

Navigating Identity in the Digital Age: The Influence of Misinformation on Adolescents' Self-Perception and Discourse

Kimia Adineh^{1,*}, Ali Zangoei¹

¹ Department of English, ToH. C., Islamic Azad University, Torbat Heydarieh, Iran

Corresponding Author's Email: kimia.adineh@iau.ac.ir

KEYWORDS

Digital Age, Discourse, Identity, Misinformation, Self-perception

ABSTRACT

With the increasing trend of false and ineffective information in digital environments, numerous problems and dilemmas have arisen for the growth and development of adolescents, especially in self-perception and discourse patterns. The present study has attempted to examine the effects of different levels of exposure to false information on adolescents' self-perception and analyze discourse patterns among different groups of users. The sample consisted of 50 adolescent girls aged 13 to 16 years old located at the Shokoh Ofoh Language Institute in Kashmar, who were categorized into three groups based on their daily exposure to the Internet: low (n=17), medium (n=16), and high (n=17). The data collected includes a self-perception profile questionnaire for adolescents and semi-structured interviews. One-way analysis of variance indicated that there were significant differences in self-perception scores across exposure groups, and subsequent Scheffé test analyses revealed that participants in the high exposure group scored significantly lower than both the low and moderate exposure groups. Through thematic analysis of the interview data, four main themes emerged: influence on self-perception, online identity expression, credibility judgments, and social influence. The findings suggest that prolonged exposure to misinformation significantly impacts adolescents' self-perception and discourse development, which points to the importance of targeted media literacy interventions. These results indicate that there are appropriate educational interventions to improve critical thinking skills and flexibility among adolescents against misinformation. Moreover, the results can help students, teachers, parents, and policymakers in developing information analysis skills.

ARTICLE INFO

Article type: Research Article

Article history:

Received: 24 May 2025

Revised: 30 August 2025

Accepted: 31 August, 2025

Published online: 31 August 2025

Introduction

The digital age and the modern world have fundamentally changed the way adolescents access information, interact socially, and develop their identities. Digital platforms have become the main places where young people get their information, with more than 4.8 billion people using social media around the world (Anwar, 2024). However, this increased connectivity has also exposed adolescents to unprecedented levels of misinformation and has created significant challenges for the development of healthy identities and critical thinking skills. The prevalence of information disorder on social media has become a major concern, especially given its impact on adolescents and the consequences it has on their cognitive development, social interactions, and decision-making abilities (Irwanto et al., 2025).

Misinformation, or disinformation—defined as misleading information disseminated regardless of its purpose or intent—has become a pandemic in digital environments recently (Irwanto et al., 2025). Research suggests that adolescents are particularly vulnerable to

How to Cite: Adineh, K., & Zangoei, A. (2025). Navigating Identity in the Digital Age: The Influence of Misinformation on Adolescents' Self-Perception and Discourse. *International Journal of Practical and Pedagogical Issues in English Education*, 3(4), 23-38. DOI: 10.22034/ijpie.2025.525854.1107



© The Author(s).

misinformation due to their developmental stage, which is characterized by identity exploration, sensitivity to peer influence, and the development of critical thinking abilities (Zozaya Durazo et al., 2024). The consequences of exposure to misinformation go beyond the formation of immediate beliefs and potentially affect long-term self-perception and discourse patterns (Zozaya Durazo et al., 2024). Therefore, it is essential to understand the broader social and psychological implications of misinformation during this sensitive developmental stage.

Recently, research has extensively investigated the effects of social media on adolescent identity formation. The rapid expansion of social media has exposed a growing user base to content that promotes conventional beauty standards, emphasizes thinness, and glorifies perfection. As a result, body dissatisfaction can stem from internalizing these appearance ideals and striving to conform to media-promoted beauty standards (Jiotsa et al., 2021; De Vries et al., 2019). Individuals who spend more time on social media platforms find themselves inundated with feedback about their physical appearance. Social media platforms provide young people with ongoing evaluations of their physical appearance through comments and “likes” (De Vries et al., 2019). These findings highlight that digital media can shape self-image and social comparison processes, which are closely tied to self-perception.

