

# The Impact of Social Media's Healthy Lifestyles and Fit Bodies on Teenage Girls

E.N. Clegg<sup>1\*</sup>, M.P. Leary<sup>1</sup>, M.E. Santella<sup>1</sup>, F. Barazzetta<sup>1</sup>,

P.J. Murray<sup>1</sup>, J. Downs<sup>2</sup>, M.D. Olfert<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>West Virginia University; <sup>2</sup>Carnegie Mellon University

## Abstract

**Objective:** Previous research shows, that exposure to social media and “fitspiration” pages leads to negative mood (Tiggemann, Zaccardo, 2015) and lower self-esteem (Tiggemann, Slater, 2013), specifically in women. Research also shows, that women edit photos more frequently than men and feel worse about body comparisons (Fox, Vendemia, 2016). With the increase in social media outlets and time spent on these over the years, the potential reach has spread to include younger adolescent girls. The purpose of this research was to qualitatively assess the impact of the healthy lifestyles and fit bodies seen on social media on teen girls. **Methods:** A 17 item survey followed by 9 focus group discussions moderated by trained researchers occurred in 27 teen girls in Middle School (MS) and High School (HS). Thematic analysis of the data was conducted by 2 trained researchers. **Results:** Participants consisting of eight MS (age:  $12.4 \pm 0.7$  years; BMI:  $25.2 \pm 8.9$  kg/m<sup>2</sup>) and 19 HS (age:  $16.1 \pm 1.3$  years; BMI:  $23.3 \pm 3.6$  kg/m<sup>2</sup>) girls. MS girls are motivated by SM pages; people that emphasize healthy lifestyles; and fit bodies. They recognize that some content are unrealistic, but become more motivated when they see other motivated individuals. Some MS girls reported feeling discouraged and envious, particularly when they see very fit people or celebrities. HS teens tend to report feeling discouraged and envious but acknowledge that this content can also be motivating. HS girls seemed more aware that many ads and posts are photo-enhanced or manipulated and that attaining the same physique is often unrealistic. **Conclusions:** While both MS and HS groups reported feeling discouraged and envious, MS girls reported more motivation from this SM content while HS girls appeared more aware that these images were manipulated. **Funding Source:** West Virginia University Hatch WV00641; Collaboration with Carnegie Mellon University.



## Methods

Sample:

- 27 teenage girls
  - 8 middle school girls (mean age  $12.4 \pm 0.7$  years)
  - 19 high school girls (mean age  $16.1 \pm 1.3$  years)
- From local schools in Morgantown, WV

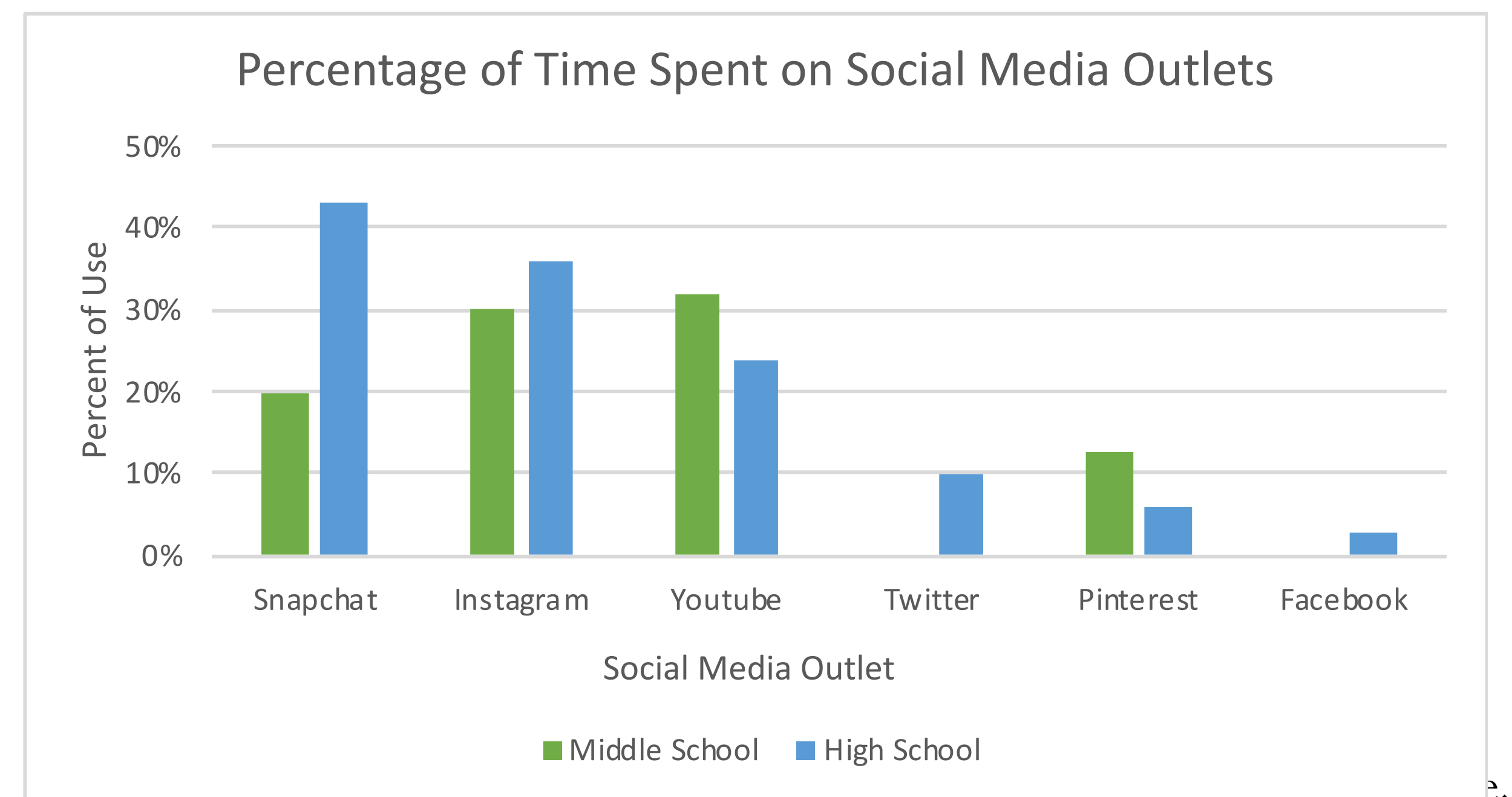
Data Collection:

