

BEYOND THE FILTER

SUBJECT

Digital well-being and critical thinking

TOPIC

Online identity and body image pressure

DURATION

45 min

AGE

14+

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of the lesson, students are expected to:

-  Recognise unrealistic beauty standards commonly promoted online.
-  Develop critical thinking when engaging with social media content.
-  Identify characteristics of social media content that may positively or negatively influence body image and well-being.
-  Reflect on how social media can influence self-esteem and body image.
-  Apply practical strategies to create a healthier online environment.

MATERIALS

- [Green flags/red flags chart](#) x5 or as many as needed with [cards](#)
- Glue

METHODS

- Shared discussion
- Working in groups
- Guided class discussion

PREPARATION/OPENING

Before the lesson, the teacher prepares the materials to introduce topics such as online identity and body image pressure, selecting a few examples of social media content (e.g. screenshots showing edited images, body-positive posts or unrealistic beauty standards). This [video](#) by ABC News provides some concrete examples of body-altering filters and could be used as an introduction to the topic. Then, print the [Green Flag / Red Flag Chart](#) and the [cards](#) for each group. Explain that **not everything we see online reflects reality**. Photos and videos are often edited, filtered or carefully selected, and social media algorithms tend to show us more of the content we interact with.

Emphasise that the goal of the lesson is not to criticise social media, but to learn how to recognise characteristics of online content that may positively or negatively influence body image and well-being.

Before starting the discussion, remind students to discuss online content without commenting on or judging their own or other people's bodies or appearances, and encourage respectful discussion of different perspectives.



LESSON STRUCTURE/DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION (15 min):

The teacher introduces the topic of unrealistic beauty standards. They talk about the effects of social media on body image, such as:

- The issues with the ability to constantly compare ourselves to the influencers,
- The prevalence of AI filters,
- The algorithms prioritising showing skinny and conventionally attractive people,
- The popularity of unverified advice on losing weight or gaining muscle.

IMPLEMENTATION (20 min):

The teacher explains the importance of using critical thinking to choose which accounts to follow.

They explain that social media algorithm can recommend more content based on what users view, follow or interact with. Therefore, students can reflect on how the accounts and content they choose to follow and interact with may influence the content they are exposed to.

The students are divided into as many groups as needed for one group to have up to 6 people. In the groups, they fill in the green flag/red flag chart. The left part should include characteristics of content that may promote unrealistic appearance ideals, comparison or body dissatisfaction. The right part should include characteristics that may promote diversity, realistic representations and self-acceptance.

After the activity, the teacher let the students present their charts and explain why they decided something was a good or a bad practice. They discuss it together, and the teacher offers explanations or clarifications when needed.

Discussion (10 min):

The teacher leads an open discussion with the following questions:

- Why might social media content make some people feel dissatisfied with their appearance?
- Is how the content makes you feel about your body something that you normally consider when choosing the content you engage with?
- How can social media influence the way young people see themselves?
- After this exercise, are you more willing to do it?
- Identify one or two concrete actions you could take to create a healthier and more positive social media environment for yourself.

Summarise the discussion by emphasising that students cannot control everything that is posted or recommended online, but they can make conscious choices about the content they follow, interact with and share.

INTERACTIVE ACTIVITY

- Red flag/Green flag chart: [below](#)
- Red / Green cards: [below](#)

REFERENCES

- ABC News - [AI Body Altering Filters](#)
- Jiménez-García AM, et al - [Impact of body-positive social media content on body image perception](#)
- UNICEF - [Is social media bad for teens' mental health?](#)
- UNICEF - [Teens and body image](#)
- American Academy of Pediatrics - [Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health](#)
- The Jed Foundation - ["Understanding Social Media Use and Balance"](#)
- American Psychological Association - ["Health Advisory on Social Media Use in Adolescence"](#)

CONCLUSION/ASSESSMENT

The teacher assesses students' interest in the topic and their ability to think critically about the content they see, participate during discussions and collaborate during the group activity.

HOMEWORK

Students choose one body-related social media message or a fictional example. They identify one green or red flag and explain in 3–5 sentences how the content could influence the way a young person feels about their body or themselves.

RED FLAG/GREEN FLAG CHART

Red Flag The content...	Green flag The content...

RED FLAG/GREEN FLAG CARDS

Focuses mainly on weight loss and appearance.	Treats sport and healthy diet as a tool to feel better, without focusing too much on the looks.
Only shows photos of skinny people.	Promotes restrictive/extreme diets or "quick fixes".
Represents a diverse range of people and experiences.	Uses heavily edited or filtered photos without mentioning it.
Uses AI filters to alter people's appearance without making this clear.	Promotes healthy habits rather than perfect looks.
Shows realistic images of people without presenting physical perfection as the norm.	Uses little or no photo editing.
Promotes restrictive gender roles (Women should always.../Men should always...).	Shows people with different body types and appearances.
Includes people with different body types, hair types and ethnicities, including people with visible disabilities.	Suggests that only one body type is attractive.
Presents highly expensive or unattainable lifestyles as normal or ideal.	Encourages unhealthy comparison with others.
Promotes untested health products without evidence of their effectiveness.	Encourages self-acceptance.



RED FLAG/GREEN FLAG CARDS

Shows realistic aspects of daily life, not only carefully selected "perfect" moments.	Makes people feel guilty about food or appearance.
Promotes balanced nutrition instead of restrictive diets.	Supports mental well-being as well as physical health.
Promotes unverified health or weight-loss products.	Focuses only on appearance and physical perfection.
Encourages excessive exercise as punishment.	Includes health information from qualified health professionals or reliable sources.
Celebrates diversity and inclusion.	Reminds that everyone is unique.
Claims that happiness depends on looking a certain way.	Promotes unrealistic beauty standards.
[Add more green and red flags if needed]	[Add more green and red flags if needed]

