Children, Healthy Lifestyle and Media Literacy

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Article Info	Abstract
	Background: Media content plays a significant role in shaping behaviors, attitudes, and lifestyle choices, especially among children, a demographic that is highly impressionable and actively engaged with various media platforms. **Aims:** This article explores the role of media literacy in equipping children to critically evaluate media content that promotes unhealthy lifestyles, including poor dietary choices, sedentary behavior, celebrity worship and unrealistic body ideals. **Methodology:** This study employs a qualitative approach, synthesizing data from case studies, government reports, and peer-reviewed academic literature to explore the role of media literacy in fostering healthy lifestyle choices among children. **Findings:** The findings indicate that current media literacy education programs for children are insufficient, largely because they often fail to include parental education. Parents play a pivotal role as mediatorsn of children's media consumption, and their active participation in media literacy education strengthens the impact of such interventions. The article argues for an integrated media literacy curriculum targeting both children and parents to create a more comprehensive understanding of healthy lifestyle practices and critical media engagement. Recommendations for policy, educational frameworks, and family-centered interventions are proposed to address these gaps. **Conclusions:** We emphasize the importance of a holistic approach to media literacy that includes all involved people and bodies in promoting healthier lifestyle choices among children.

1. Introduction

Media content plays a significant role in shaping behaviors, attitudes, and lifestyle choices, especially among children, a demographic that is highly impressionable and actively engaged with various media platforms. From advertisements promoting fast food and sugary beverages to social media influencers showcasing unattainable beauty standards, children are frequently exposed to messages that normalize unhealthy lifestyle choices (Zamani et al., 2021). As Kharazmi and Mohammadi (2020) demonstrate through their analysis of media framing, the way content is presented can significantly shape public perceptions and responses, particularly in challenging circumstances. This growing concern has prompted researchers, educators, and policymakers to explore the potential of media literacy as a tool for empowering children to critically engage with such content. However, despite its recognized value, media literacy education often remains fragmented and insufficient, particularly in its exclusion of a key involved group: parents. In parallel, globalization has significantly shaped cultural consumption patterns and communication technologies, influencing both media and urban living spaces. This dual impact underscores the interconnectedness of societal trends and the need for media literacy to address these multifaceted influences (Dariush et al., 2021).

In their educational article, Arsalani, Sakhaei and Zamani (2022) emphasize:

> "Parents play a crucial role in modeling media literacy behaviors and facilitating open discussions about digital experiences. Communities can provide opportunities for collaborative learning and mentorship, while policymakers can establish frameworks that ensure media literacy is integrated into national education systems. This multi-stakeholder approach ensures that media literacy is not relegated to a single domain but is recognized as a shared responsibility across society" (Arsalani et al., 2022: 4).

Elsewhere, they say:

> "Through co-viewing, adults can help decode these messages and facilitate discussions that uncover deeper meanings. For example, when watching a movie that portrays stereotypical gender roles, parents can guide children in identifying these stereotypes and questioning their validity. This interactive approach helps children develop a more critical mindset, making them less likely to passively accept everything they encounter in the media" (Arsalani et al., 2022: 22).

The rising influence of media on children's health and lifestyle choices has been well-documented. With the onset of COVID-19,

societies rapidly transitioned many activities, including formal and informal education, to online platforms. Families often welcomed this shift, allowing children to immerse themselves in online leisure activities and interact with friends in virtual environments. While this adaptation was necessary, it brought challenges to traditional forms of 'natural education' (Shahghasemi et al., 2023). More concerningly, it also intensified children's exposure to media content, increasing the risks associated with unhealthy IT use, which has its effects not only through content but also through the sheer technology itself (Soroori Sarabi et al., 2023).

Studies show that excessive exposure to media promoting unhealthy behaviors correlates with increased risk of obesity, body image issues, and sedentary habits among children. In response, media literacy programs have been designed to help children identify and question the persuasive strategies used in such content. Media literacy enables children to deconstruct media messages, understand the intentions behind them, and make more informed decisions regarding their behavior. However, the success of these programs is often undermined by the lack of involvement from parents, who are crucial gatekeepers of children's media consumption (Livingstone, 2014).

Parents' role in mediating children's interactions with media is complicated. They serve as role models, actively or passively shaping children's attitudes toward media through their own behavior and conversations. Research has highlighted the effectiveness of co-viewing and discussions between parents and children in reducing the impact of harmful media messages. Nevertheless, many parents themselves lack the media literacy skills necessary to guide their children effectively. This gap emphasizes the need for media literacy education programs to be inclusive of both children and their parents, fostering a collaborative approach to healthy media engagement.

Furthermore, the digital age has amplified the need for comprehensive media literacy education. Children are increasingly interacting with media through digital platforms that utilize sophisticated algorithms to capture their attention and influence their preferences. These platforms often blur the lines between entertainment, advertising, and education, making it more challenging for children to recognize unhealthy messages. Without the involvement of informed parents, children may struggle to navigate these complex media environments. Thus, equipping parents with media literacy skills is not just a complementary effort; it is a critical component of any strategy aimed at fostering healthy lifestyle choices among children.

