 will be obese by 2030. Currently, 38.4% of children aged 6-13 and 24.8% aged 12-17 are overweight or obese. This represents a very high and high index, respectively, with girls more affected (Unicef Perú, 2023). The deterioration of minors' health is due to the unhealthy food context they grow up in, which includes the marketing of products that are harmful and affects their decisions, behavior, and diet (Unicef América Latina y el Caribe, 2023). In this sense, publications revealed that industries in the mass consumption category, which

includes food and beverages, and other segments of high demand and daily consumption, invest the most in digital advertising (IAB Perú, 2024), with influencer management being the second biggest service (IAB Perú, 2023a).

The health deterioration is especially obvious when linked to connectivity data, which indicate that 72% of children and adolescents between 6 and 17 years use the internet (INEI, 2024), and that 6.2% of social media users are between 13 and 17 years old (We Are Social & Meltwater, 2023). Given that the latter study only considered data related to the legal age for social media use, the actual figure may be higher. But the figures indicate considerable exposure to the internet and social networks, mainly (86.4%) through mobile phones (INEI, 2024). Peruvian studies have confirmed a problematic use by adolescents (Pomalima et al., 2016; Yana-Salluca et al., 2022). High exposure, including to influencer advertising related to body and diet, and to other highly persuasive digital marketing techniques (Unicef América Latina y el Caribe, 2023) has been well documented.

In this regard, countries must strengthen regulatory frameworks to protect this population. However, the existing legislation in countries like Peru is insufficient (Unicef América Latina y el Caribe, 2023), especially considering that only three fines have been imposed from 2020 to date, of more than 180 preliminary investigations opened into Peruvian influencers, while 112 were archived because no infraction was found (Indecopi, 2022).

3. Methodology

This study examines the relationship between minors' exposure to influencer advertising related to body and diet on YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, and their self-perception, satisfaction with, and perceived importance of physical appearance. Six specific objectives were proposed:

SO1. To know the frequency of exposure to influencer advertising related to body and diet on YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok.

SO2. To know minors' perception of their ideal and actual physical appearance.

SO3. To know how satisfied minors are with their physical appearance.

SO4. To know how minors perceive the social relevance of physical appearance.

SO5. To know if sex and age affect self-perception, satisfaction with, and social relevance of physical appearance.

SO6. To know the relationship between exposure to influencer advertising and the self-perception, satisfaction with, and social relevance of physical appearance.

A quantitative method was deployed, specifically a nationally representative survey. Choosing a qualitative approach would have prevented obtaining more precise knowledge about the processing mechanisms of influencer advertising and its impact, since incipient production in Peru suggested that it was more urgent to describe the broader reality of the social phenomenon. The target population in the official RENIEC web registry involved 4,216,806 adolescents aged 11-17. The selected group was consulted in September 2023. The age cohort was selected because it is less explored than young adults, and because the studies that are beginning to appear in Peru refer to the same age range, which would facilitate comparisons. The study was multistaged, stratified, and involved proportional allocation of the sample. The strata used were departments of Peru, sex, and age. The sample consisted of 1,020 units of analysis and had the same composition as its population. The study obtained a 95% confidence level and a $\pm 3\%$ error margin. Units were selected for convenience, respecting the stratification parameters. The methodological design allowed the results to be extrapolated to the population, and the questionnaire was inspired by previous studies and

reports (Fanjul Peyró et al., 2019; Fundación Mapfre, 2023; Thompson & Gray, 1995) and involved two blocks: classification and control, and research comprising six questions.

The field phase began in September 2023 and ended in November 2023. A company provided the online platform for the questionnaire and handled anonymous and secure storage of participant data. Due to the nature of the study, informed consent was necessary and obtained from parents or guardians. Participants were educated about study scope and their rights as part of the questionnaire. The methodology and instruments were validated by the ethics committee of the International University of La Rioja, which on November 20, 2023 issued its approval under code PI:065/2023. Finally, the statistical power of the sample was evaluated with GPower, and the following factors were obtained: ANOVA tests to compare averages by sex and age range, statistical power of 100% and effect size 0.4. Correlation tests indicated a power of 99.99966%.

