

Perfect models of social media and consequences

The impact of social media on self-esteem

“Perfect models” on social media, such as influencers and celebrities, show idealized versions of their lives, creating difficult-to-reach standards. This drives social comparison, which can impact self-esteem. If who we truly are differs from who we wish to be, we may feel dissatisfied and have low self-esteem.

According to Leon Festinger, social comparison happens in two ways: upward, when we compare ourselves to those who seem better, and downward, when we compare ourselves to those who seem worse. Most people on social media post only positive moments, hiding their struggles, which can make others feel inadequate. Influencers, who represent models of success and perfection, feed this comparison, causing their followers to feel insecure, especially those with low self-esteem, thinking they are not good enough or successful.

The search for approval on social media, based on likes and comments, can affect one's self-worth, especially for those with low self-esteem. This phenomenon particularly affects adolescents, who are more sensitive to others' judgment and tend to place too much importance on physical appearance, comparing themselves to altered images. Feeling distant from these standards can lead to anxiety, depression, and, in some cases, eating disorders and other psychological issues.

The consequences of perfect models on social media

1. Personal dissatisfaction and low self-esteem: many people compare themselves to unreachable standards seen on social media, feeling inadequate for their appearance, lifestyle, or successes. This happens because:

- We only see the best sides of others' lives, while difficult moments are hidden (the “highlight reel” effect).
- Comparing ourselves to apparently perfect people leads us to focus on what we lack, rather than appreciating our strengths.

2. Anxiety, depression, and stress: the constant comparison with perfection models can generate anxiety and depressive states, especially among the younger generation. Some factors are:

- FOMO (Fear of Missing Out): the fear of missing out on something when we see others living extraordinary experiences.
- Obsession with likes: the need for approval through likes and comments can become a source of stress.

- Reality distortion: spending too much time in a perfect digital world can make it more difficult to accept everyday reality.

3. Social media addiction and need for approval: many people have a real addiction to social media, constantly checking notifications and seeking validation from others. This happens because:

- Every like received stimulates the release of dopamine, creating a form of addiction.
- To gain more approval, people modify photos and posts, presenting an unrealistic version of themselves.

4. Body image issues and eating disorders: social media spreads unrealistic beauty standards, often achieved through filters, surgery, or photo editing. This can make many people dissatisfied with their bodies, raising the chance of eating disorders and problems with self-esteem.

The negative effects of beauty filters on social media

For some time now, beauty filters have been criticized for creating unattainable standards and fueling issues such as body dysmorphia, depression, and anxiety, especially among young people. By retouching images or applying filters, people lose awareness of their own bodies on one hand and control over their image on the other.

More than two million filters on Instagram and Facebook will disappear. Meta is not the only one taking action—TikTok has also decided to ban beauty filters, but only for underage users on the platform. However, removing them from official channels may not be enough. The risk is that users will download filters that are harder to detect.

The problems related to filters on Instagram will most likely not disappear; they will only become more difficult to manage.

Here are some of the negative effects of using filters:

1. Reality distortion: Filters create images that don't correspond to reality, making people appear younger, thinner, or more perfect than they truly are, feeding unrealistic expectations.

2. Social pressure: The continuous use of filters can make people feel pressured to conform to beauty standards, even though these images do not reflect their true appearance.

3. Low self-esteem: Constant exposure to filtered images can make people unsatisfied with their bodies. The idea that a “perfect” appearance can be easily achieved with a filter can make individuals insecure about their natural beauty.

4. Deception and lack of transparency: Many people don’t realize that many images on social media are modified, creating a false sense of perfection and negatively influencing the perception of real beauty.

5. Too much perfection: The use of filters can raise the search for an impossible perfection, creating a cycle of dissatisfaction and continuous comparison with others.

6. Long-term psychological effects: Frequent use of filters can lead to mental health problems such as anxiety and depression, affecting relationships.

7. Distortion of values: Filters can make people believe that physical appearance is more important than our personality, abilities, and social relationships, giving more attention to outer appearances.