Case studies and government reports have provided valuable insights into the gaps and opportunities in current media literacy initiatives. For example, national campaigns aimed at promoting healthy eating often overlook the role of media in shaping children's dietary habits, focusing instead on traditional educational approaches. Similarly, school-based

media literacy programs may address the technical skills required to analyze media but fail to incorporate discussions about health-related content. By integrating a broader perspective that includes parents, these programs can better address the intersection of media literacy and healthy lifestyle promotion (Mateus, 2021).

The exclusion of parents from media literacy education also reflects broader systemic issues in education policy and public health strategies. Media literacy is often treated as a standalone subject rather than an interdisciplinary effort that intersects with health education, family studies, and social policy. This siloed approach limits the effectiveness of interventions, as children's media consumption is deeply embedded in their social and familial contexts. A more holistic approach would recognize the interconnectedness of these factors and actively involve parents, educators, policymakers, and healthcare professionals in the design and implementation of media literacy programs (Livingstone, 2014).

Furthermore, there is a general consensus that the cultural and socioeconomic diversity of families must be considered when designing media literacy initiatives. Parents from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds may face unique challenges in guiding their children's media use, ranging from limited access to digital tools to cultural norms that shape their attitudes toward media. Tailoring media literacy education to address these diverse needs can enhance its relevance and impact, ensuring that all families have the tools to promote healthy lifestyle choices (Kline et al., 2006).

Policy recommendations emerging from this study emphasize the need for integrated, family-centered approaches to media literacy. Educational frameworks should include curricula designed for parents, equipping them with the skills to engage critically with media and support their children in doing the same. Media literacy programs should leverage global communication tools to enhance awareness and drive behavioral change. Incorporating global communication insights into these programs can amplify their reach and effectiveness, enabling families to adapt to global challenges (Mousavi & Dariush, 2019). Incorporating virtual education into these frameworks offers an opportunity to provide flexible and accessible learning environments for families. Virtual platforms have been shown to effectively address challenges in education by fostering collaboration and promoting critical awareness, making them a valuable addition to media literacy initiatives (Dastyar et al, 2023). Public health campaigns should leverage the influence of parents as partners in promoting healthier behaviors, creating resources that empower families to navigate media content effectively. Some studies (see, for example, Sakhaei et al., 2024) argue that programs for teaching IT to the elderly— regardless of the cost— are essential for improving society as a whole. Finally, collaboration among schools, community organizations, and

government agencies is essential to create a supportive ecosystem for media literacy education.

This article argues for a paradigm shift in the way media literacy education is conceptualized and implemented. By recognizing the interdependence of children and parents in media engagement, it is possible to create more effective strategies for fostering critical media skills and promoting healthy lifestyle choices. This integrated approach has the potential to mitigate the negative impacts of media on children while empowering families to thrive in an increasingly media-saturated world. Through case studies, government reports, and peer-reviewed research, this article provides evidence and recommendations for a more holistic and inclusive model of media literacy education.

2. Methodology
This study employs a qualitative approach, synthesizing data from case studies, government reports, and peer-reviewed academic literature to explore the role of media literacy in fostering healthy lifestyle choices among children. By analyzing existing programs, policies, and educational frameworks, the research identifies key gaps and opportunities in current practices. The selection of sources was guided by their relevance to the study's core themes, including media literacy education, unhealthy lifestyle promotion, and parental involvement. The focus on secondary data ensures a comprehensive examination of the topic through diverse and interdisciplinary perspectives.

3. Findings
3.1. Children and the promoted unhealthy lifestyle
The exposure of children to media content that promotes unhealthy lifestyle habits is an issue of global concern, given its profound implications for physical and mental health. Media channels, such as television, social media, and digital advertising platforms, routinely present persuasive messages encouraging behaviors like excessive consumption of unhealthy foods and prolonged sedentary activities. These behaviors have become normalized in many media narratives, making it increasingly challenging for children to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy choices. Such exposure occurs during formative years, when children's cognitive and emotional development are still underway, rendering them particularly susceptible to the influence of advertising and other promotional content (Dunlop et al., 2016).

One of the most prominent contributors to unhealthy habits among children is the promotion of poor dietary choices through advertisements. Fast food chains, snack companies, and beverage manufacturers spend substantial resources marketing their products to young audiences, often using engaging characters, bright colors, and catchy jingles to capture attention. These advertisements rarely emphasize the health implications of consuming their products, instead

associating them with fun, happiness, and social connection. For instance, commercials for sugary cereals or soft drinks often depict these items as indispensable components of an enjoyable lifestyle. Such portrayals overshadow nutritional education efforts, causing children to associate unhealthy foods with positive emotions and moments of reward.

Additionally, children encounter significant encouragement toward sedentary behavior through media (Strasburger et al., 2010). Streaming platforms, online gaming, and other digital entertainment options are designed to maximize user engagement, often by incorporating features that discourage breaks or pauses. Children, drawn in by the interactivity and constant flow of content, spend extended hours consuming digital media, often at the expense of physical activity. This shift toward screen-dominated leisure time has contributed to a decline in traditional forms of exercise, such as outdoor play and organized sports. Over time, such habits can have cumulative negative effects on children's physical health, increasing their risk of conditions like obesity and related metabolic disorders (Zhou et al., 2015).