3.1. *Instrument*

3.1.1. Exposure to advertising on YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok

The variable examines the frequency of exposure to influencer advertising related to body and diet on YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. The variable was coded as follows:

- Exposure to influencer advertising on YouTube: (Exp_YT).
- Exposure to influencer advertising on Instagram: (Exp_IG).
- Exposure to influencer advertising on TikTok: (Exp_TK).

The variable was evaluated with the following question: How often do you receive advertising related to food or body on the following platforms? A six-point Likert scale was used, where: 1 = I don't use this platform; 2 = never; 3 = infrequently; 4 = somewhat frequently; 5 = frequently, 6 = very frequently.

3.1.2. Self-perception of ideal and actual figure

The variable examines minors' self-perception of ideal and actual figure, and was coded as follows:

- Self-perception of ideal figure: (Fig_Id).
- Self-perception of actual figure: (Fig_Ac).

The variable used the Silhouette Test (Thompson & Gray, 1995) and was evaluated with two questions: Taking as a reference the figures presented below, which one do you consider being your ideal figure? (Fig_Id). Taking the figures presented below as a reference, which one do you think best represents your actual figure? (Fig_Ac). The scale showed nine silhouettes of men and women in increasing order, where 1 was very thin and 9 very obese.

3.1.3. Satisfaction with physical appearance

The variable examines satisfaction with physical appearance and was coded as follows:

- Level of satisfaction with physical appearance: (Sat_PhysA).

It was evaluated with the question: In general, do you feel satisfied with your body and physical appearance? (Sat_PhysA). A five-point Likert scale was used, where: 1 = not at all and 5 = very much.

3.1.4. Perception of social relevance of physical appearance

The variable examines the social relevance of physical appearance and was coded as follows:

- Perception of social relevance of physical appearance: (Soc_Rel).

Three questions were asked: Do you think that others' perception of you would improve if your physical appearance changed? (Soc_Rel). Do you think that having a good physique helps you to be more successful (having more friends, being liked more, being more accepted,

etc.)? (Soc_Rel2). How important do you think your physical appearance is to your friends? (Soc_Rel3). The Likert scale had five points, where: 1 = not at all and 5 = very much.

3.1.5. Differences by sex and age

The variable identifies differences by sex and age of each variable. SPSSv.23 software was used for the results analysis. In line with the study objectives, averages were calculated to evaluate the trend; the ANOVA test was used to measure the significance of differences by sex and age, and Pearson's correlational analysis to determine the relationship between variables.

4. Results

4.1. Exposure to advertising on YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok

The results reveal greater exposure to influencer advertising on TikTok and YouTube, and to a lesser extent on Instagram. In addition, they indicate significant differences by sex and age on Instagram and TikTok ($p < 0.05$), which means that girls and participants of all sexes aged 16–17 were more exposed. In both cases, average exposure was above the general average. There were no significant differences by gender and age on YouTube.

Table 1. Exposure to advertising on YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok by gender

	Male (N=520)		Female (N=500)		Total (N=1,020)		ANOVA Test Sig.
	Average	Dev.	Average	Dev.	Average	Dev.	
Exp_YT	3.95	1.23	3.83	1.30	3.89	1.27	0.158
Exp_IG	2.94	1.75	3.49	1.72	3.21	1.75	0.000
Exp_TK	3.78	1.64	4.30	1.46	4.04	1.57	0.000

Source: own elaboration

Table 2. Exposure to advertising on YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok by age

	11-12 years (N=296)		13-15 years (N=443)		16-17 years (N=281)		Total (N=1,020)		ANOVA Test Sig.
	Average	Dev.	Average	Dev.	Average	Dev.	Average	Dev.	
Exp_YT	3.98	1.22	3.84	1.28	3.87	1.30	3.89	1.27	0.350
Exp_IG	2.22	1.55	3.32	1.68	4.08	1.60	3.21	1.75	0.000
Exp_TK	3.67	1.72	4.01	1.54	4.46	1.35	4.04	1.57	0.000