In addition to body image concerns, online communities, often defined by shared interests, ideologies, or lifestyles, can play a significant role in the construction of an individual’s identity, values, and beliefs. In some cases, these online communities can have a more prominent influence than an individual’s physical social circles (Lüders et al., 2022). Digennaro and Tescione (2024) found that social media exposure was significantly associated with body image dissatisfaction among adolescents and young adults, suggesting broader implications for self-concept development. Similarly, Virós-Martín et al. (2024) showed that excessive use of social media, particularly platforms such as TikTok, negatively impacts adolescents’ self-perception of digital health and contributes to depressive symptoms. These patterns suggest that the digital environment influences not only physical self-image but also mental health and identity stability.

The relationship between exposure to misinformation and identity formation is also particularly complex during adolescence, as this developmental period involves significant neural changes that affect decision-making and social cognition (Li et al., 2024). Zhang (2025) emphasized that adolescents face significant challenges in navigating the authenticity of information in digital environments and have limited strategies for responding to widespread misinformation. While prior research has examined aspects of social media’s influence on identity and body image, fewer studies have specifically explored how misinformation shapes self-perception and discourse patterns in adolescents. This gap points to the need for studies that integrate insights from developmental psychology, digital media research, and discourse analysis to address this issue comprehensively.

Discourse analysis provides a valuable framework for understanding how misinformation affects adolescents’ communication patterns and identity expression. Language serves as a tool for identity construction and can be manipulated to influence perceptions and social meanings (Ghorbanzad, 2024). The social cognitive perspective shows how linguistic choices reflect and shape individual and collective identities, making discourse analysis essential for understanding the impact of misinformation on adolescent development (Ghorbanzad, 2024). However, despite its potential, this approach has rarely been applied to the intersection of misinformation,

adolescent self-perception, and digital communication, leaving an important research gap that the present study aims to address.

The present study aims to investigate the effects of exposure to false information on adolescents' self-perception and the ways in which their discourse changes in digital environments. This research seeks to address gaps in developmental psychology, digital media, and discourse analysis. It focuses on the impact of continuous exposure to false information on adolescents' self-perception and their speech patterns in digital spaces. Given the rapid growth of digital media usage among adolescents and the increasing prevalence of false information on these platforms, it is crucial to examine how these factors affect adolescents' self-perception and communication styles. Adolescence is a particularly sensitive stage for the development of identity and cognitive skills. Consequently, the significance of this study is underscored by its potential findings, which could serve as a foundation for creating targeted media literacy interventions and informing educational policies aimed at supporting the psychosocial development of adolescents in the digital age. This study seeks to address the following questions:

1. Does long-term exposure to misinformation during adolescence affect self-perception development into young adulthood?
2. How does participation in social media programs change the discourse among adolescents regarding misinformation?

Literature Review

With the rapid development of information technology, human society has fully entered the digital age. Digital tools such as the Internet, smartphones, and social media have become an inseparable part of people's daily lives, especially for children in secondary schools who have grown up with these technologies as "digital natives" since childhood (Prensky, 2001). Emotional and psychological development during adolescence is considered a critical stage because social awareness and behavioral patterns change dramatically, and individuals begin to develop emotion regulation strategies (Chang, 2024).

With the rapid development of artificial intelligence, virtual simulation, big data, and other internet technologies, children's learning methods have gradually broken the time and space constraints of traditional education, and a variety of virtual learning, teaching, and simulation programs have emerged, making children's access to knowledge more convenient and intuitive (Zhu et al., 2024). Digital technology has not only changed the way they learn and have fun but also deeply affected their social interaction and emotional development. Therefore, studying the social and emotional development of high school children in the digital age is of great significance for understanding the psychological development patterns of contemporary adolescents, as well as for formulating effective educational policies and social support measures. This broad technological context also sets the stage for examining how digital environments can be both empowering and risky for adolescents, particularly in relation to the spread of misinformation.