Another concerning aspect of media's role in promoting unhealthy lifestyles is the way it encourages mindless consumption. The rise of personalized advertising, driven by sophisticated algorithms, ensures that children are targeted with content tailored to their preferences and habits. These algorithms perpetuate cycles of exposure, reinforcing children's inclinations toward particular types of food or entertainment while limiting opportunities for them to encounter alternative, healthier options. The seamless integration of advertising into entertainment, such as product placements in popular videos or games, further blurs the line between content consumption and persuasion, making it even harder for young audiences to critically evaluate the messages they receive (Dunlop et al., 2016).

The normalization of unhealthy behaviors is not limited to direct advertising but extends to the broader narratives perpetuated by media. For example, popular shows and films frequently portray excessive eating or junk food consumption as humorous or harmless, trivializing the long-term consequences of such behaviors. Similarly, scenes of leisure often depict characters engrossed in screens, subtly reinforcing the acceptability of sedentary lifestyles. While these depictions may seem inconsequential in isolation, their cumulative effect can shape children's perceptions of what constitutes normal or desirable behavior.

Media literacy programs have been introduced as a means of combating these influences, equipping children with the skills to critically analyze and question the media content they consume. However, these programs face numerous challenges, including a lack of consistent implementation and limited focus on the specific health implications of media exposure. Children who participate in these programs may learn to recognize advertising techniques but often fail

to connect this understanding to broader lifestyle choices. Moreover, the appeal and pervasiveness of unhealthy media content frequently outweigh the relatively modest reach and impact of educational initiatives.

The survey conducted by Sabbar et al. (2021) revealed a concerning lack of skepticism toward social media content. This insight directly supports the argument for enhancing children's and parents' critical media literacy, as proposed here, to empower them to resist unhealthy lifestyle messages effectively. Children see hazardous behavior of adults on social media and they might be tempted to copycat them. In an informative article, Soroori Sarabi, Arsalani and Toosi (2020) indicated that humans have a bizzare tendency to resort to hazardous behavior to attract attention on social media. They enumerates cases in which this zeal for the "spectacle" was responsible for people's death. To them:

> "Workers in hazardous jobs such as construction, logging, manufacturing, and mining find themselves uniquely positioned to capture content that showcases physical feats, high-stakes environments, or dramatic visuals. For example, a construction worker might record themselves balancing precariously on a beam at a great height or operating heavy machinery in unconventional ways. While these posts may garner likes, shares, and admiration, they often come at a significant cost—an increased risk of injury or even death. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced among younger workers, who often exhibit a stronger inclination toward social media engagement. Studies indicate that younger demographics are more likely to seek validation and social capital through online interactions, making them vulnerable to the pressures of creating sensational content. The pursuit of online visibility can lead to a normalization of risky behaviors, as these actions are rewarded with attention and approval from peers and followers" (Soroori Sarabi et al., 2020).

While grown people are involved in such mindless activities, parental involvement is a critical factor in mediating children's responses to media. Parents who actively engage with their children's media consumption— by discussing the content they view, setting limits on screen time, and modeling healthy behaviors— can mitigate some of the negative effects of media exposure. However, many parents face barriers to fulfilling this role effectively, ranging from time constraints to their own lack of media literacy. Without adequate resources and support, parents may struggle to provide the guidance their children need, leaving them vulnerable to the persuasive power of unhealthy media messages.

Efforts to regulate the content and targeting strategies of advertisements aimed at children can help reduce their exposure to harmful messages. For instance, restricting the promotion of high-sugar, high-fat products during programming popular with children can limit their influence. Additionally, encouraging media producers to incorporate healthier behaviors into their narratives— such as characters engaging in physical activity or making balanced dietary choices— can provide children with positive examples to emulate.

Education also plays a vital role in counteracting media's promotion of unhealthy lifestyles. Research by Sabbar et al. (2019) reveals that even highly educated individuals often lack sufficient knowledge about basic ethical rules and critical evaluation skills, highlighting the need for more comprehensive educational approaches. Schools, as key institutions in children's lives, are well-positioned to deliver media literacy programs that specifically address the connection between media content and health. Community organizations and public health campaigns can complement these efforts by reaching children outside the classroom, particularly in underserved areas where access to educational resources may be limited.

The promotion of unhealthy lifestyles through media underscores the need for systemic change. Media producers, advertisers, educators, policymakers, and parents all have a role to play in creating an environment that prioritizes children's well-being. By recognizing the interconnectedness of these stakeholders, society can begin to address the complex factors that contribute to unhealthy behaviors among children. The goal should not be to shield children entirely from media but to empower them to engage with it in ways that support their development and health.

3.2. Celebrity worship

Celebrity worship among children is fueled by the omnipresence of media in their lives. Celebrities, who were once confined to specific entertainment or sports domains, are now influential figures across multiple platforms, ranging from social media to streaming services. Children, drawn to the glamour, fame, and success these figures represent, often develop deep admiration for their favorite celebrities. While such admiration can be harmless in moderation, excessive celebrity worship may lead to uncritical acceptance of behaviors, choices, and lifestyles promoted by these figures, shaping children's values, priorities, and decision-making processes (O'Connor & Mercer, 2017).

One of the reasons celebrity worship is so pervasive among children is the accessibility provided by modern media. Social media platforms, in particular, enable celebrities to share personal moments, behind-the-scenes content, and curated glimpses of their lives (Nosrati et al., 2023). This perceived intimacy fosters a sense of connection, leading children

to view these celebrities as relatable and aspirational role models. The lines between reality and performance often blur, causing children to idealize the curated versions of celebrity lives. This idealization may lead to emulation, as children mimic the actions, preferences, and attitudes of their admired figures, without necessarily understanding the broader implications or context.