Source: own elaboration

4.2. Self-perception, satisfaction and social relevance of physical appearance

Self-perception, in general, indicated discrepancies between ideal and actual figure, with an inclination toward a slimmer appearance (Fig_Id M = 4.54; Fig_Ac M = 4.93). It also indicated significant differences by sex ($p < 0.05$), where girls showed greater self-discrepancy and inclination toward a more slender figure (Fig_Id M = 3.80; Fig_Ac M = 4.49), while boys identified with a more robust appearance (Fig_Id M = 5.25; Fig_Ac M = 5.35). Participants aged 16–17 showed the greatest self-discrepancy (Fig_Id M = 4.66; Fig_Ac M = 5.24). According to age, there were significant differences related to actual figure ($p < 0.05$), where 16–17-year-olds perceived themselves as more robust (Fig_Ac M = 5.241) than the 11–12 age group (Fig_Ac M = 4.673) and the general average (Fig_Ac M = 4.93). No significant differences were observed with respect to ideal figure.

The satisfaction variable revealed a certain disagreement (Sat_PhysA M = 3.39). According to sex, significant differences were observed ($p < 0.05$), where girls showed greater

dissatisfaction (Sat_PhysA M = 3.21) than boys (Sat_PhysA M = 3.55) and the general average (Sat_PhysA M = 3.39). According to age, significant differences were observed ($p < 0.05$), where participants aged 16–17 showed greater dissatisfaction (Sat_PhysA M = 3.189) than 11–12-year-olds (Sat_PhysA M = 3.645) and the general average (Sat_PhysA M = 3.39).

The social relevance variable indicated considerable importance of physical appearance in influencing the perception of others (Soc_Rel1 M = 2.57), for social success (Soc_Rel2 M = 2.76), and regarding friends (Soc_Rel3 M = 2.91). In all three cases, significant differences were observed by age ($p < 0.05$), with the 16–17 group deeming physical appearance more important (Soc_Rel1 M = 2.669, Soc_Rel2 M = 2.921, Soc_Rel3 M = 2.933) than the 11–12 group (Soc_Rel1 M = 2.377, Soc_Rel2 M = 2.57, Soc_Rel3 M = 2.755) and the general average.

Table 3. Self-perception, satisfaction with, and social relevance of physical appearance according to sex

	Male (N=520)		Female (N=500)		Total (N=1,020)		ANOVA Test Sig.
	Average	Dev.	Average	Dev.	Average	Dev.	
Fig_Id	5.25	1.07	3.80	1.38	4.54	1.431	0.000
Fig_Ac	5.35	1.36	4.49	1.69	4.93	1.591	0.000
Sat_PhysA	3.55	1.05	3.21	1.06	3.39	1.069	0.000
Soc_Rel1	2.56	1.18	2.57	1.20	2.57	1.189	0.920
Soc_Rel2	2.74	1.23	2.79	1.23	2.76	1.227	0.519
Soc_Rel3	2.86	1.12	2.96	1.14	2.91	1.127	0.203

Source: own elaboration

Table 4. Self-perception, satisfaction with, and social relevance of physical appearance according to age

	11-12 years (N=296)		13-15 years (N=443)		16-17 years (N=281)		Total (N=1,020)		ANOVA Test Sig.
	Average	Dev.	Average	Dev.	Average	Dev.	Average	Dev.	
Fig_Id	4.52	1.49	4.47	1.41	4.66	1.40	4.54	1.43	0.255
Fig_Ac	4.673	1.807	4.898	1.469	5.241	1.483	4.93	1.59	0.000
Sat_PhysA	3.645	1.06	3.339	1.073	3.189	1.023	3.39	1.07	0.000
Soc_Rel1	2.377	1.219	2.628	1.187	2.669	1.142	2.57	1.19	0.008
Soc_Rel2	2.57	1.201	2.794	1.216	2.921	1.249	2.76	1.23	0.004
Soc_Rel3	2.755	1.156	2.992	1.143	2.933	1.055	2.91	1.13	0.026

Source: own elaboration

4.3. Relation between exposure to advertising and self-perception, satisfaction with, and social relevance of physical appearance

A very low and significant inverse relationship was observed between exposure to body and diet advertising on Instagram and TikTok, and self-perception of the ideal figure and satisfaction with physical appearance. A very low and significant direct relationship between these two platforms and the social relevance of physical appearance was also observed in the three cases studied. Moreover, there was a very low and significant direct association between YouTube and the social relevance of physical appearance to influence the perception of others.