- Online Survey
  - HS (n=19)
  - MS (n=8)
- Focus Groups (n=27)
  - Conducted by trained moderators with digital recordings and a note taker
  - All females (n=3-5 per group)
  - Data compared to identify saturation point
  - Content analyzed by researchers trained in qualitative data analysis



## Results

- MS girls BMI:  $25.2 \pm 8.9$  kg/m<sup>2</sup>
- HS girls BMI:  $23.3 \pm 3.6$  kg/m<sup>2</sup>
- On average, HS girls report spending 3 hours 23 minutes on social media a day. In comparison, MS report spending 1 hour 14 minutes on social media per day.



- HS girls spent most of their time on Snapchat
  - “Snapchat is more personal than texting because you can see your friends faces.”
- MS girls spent only 20% on snapchat and 30% on Instagram, with their most amount of time spent on YouTube.
- Twitter and Facebook showed very little use in HS and no use in MS.
  - MS: “Facebook is out of date”.
  - HS: “I feel like we use Instagram and snapchat more because most people have those. If I got on Twitter or something, I wouldn’t be on it as much and it wouldn’t be as interesting because not all of my friends would on it to interact with me and see what they are doing.”
- MS girls are motivated by SM pages; people that emphasize healthy lifestyles; and fit bodies. They recognize that some content are unrealistic, but become more motivated when they see other motivated individuals. Some MS girls did report feeling discouraged and envious, particularly when they see very fit people or celebrities.
  - MS: “It is important for girls their age to hear about empowerment from celebrities”.
- HS teens, on the other hand, tend to report feeling discouraged and envious but acknowledge that this content can also be motivating. HS girls seemed more aware that many ads and posts are photo-enhanced or manipulated and that attaining the same physique is often unrealistic.
  - HS: “Sometimes, I’m like, not really envious but it pushes me to want that more. Guys with really big muscles, that’s not aspirable, but people that are just fit and slim and eat healthy, that’s helpful.”

## Conclusion

While both middle school and high school groups reported feeling discouraged and envious, middle school girls reported more motivation from this social media content while high school girls appeared more aware that these images were manipulated. The results from the survey and focus group data show information that slightly differs from the literature. This is important to continue research and comparisons in middle school and high school aged girls to better understand social media’s affect on their lifestyles and behavior.

## References

1. Fox J, Vendemia MA: Selective self-presentation and social comparison through photographs on social networking sites. *Cyberpsychology, behavior, and social networking* 2016, 19:593-600.
  2. Tiggemann M, Slater A: NetGirls: The Internet, Facebook, and body image concern in adolescent girls. *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 2013, 46:630-633.
- Tiggemann M, Zaccardo M: “Exercise to be fit, not skinny”: The effect of fitspiration imagery on women’s body image. *Body image* 2015, 15:61-67.