The promotion of materialism is a significant aspect of celebrity worship. Many celebrities are associated with high-end brands, luxury lifestyles, and extravagant consumption patterns. Through endorsements, product placements, and their own content, they normalize materialistic values, presenting wealth and possessions as markers of success and happiness. Children exposed to such messages may develop unrealistic aspirations, placing undue emphasis on acquiring material goods as a path to personal fulfillment. This can create a disconnection between their lived realities and their perceived goals, potentially fostering dissatisfaction or unhealthy coping mechanisms (Wicks & Nairn, 2014).

Another dimension of celebrity worship is its impact on leisure and interests. Many children prioritize activities linked to their favorite celebrities, such as watching their movies, following their sports teams, or engaging with their endorsed products. While this can provide entertainment and a sense of belonging within fan communities, it may also limit the diversity of experiences and hobbies children explore. Instead of developing a broad range of interests or pursuing activities aligned with their innate talents, children might narrow their focus to align with their celebrity idols, potentially constraining their personal growth (O'Connor & Mercer, 2017).

Social media amplifies the phenomenon of celebrity worship through its interactive nature. Unlike traditional media, where the relationship between audience and celebrity was one-directional, social media allows for perceived reciprocity. A "like" or comment from a celebrity can create a strong sense of validation, further deepening the emotional connection fans feel. For children, who are in critical stages of social and emotional development, this perceived connection can reinforce patterns of celebrity worship, making it more difficult to maintain healthy boundaries between admiration and obsession (Brooks, 2021).

The role of celebrities in promoting consumerism is particularly impactful (Shahghasemi, 2021). Many celebrities launch their own product lines or collaborate with brands, leveraging their influence to drive sales. From fashion and beauty products to food and gadgets, the items endorsed by celebrities often gain popularity among young audiences. Children, swayed by the association between these products and their idols, may pressure their families to purchase them, equating ownership with enhanced social status or personal identity. This can strain family resources and reinforce a cycle of consumerism where

value is placed on consumption over creativity, community, or self-expression.

Celebrity worship can also influence children's perspectives on success and achievement. Many celebrities project an image of effortless success, rarely showcasing the hard work, discipline, and setbacks involved in their journeys. As a result, children may develop unrealistic expectations about their own paths to success, underestimating the effort required to achieve their goals. This can lead to frustration or disillusionment when their own experiences fail to align with the idealized narratives they admire. Additionally, the focus on external validation, such as fame and public approval, may detract from intrinsic motivation, which is essential for long-term personal fulfillment (Xie, 2021).

The emphasis on appearance and lifestyle promoted by celebrity culture can also shift children's priorities. Instead of valuing attributes like kindness, perseverance, or intellectual curiosity, children may begin to prioritize superficial traits associated with celebrity personas. This shift in values can impact their relationships, self-esteem, and overall sense of identity, particularly when they feel they cannot measure up to the standards set by their idols. Moreover, the competitive nature of fandoms, where children vie for recognition as the most devoted followers, can further entrench these unhealthy dynamics.

While the influence of celebrity worship on children has several concerning aspects, it is important to recognize that not all admiration of celebrities is inherently negative. Celebrities who use their platforms to promote positive messages, advocate for social causes, or encourage personal growth can serve as valuable role models. Children who are inspired by such figures may develop an interest in charitable work, activism, or artistic expression, using their admiration as a stepping stone toward constructive pursuits. The key lies in helping children critically evaluate the messages they receive and distinguish between healthy admiration and excessive worship.

Parents and educators play a crucial role in guiding children's perceptions of celebrities and their influence. By conducting open conversations about media and celebrity culture, they can help children understand the curated nature of celebrity personas and the commercial motives behind their actions. Encouraging children to think critically about the values and behaviors, they observe can empower them to make informed choices about the figures they admire. Additionally, exposing children to a diverse range of role models, including everyday individuals who embody positive traits and achievements, can help counterbalance the allure of celebrity worship.

Media literacy programs can also contribute to addressing the challenges posed by celebrity worship. Celebrities often engage in fake activities (Shahghasemi, 2020). By teaching children to analyze the

motivations behind celebrity endorsements, the construction of public personas, and the impact of media narratives, these programs can equip them with the tools to engage with celebrity culture in a balanced way. Such initiatives should emphasize the importance of intrinsic values, resilience, and community involvement, providing children with a framework for evaluating role models beyond their celebrity status.

Addressing the broader cultural context of celebrity worship is equally important. The media industry, which thrives on the commodification of celebrity personas, has a responsibility to consider the impact of its content on young audiences. By creating narratives that celebrate diverse definitions of success and highlight the efforts behind achievements, media producers can contribute to a healthier cultural landscape. Collaboration between media creators, educators, parents and policymakers is essential to ensure that children are exposed to content that supports their development and well-being. So, in this section too we find out that teaching media literacy to children has little effect without involving other stakeholders.

And last but not least, parents, educators, media specialists and other stakeholders should tell children that big-tech corporations have benefit in users spending time on social media. Every move we make on social media is a data and collectively our data are accumulated at service not to ourselves but to the big-tech corporations (Sarfi et al., 2021). Our children should be thought about celebrities' role in keeping us busy on social media to make us produce more data.