Table 5. Correlational analysis between variables

		Exp_ YT	Exp_ IG	Exp_ TK	Fig_ Id	Fig_ Ac	Sat_ PhysA	Soc_ Rel1	Soc_ Rel2	Soc_ Rel3
Exp_ YT	Corr. PearsonSig. (bilateral)	1	.189** .000	.252** .000	.022 .516	.028 .408	.030 .377	.067* .047	.022 .515	.015 .659
Exp_ IG	Corr. PearsonSig. (bilateral)	.189** .000	1	.448** .000	-.107** .001	.039 .241	-.182** .000	.157** .000	.175** .000	.067* .045
Exp_ TK	Corr. PearsonSig. (bilateral)	.252** .000	.448** .000	1	-.080* .017	-.013 .691	-.159** .000	.094** .005	.077* .021	.103** .002
Fig_ Id	Corr. PearsonSig. (bilateral)	.022 .516	-.107** .001	-.080* .017	1	.565** .000	.071* .035	.000 .994	-.029 .392	-.035 .302
Fig_ Ac	Corr. PearsonSig. (bilateral)	.028 .408	.039 .241	-.013 .691	.565** .000	1	-.154** .000	.092** .006	.026 .438	-.062 .066
Sat_ PhysA	Corr. PearsonSig. (bilateral)	.030 .377	-.182** .000	-.159** .000	.071* .035	-.154** .000	1	-.216** .000	-.133** .000	-.036 .285
Soc_Rel1	Corr. PearsonSig. (bilateral)	.067* .047	.157** .000	.094** .005	.000 .994	.092** .006	-.216** .000	1	.442** .000	.279** .000
Soc_Rel2	Corr. PearsonSig. (bilateral)	.022 .515	.175** .000	.077* .021	-.029 .392	.026 .438	-.133** .000	.442** .000	1	.265** .000
Soc_Rel3	Corr. PearsonSig. (bilateral)	.015 .659	.067* .045	.103** .002	-.035 .302	-.062 .066	-.036 .285	.279** .000	.265** .000	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (bilateral).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (bilateral).

Source: own elaboration

5. Discussion

The first objective confirms high exposure on TikTok and YouTube. However, on TikTok and Instagram, girls and participants aged 16–17 were significantly more exposed. The results are consistent with the literature, which indicates a high presence of food and beverage advertising that promotes products harmful to the health of minors (Coates et al., 2019a, 2019b; Potvin Kent et al., 2019; Powell & Pring, 2024; Winzer et al., 2022), and with a Peruvian report that reveals that this industry invests the most in digital marketing (IAB Perú, 2024). In addition, the results are consistent with Spanish studies (Cortés-Quesada & Vizcaíno-Verdú, 2025; Perales-Albert & Rodríguez Carro, 2025), although in Spain, most exposure was recorded on YouTube, while it was TikTok in Peru. In both cases, Instagram occupies the third position. However, these studies did not investigate differences by sex and age with respect to exposure, and did not consider a latent need to replicate methodologies and instruments in different regions that enable comparisons to consolidate results (Sádaba, 2024). In this sense, the present study contributes to the field by segregating the results by sex and age to favor comparison by region and facilitate the consolidation of knowledge. It also contributes to analyses of influencers advertising body and diet products, specifically the impact such advertising has on the self-image, beauty ideals, and satisfaction of Peruvian children, particularly when the literature indicates that this is an emerging field. So far, most data relate

to Brazil and Mexico, which shows the need for studies from other countries in the region (Andres et al., 2024).