3.3. Cyberbullying

Amanda Todd was a bright, bubbly 15-year-old Canadian girl who fell victim to the cruelty of online predators and bullies. It all started innocently enough. In 2009, at the age of 12, Amanda made a new friend online. This person, unbeknownst to her, was a stranger with malicious intent. They convinced her to flash her breasts on webcam, capturing the image. This seemingly harmless act would forever alter the course of her life. The stranger began to blackmail Amanda, threatening to release the photo if she didn't comply with their demands. This led to a downward spiral of fear, anxiety, and self-doubt. The photo was indeed shared online, and Amanda became a target of relentless cyberbullying. She was mocked, humiliated, and ostracized by her peers. The bullying extended beyond the digital realm. Amanda was physically assaulted at school and subjected to cruel taunts and rumors. She changed schools multiple times, hoping to escape the torment, but the abuse followed her. The constant fear and humiliation took a toll on her mental health. In September 2012, Amanda took a desperate step. She posted a video on YouTube titled "My story: Struggling, bullying, suicide, self-harm". In the video, she silently held up flashcards detailing her ordeal. The video went viral, garnering millions of views and sparking global outrage. Sadly, it was too late. A month later, on

October 10, 2012, Amanda took her own life. Her tragic death sent shockwaves through communities worldwide, highlighting the devastating consequences of cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying has become a significant challenge in the digital age and affects children across various age groups and social backgrounds. Unlike traditional bullying, which is often confined to physical or verbal confrontations in specific settings, cyberbullying transcends physical spaces and operates through digital platforms such as social media, messaging apps, and online gaming communities. Its pervasive nature makes it especially harmful, as it can infiltrate every aspect of a child's life, leaving them vulnerable at home, school, and virtually anywhere they are connected online. Understanding the dynamics of cyberbullying and its effects on children is crucial for developing effective strategies to mitigate its impact (Çakar-Mengü & Mengü, 2023).

One of the defining characteristics of cyberbullying is its anonymity. Perpetrators often exploit the faceless nature of digital interactions to harass, threaten, or demean their victims without fear of immediate consequences. This anonymity emboldens bullies to engage in behavior they might avoid in face-to-face interactions. For children on the receiving end, the inability to identify their tormentors can intensify feelings of helplessness and fear, compounding the psychological toll of bullying. This digital veil also complicates efforts to hold perpetrators accountable, as tracking and identifying them often requires significant technological resources and cooperation from platform providers.

The reach and permanence of cyberbullying further differentiate it from traditional bullying. A single harmful message, image, or video can be disseminated to a vast audience within seconds, amplifying its impact exponentially. The content often remains accessible long after the initial incident, serving as a persistent reminder of the trauma and allowing the harm to resurface repeatedly. For children, this permanence can make it seem as though there is no escape from the ridicule or humiliation, leading to heightened stress, anxiety, and even depression (Chan, 2024).

The social dynamics of cyberbullying are also complex, as they often involve bystanders who play an indirect but significant role. Unlike traditional bullying, where witnesses might feel pressured to intervene or report incidents, online bystanders can easily ignore or even perpetuate the bullying by liking, sharing, or commenting on harmful content. This passive or active reinforcement of cyberbullying can make victims feel further isolated and unsupported, exacerbating their emotional distress. Additionally, the lack of immediate consequences for bystanders' actions online often leads to a normalization of such behavior, perpetuating a culture of cyberbullying.

Children who experience cyberbullying frequently face a range of

negative outcomes, spanning emotional, psychological, and academic domains. Emotionally, they may feel isolated, rejected, or ashamed, especially if the bullying targets deeply personal aspects of their identity or appearance. Over time, these feelings can erode their self-esteem and contribute to long-term issues such as social withdrawal or difficulty forming trusting relationships. Psychologically, cyberbullying has been linked to increased rates of anxiety, depression, and even suicidal ideation among children. The pervasive nature of digital interactions means that victims often have little respite from the bullying, further intensifying these negative effects.

Academically, cyberbullying can disrupt children's ability to focus and engage in school activities. Victims often experience a decline in academic performance, as the stress and emotional turmoil caused by cyberbullying interfere with their concentration and motivation. They may also avoid school altogether, fearing that their peers are aware of the online harassment or that the bullying will extend into physical spaces. This avoidance can lead to chronic absenteeism, further exacerbating academic challenges and hindering long-term educational and career prospects.

Enkhtugs (2023) examines the relationship between self-presentation and cyberbullying in the digital age, using Goffman's (1959) framework on the presentation of self. The study investigates how children navigate their identities in virtual and non-virtual spaces in the context of cyberbullying, addressing both victim and perpetrator perspectives. Employing a phenomenological approach, the research draws on qualitative interviews and participant-generated visual data to explore these dynamics. Enkhtugs's findings highlight the fluidity of identity roles in cyberbullying, challenging the dichotomy of victim and perpetrator. Participants' identity construction and presentation strategies are shown to influence their coping mechanisms and social positioning. Cyberbullying victimization emerges as a significant form of online harm, exacerbating social inequalities and digital vulnerabilities, particularly in the absence of adequate emotional and mental health support. The study underscores how cyberbullying normalizes online transgressions and shapes young people's perceptions of digital interaction and morality. Enkhtugs advocates for targeted mental health interventions and the development of supportive environments for those affected by cyberbullying.

Parents, educators, and policymakers face significant challenges in addressing cyberbullying due to its multifaceted nature and the ever-evolving landscape of digital platforms. One of the primary obstacles is the difficulty in monitoring children's online activities without infringing on their privacy or autonomy. While parental controls and monitoring tools can help mitigate risks, they are not foolproof and may inadvertently strain parent-child relationships if perceived as intrusive. Educators, too, often lack the training or resources to address

cyberbullying effectively, as it typically occurs outside of school hours and beyond their direct purview.

Efforts to combat cyberbullying often focus on promoting digital citizenship and media literacy among children. Digital citizenship initiatives aim to instill a sense of responsibility and ethical behavior in online interactions, encouraging children to consider the consequences of their actions and treat others with respect. Media literacy programs complement these efforts by teaching children to recognize, report, and resist harmful online behavior. These programs emphasize critical thinking and empathy, equipping children with the tools to navigate complex social dynamics online and respond to cyberbullying in constructive ways.

Parental co-viewing is another critical component in addressing cyberbullying. Parents who actively engage in their children's digital lives— by discussing online experiences, setting boundaries for screen time, and conducting open communication— can help mitigate the risk of cyberbullying and provide crucial support if incidents occur. However, many parents face barriers to effective engagement, including a lack of familiarity with digital platforms or the time constraints of balancing work and family responsibilities. Providing parents with resources and training to enhance their digital literacy can empower them to play a more active role in preventing and addressing cyberbullying.

Policy interventions also play a crucial role in tackling cyberbullying. Governments and regulatory bodies can implement measures to hold perpetrators accountable and ensure that digital platforms take proactive steps to prevent and address harmful behavior. For example, legislation requiring social media companies to establish reporting mechanisms and remove harmful content promptly can reduce the prevalence of cyberbullying and provide victims with a sense of recourse. Additionally, policies promoting education and awareness campaigns can help create a broader cultural shift toward rejecting cyberbullying and fostering a more inclusive digital environment.

El Asam and Samara (2016) provide a comprehensive review of the psychological and legal complexities surrounding cyberbullying, focusing on the UK legal framework. Cyberbullying is recognized as a widespread issue among children and adolescents, exacerbated by increased reliance on digital technology. The psychological consequences of cyberbullying, including severe mental health outcomes and the risk of suicide, underscore the urgency for effective prevention and intervention measures. The review evaluates several UK statutes that may apply to cyberbullying, including the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, Communications Act 2003, and Malicious Communications Act 1988, among others. However, the authors argue that the absence of a clear and consistent legal definition of cyberbullying limits the applicability and enforcement of these laws.

Challenges include the difficulty of proving intent to harm, gathering sufficient evidence, addressing jurisdictional issues in cross-border cyberbullying cases, and navigating the role of technology in facilitating harm. Additional complications arise from the age of criminal responsibility and limited public awareness of legal recourses. The authors advocate for modifications to existing legislation to better address the nuances of cyberbullying, as well as the creation of targeted laws to provide clarity and deterrence. They emphasize the need for a multidisciplinary approach, integrating legal reforms with education, technology regulation, and mental health support to combat cyberbullying effectively.

Despite these efforts, significant challenges remain in addressing cyberbullying effectively. The rapid evolution of digital technology means that new platforms and features often outpace the development of preventative measures, creating opportunities for cyberbullying to take new forms. Mohammadi and Kharazmi (2021) demonstrate through their analysis of remote education during the COVID-19 pandemic that rapid transitions to online environments require both technical and emotional support systems to be effective. For example, the rise of anonymous messaging apps and ephemeral content has made it increasingly difficult to track and address harmful behavior. Similarly, the global nature of digital interactions complicates enforcement efforts, as perpetrators and victims may be located in different jurisdictions with varying legal frameworks.

In this section too we can find that addressing cyberbullying requires a holistic and collaborative approach that involves all stakeholders, including children, parents, educators, policymakers, and technology companies. Children need to be empowered with the skills and knowledge to navigate online spaces safely and responsibly, while parents and educators must be equipped with the tools to guide and support them effectively. Policymakers and technology companies must work together to create digital environments that prioritize user safety and accountability, ensuring that children can engage with technology without fear of harm.

3.4. Hate speech
Hate speech on social media and the internet poses a significant challenge, particularly in the context of cultivating a healthy lifestyle for children. While hate speech has traditionally been associated with issues of discrimination and intolerance, its indirect influence on children's mental and physical health warrants deeper consideration. Recent research by Sabbar et al. (2023) on orientalist self-perceptions demonstrates how media exposure can profoundly influence individuals' self-image and cultural identity. Social media platforms, with their vast reach and interactivity, often expose children to hostile language, discriminatory rhetoric, and negative stereotypes that can

erode self-esteem, create stress, and foster unhealthy behaviors. Understanding how hate speech intersects with children's pursuit of a healthy lifestyle is essential for addressing its broader implications (Andrade & Pischetola, 2016).