The second objective reveals self-perception discrepancies between ideal and actual figure: children aspire to a slimmer appearance than their actual one. This discrepancy is significantly higher among girls, indicating greater concern and dissatisfaction with their appearance. The result is consistent with studies that indicate greater vulnerability of women to feel frustration and dissatisfaction with physical appearance when considering that images promoted by influencers are unattainable (Bajaña Marín & García, 2023; García Puertas, 2020; Lozano-Muñoz et al., 2022). Results also coincide with studies that reveal greater self-discrepancies among women, making them more vulnerable to concerns about appearance when exposed to influencer content (Möri et al., 2022). A study indicated that celebrities have more influence among women (Aw & Chuah, 2021). The results confirm that girls tend to prefer a thinner appearance, as the average of their ideal figure is between the first and second third of the scale. Among boys, the body figure is more robust and self-discrepancy is lower, which indicates a lower tendency toward thinness, concern and dissatisfaction with appearance. In addition, adolescents aged 16-17 showed greater self-discrepancies and a greater tendency toward robustness of their actual figure. This is consistent with evidence suggesting greater social pressure on adolescents to look attractive (Unicef España, 2021), which is induced by a tendency to social comparison as a result of frequent exposure (Alfonso-Fuertes et al., 2023). They may experience more pressure regarding appearance and, therefore, tend to evaluate their actual figure more harshly, as images presented by influencers are idealized and have negative effects on the body self-image of followers (Powell & Pring, 2024).

The third objective shows considerable dissatisfaction. Girls and participants aged 16-17 were significantly more dissatisfied than boys and other age groups, even higher than the overall average in both cases. These findings point in the same direction as the theory that establishes a direct relationship between self-perceived discrepancies regarding the ideal and actual figure with preoccupation and dissatisfaction with appearance (Mason et al., 2022; Möri et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2021). However, the dissatisfaction of Peruvian children may be greater than that of their Spanish peers (Virós-Martín et al., 2024, 2025) because in Peru the results were related to the deterioration of children's health and the higher prevalence of overweight and obesity girls grapple with (Unicef Perú, 2023). The level of dissatisfaction evidenced by the results suggests that children are exposed to idealized images by influencers, since previous theory has indicated that these affect body self-perception, increasing pressure and dissatisfaction with appearance (Bell et al., 2024; Powell & Pring, 2024). Likewise, it is well established that social networks are disseminating idealized images that seem unattainable (Dahlgren et al., 2024; Monks et al., 2021).

The fourth objective shows that the physical aspect is seen as socially very relevant in the three cases analyzed. The results did not show significant differences by sex, but indicated that participants aged 16-17 attribute greater importance to body shape than other age groups, which suggests that the higher the age, the greater the importance given to appearance. These results coincide with a Spanish survey, which revealed that physical appearance is highly relevant for adolescents, especially 15-16-year-olds, and this importance increases with age (Unicef España, 2021). In addition, results are consistent with the theory that highlights the value of social acceptance, especially for adolescents, which is related to appearance (Ehmke, 2024). Since the literature indicates that children are frequently exposed to digital social evaluation (Fatt & Fardouly, 2023), it is likely that they seek to form and maintain desired

impressions with others, which they then evaluate based on social media interactions such as “likes” (Ehmke, 2024).

The fifth objective proves significant differences according to sex related to exposure, self-perception and satisfaction, and age, but not regarding social relevance. Girls and participants aged 16–17 were more exposed to advertising on Instagram and TikTok. This result was unexpected in part, as a Spanish report indicated a greater inclination of women to use Instagram, but not TikTok, although in both cases older adolescents were more exposed (IAB España, 2023). The results of the present study revealed greater self-discrepancies and dissatisfaction with appearance among this group, consistent with the theory that points to women's greater vulnerability (Möri et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2021). The consistency of the results with the literature is useful to consolidate findings regarding the greater impact on women, but more studies are needed to compare results by age. Finally, participants aged 16–17 deemed appearance more socially relevant, but were also more inclined to physical robustness. The results are consistent with theory suggesting that images of attractive persons posted on social networks increase pressure and concern about body shape among adolescents (Ehmke, 2024) through digital social judgement (Fatt & Fardouly, 2023). This could explain the great importance attributed to physical appearance.