One of the primary ways hate speech impacts children is through the creation of a hostile online environment. Social media platforms and internet forums frequently harbor toxic conversations, where users express prejudiced opinions or direct insults at specific groups. Children who encounter such content— whether as targets, bystanders, or unintended recipients— are exposed to negativity that can affect their emotional well-being. The stress and anxiety caused by hateful language can interfere with their ability to make healthy lifestyle choices, such as maintaining regular physical activity, eating a balanced diet, or building positive social relationships. Over time, this exposure can lead to feelings of isolation and insecurity, which are often precursors to mental health challenges (Igwebuike, 2021).

Hate speech on digital platforms also exacerbates exclusion and discrimination, further undermining children's efforts to lead healthy lives. For example, children from marginalized communities are often disproportionately targeted by hateful rhetoric that reinforces stereotypes or denigrates their cultural, ethnic, or religious identities. This type of content can discourage children from participating in group activities, sports, or community-based programs that are essential for physical and social development. Instead, they may retreat from public spaces, both online and offline, reducing opportunities for engagement and collaboration. The sense of alienation fostered by hate speech can have long-term consequences, shaping children's attitudes toward themselves and others in ways that hinder their holistic well-being.

The normalization of hate speech on social media platforms also presents challenges for modeling healthy behaviors. Children are impressionable, and exposure to hateful language can desensitize them to its harms, leading to the adoption of similar patterns of interaction. This normalization creates a cycle where children replicate the hostility they encounter, perpetuating a culture of aggression and negativity. Such behaviors are antithetical to the principles of a healthy lifestyle, which emphasize respect, empathy, and collaboration. Instead of fostering positive interactions, the prevalence of hate speech encourages divisiveness and discourages constructive dialogue, further alienating children from supportive networks and opportunities for growth (Salma, 2019).

The indirect effects of hate speech on physical health are equally concerning. Stress and anxiety caused by exposure to hateful content can trigger physiological responses, such as increased cortisol levels, which are linked to numerous health issues, including weight gain, weakened immunity, and chronic fatigue. Over time, these stress responses can disrupt children's sleep patterns, appetite, and energy

levels, creating a cascade of negative effects on their physical health. For children already navigating the challenges of adolescence, these compounded stressors can significantly undermine their ability to maintain a healthy and active lifestyle.

Hate speech also intersects with digital algorithms in ways that exacerbate its visibility and impact. Social media platforms often prioritize content that elicits strong emotional reactions, such as anger or outrage, to maximize user engagement. As a result, hateful language is amplified, reaching wider audiences and becoming more pervasive in children's online environments. This algorithmic bias not only increases the likelihood of children encountering hate speech but also reinforces its normalization by presenting it as a common and accepted part of digital interactions. The constant reinforcement of hateful content can make it more challenging for children to develop critical media literacy skills, leaving them vulnerable to its psychological and social consequences.

Another significant issue is the role of online communities in perpetuating hate speech and its effects on children. Social media groups or forums centered on shared prejudices often serve as echo chambers, where hateful rhetoric is encouraged and validated. Children who inadvertently become part of such communities may adopt these attitudes, integrating them into their worldview and interactions. This adoption of hostility not only impacts their mental and emotional health but also limits their ability to form meaningful and supportive relationships, which are essential components of a healthy lifestyle (Goel et al., 2023).

Addressing hate speech in the context of children's health requires a more substantiated approach that involves education, regulation, and technological innovation. Media literacy programs are critical in empowering children to recognize, understand, and respond to hate speech effectively. These programs should emphasize the importance of empathy, diversity, and respect, equipping children with the tools to challenge hateful narratives and foster positive interactions. By teaching children to identify hate speech and understand its broader implications, media literacy initiatives can help mitigate its psychological and social effects, promoting a healthier and more inclusive digital environment.

Parental involvement is equally important in addressing the effects of hate speech on children. Parents who actively engage with their children's online activities— by discussing the content they encounter, setting guidelines for appropriate interactions, and fostering open communication— can provide essential support and guidance. Encouraging parents to model respectful and empathetic behavior in their own digital interactions further reinforces these values, creating a positive framework for children to emulate. Providing parents with resources and training to enhance their digital literacy can also

empower them to address hate speech effectively and support their children in navigating its challenges.

Policy interventions play a crucial role in mitigating the prevalence and impact of hate speech on social media platforms. Governments and regulatory bodies must work with technology companies to implement robust mechanisms for detecting, reporting, and removing hateful content. These measures should prioritize the safety and well-being of children, ensuring that digital environments are conducive to positive interactions and personal growth. Additionally, regulations should hold platforms accountable for the amplification of hate speech through algorithms, encouraging transparency and responsibility in content moderation practices (Brown, 2015).

Technology companies also bear significant responsibility in addressing hate speech. By leveraging artificial intelligence and machine learning, platforms can improve their ability to identify and remove hateful content proactively. Investments in algorithmic transparency and user-friendly reporting systems can further enhance their effectiveness, reducing the exposure of children to harmful rhetoric. Collaboration with educators, mental health professionals, and child advocacy groups can provide valuable insights into the unique challenges children face in online environments, informing the development of more targeted and impactful solutions.

Community-based initiatives are another avenue for addressing the effects of hate speech on children's health. Schools, youth organizations, and local groups can create safe spaces for children to discuss their experiences with hate speech, providing support and resources to navigate its challenges. Programs that promote inclusivity and celebrate diversity can counteract the divisive effects of hate speech, fostering a sense of belonging and resilience among children. Encouraging peer support networks can also help children build positive relationships and develop the confidence to challenge hateful narratives in their communities.

4. Conclusion
Keeping children away from computers, cellphones, and the internet is a good way to save them against bad lifestyle on the Internet, but it is not a practical solution for most parents. Therefore, we need a more effective media literacy education to equip children against online challenges. The complexities of modern media environments demand a strong and holistic approach to media literacy education, especially when targeting children. The study by Sabbar et al. (2021) offers compelling evidence that audiences, including students, often fail to question extraordinary claims on social media. These findings support the call for holistic media literacy education outlined in this article, particularly initiatives that train both children and parents to critically evaluate media promoting unhealthy behaviors.

In this article, we emphasized the profound influence of media content on children's lifestyle choices, ranging from dietary habits to social behaviors. While efforts to further media literacy among children have shown promise, their impact remains limited without the active inclusion of parents and other stakeholders. A more integrated approach that accounts for the interconnectedness of media consumption, family dynamics, and societal influences is essential for empowering children to go through the media critically and make healthier life choices.

Children are growing up in a media-saturated world where they encounter an array of challenges, including unhealthy lifestyle promotion, celebrity worship, cyberbullying, and exposure to hate speech. These influences can disrupt their physical, emotional, and social well-being, often in ways that are difficult to detect or address. Media literacy has the potential to serve as a protective tool, equipping children with the skills to analyze, question, and resist harmful media messages. However, current programs are often narrowly focused on children alone, overlooking the broader contexts in which media consumption occurs. This approach limits the effectiveness of interventions and misses opportunities to leverage the critical role of parents, educators, and policymakers in shaping healthier media engagement.

Parents are vital mediators of children's media consumption, influencing how young audiences interpret and respond to media messages. Yet, many parents lack the skills or knowledge necessary to guide their children effectively. Without media literacy education that includes parents, children may struggle to apply critical thinking skills in real-world settings, as they are often shaped by familial attitudes and behaviors. Incorporating parents into media literacy programs creates a collaborative learning environment, where both generations can develop a shared understanding of healthy media practices. Moreover, parental involvement ensures that media literacy education extends beyond classrooms into everyday family interactions, reinforcing its lessons through consistent application.

The role of educators and schools in teaching media literacy cannot be overstated. Schools provide an ideal setting for equipping children with critical media skills, yet existing curricula often fall short in addressing the multifaceted nature of media's influence. Media literacy education should be integrated across disciplines, connecting it with health education, social studies, and digital technology. Such an interdisciplinary approach would provide children with a more comprehensive understanding of how media shapes their behaviors and attitudes. Additionally, schools can serve as hubs for parental engagement, offering workshops and resources that empower families to address media-related challenges collectively.

Policymakers and technology companies also have a crucial role in creating an ecosystem that supports healthy media practices.

Government policies should mandate the inclusion of media literacy in national education standards, ensuring that all children have access to high-quality programs. Additionally, regulatory frameworks must hold media producers accountable for the content they create, particularly when it targets young audiences. Technology companies should prioritize transparency and ethical practices in their content algorithms, minimizing the amplification of harmful messages while promoting educational and positive media experiences. Collaborative efforts between policymakers, educators, and technology developers are essential to creating a digital landscape that prioritizes the well-being of children.

Community-based initiatives can complement these efforts by fostering local support networks for children and families. Libraries, community centers, and youth organizations can host media literacy programs tailored to the unique needs of their communities. By engaging children in discussions about media, providing tools for critical analysis, and promoting positive role models, these initiatives can help counteract the negative influences of media content. Peer-to-peer programs, where older children mentor younger ones in media literacy, can also be highly effective in building trust and relatability.

Our findings support earlier and recent research on media literacy for children. One of the most exhaustive meta-analyses has been recently carried out by Sakhaei, Arsalani and Nosraty (2023) with a wide-ranging access to different resources, government reports and legal cases. This article concludes:

> "This systematic review highlights the pivotal role of media literacy in empowering children to live and work well through complexities of the digital age. Media literacy, encompassing the ability to critically access, analyze, evaluate, and create media content, fosters crucial cognitive, social, and emotional skills. It enables children to develop critical thinking and creativity, understand media biases, and resist manipulation. Moreover, media literacy facilitates emotional resilience by helping children interpret media messages thoughtfully, manage their responses to idealized portrayals, and build a positive self-concept. Socially, it equips children to engage constructively with peers and broader digital communities, promoting ethical and responsible media usage" (Sakhaei et al., 2023).

We propose several key recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of media literacy education. First, programs should adopt a holistic perspective, addressing not only children but also parents, educators, and policymakers. This inclusive approach ensures that media literacy is reinforced across multiple environments, from homes to schools and communities. Secondly, curricula should be

interdisciplinary, connecting media literacy with broader health and social issues to provide children with a well-rounded understanding of its implications. Thirdly, governments and technology companies must collaborate to regulate harmful media content, improve algorithmic accountability, and prioritize the creation of safe online spaces for children. Finally, community-based initiatives should be encouraged to provide grassroots support and foster a culture of critical media engagement.

Conflict of interest
The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

Authors' contributions
All authors contributed to the original idea, study design.

Ethical considerations
The authors have completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc. This article was not authored by artificial intelligence.

Data availability
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