The sixth objective proves an inverse relationship between exposure on Instagram and TikTok, and ideal figure and satisfaction. The more exposed children were on these platforms, the greater the preference for a thinner physique and the higher the dissatisfaction with appearance. The result is consistent with theory suggesting social media use has a highly negative impact on the self-perception of appearance (Aslan & Tolan, 2022; Bajaña Marín & García, 2023; García Puertas, 2020; Milmo & Skopeliti, 2021). A direct link was also observed between these two platforms and the social relevance of appearance, and between YouTube and the social relevance of appearance to improve the perception of others. Thus, greater exposure on these platforms would increase the social relevance of appearance, as anticipated (Bell et al., 2024; Cataldo et al., 2021; Dahlgren et al., 2024)

6. Conclusions

This study confirms high exposure of Peruvian minors to advertising related to body and diet on Instagram and TikTok, two predominantly visual social networks, which have the greatest impact on physical self-perception, in line with health sciences theory (Bajaña Marín & García, 2023; García Puertas, 2020). In addition, there is evidence of self-discrepancies between ideal and actual figure, which reveals an aspiration of children, mostly girls and participants aged 16–17 of both sexes, to be slimmer. Previous data suggested some children are unhappy with their appearance, which was confirmed by the low level of satisfaction in general, particularly for the two groups mentioned. It is likely that these groups experience more pressure, concern, and dissatisfaction with their appearance, as evidence suggests a direct relationship between body worries and dissatisfaction and perceived physical discrepancies (Mason et al., 2022; Möri et al., 2022), especially when considering the results showing that appearance is very relevant for children, which was also found in previous analyses (Unicef España, 2021). This result also suggests that the fear of social evaluation accentuates this importance for the social dynamics minors engage in (Fatt & Fardouly, 2023; Roccaforte & Cohen, 2024). Finally, correlational analysis showed an inverse association between exposure to influencer advertising on Instagram and TikTok, perception of an ideal figure and satisfaction with the actual one, but a direct relationship with the social relevance of appearance. This means that minors' greater exposure to these social networks fosters a

greater tendency toward thinness and less satisfaction with actual physical appearance. It also impacts the perceived social relevance of appearance. Thus, these results suggest some incidence of influencers advertising body and diet products to minors. However, it is necessary to delve deeper into this aspect with an instrument that covers all factors that could affect physical self-perception, in addition to greater exposure to this type of advertising.

7. Theoretical and practical implications

This study has considerable theoretical and practical implications for the advertising of body and diet products by influencers targeting Peruvian adolescents. Its extensive review of the literature enables theoretical understanding of the potential impact influencer advertising has on minors' self-perception, their satisfaction with, and perceived social relevance of physical appearance. It also offers novel evidence on the variables of analysis in the study of adolescents' priorities. The results help influencers, their managers, advertisers and agencies to understand the possible impact on the target audience, so that they can self-regulate responsibly. In addition, it provides knowledge parents can use to better shape their children's outlook. This study expands knowledge in the region, which favors the development of more specific regulations and public policies that ensure the well-being of minors and promote the inclusion of these issues in the national public agenda—fundamental aspects of media and advertising literacy.

8. Limitations

Certain limitations must be considered. The quantitative design, although relevant here, limits understanding the repercussions of exposure to influencer advertising. In addition, the data collected are self-reported and perceptions may not match reality. Future studies should qualitatively analyze this problem to gain deeper knowledge of the processing mechanisms of influencer advertising and its impact on the variables analyzed. It is also necessary to recognize that self-perception, satisfaction, and social relevance are impacted by multiple causes besides advertising. The literature addresses some of these aspects, but the instrument does not cover all of them. To overcome this limitation, it is necessary to design an instrument incorporating these aspects for a more precise understanding of the link between exposure and the other study variables.

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