On the other hand, the intersection of misinformation, adolescent development, and digital media has emerged as an important area of research in recent years. Handford and Gee's (2023) comprehensive handbook on discourse analysis provides the theoretical frameworks necessary to understand how digital discourse would shape identity formation and social

meaning-making processes, emphasizing the need to analyze multimodal discourse across platforms. Similarly, Kianpour et al. (2024) examined how advanced digital technologies shape cultural and identity narratives and found that young people increasingly rely on digital platforms to construct and maintain their identities, making them vulnerable to false narratives. The psychological effects of misinformation extend beyond belief formation; exposure to manipulated content can distort reality perceptions, affecting relationships, mental health, and self-worth (Abbas et al., 2024). These results indicate that misinformation constitutes not only a cognitive obstacle but also a socio-emotional peril that can destabilize identity, especially during adolescence.

Social networks also have an effect on how teens see themselves. Some studies highlight their positive potential for self-expression, creativity, and professional growth (Stoliarchuk et al., 2024), while others show that patterns of digital interaction influence how identity develops (Zelenin, 2024). Adolescents with high social media use often display different identity formation patterns compared to those with limited exposure. However, while these research papers illuminate general social media effects, relatively few have examined the specific role of misinformation within these identity formation processes. Bridging this gap requires integrating research on social media usage patterns with investigations into the spread and reception of false information.

Critical discourse analysis has been particularly valuable in examining how misinformation influences youth communication. Tan and Yu (2024) demonstrated that language choices in online environments both reflect and reinforce social identities and power structures. Other research emphasizes that susceptibility to misinformation is shaped by cognitive and cultural factors (Akers et al., 2018; Hutchings, 2025). Despite these insights, limited empirical work has connected discourse analysis with measures of adolescent self-perception in the context of misinformation, leaving a notable research gap. Addressing this gap will help clarify how digital discourse both reflects and shapes adolescents' evolving identities under the influence of false narratives.

Method

Research Design

This research used a mixed-methods design to examine the impact of exposure to misinformation on adolescents' self-perception and discourse. A mixed-methods design was used to allow for in-depth and richer findings: the quantitative component yielded quantifiable data on self-perception changes, while the qualitative component examined the multifaceted means by which adolescents represent and negotiate misinformation in social situations. With these two methods combined, the research provided a clearer and more detailed representation of what was being researched (Zohrabi, 2013).

Participants

The study employed purposive sampling to recruit 50 female adolescents aged 13-16 years from Shokouh Ofogh Language Institute in Kashmar, Iran. Participants were chosen according to specific inclusion criteria: (1) age between 13 and 16 years, (2) consistent access to the Internet, (3) parental consent, and (4) readiness to engage in both questionnaire and interview components. The sample was categorized based on self-reported daily internet usage: low

exposure (less than 2 hours/day, n=17), moderate exposure (2-4 hours/day, n=16), and high exposure (more than 4 hours/day, n=17).

Table1

Characteristics of Participants Based on Daily Internet Usage

Exposure Level	Daily Internet Use	Number of Participants (n)	Percentage of Total Sample
Low Exposure	Less than 2 hours/day	17	34%
Moderate Exposure	2-4 hours/day	16	32%
High Exposure	More than 4 hours/day	17	34%
Total	-	50	100%

Instruments

Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (SPPA) Questionnaire

The Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (SPPA) by Harter (2012) was used for the present study. In this study, the English version of the SPPA was used to ensure consistency with the original standardized format. The main scale consists of 45 items measuring nine domains of self-perception. In this study, the subscales of general self-worth and social acceptance (20 items) were examined. Each item uses a two-step structured alternative format, where participants choose between two adolescent descriptions and then indicate how true it is (“really true” or “somewhat true”), yielding a 4-point score. The instrument has a well-documented construct and convergent validity and good internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.86).

Semi-structured interview

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to examine discourse patterns and strategies for evaluating misinformation. The interview guide was developed based on a review of recent literature on misinformation, adolescent identity development, and discourse analysis (e.g., Marwick & Boyd, 2014; Wang et al., 2019; Chou et al., 2018; Livingstone, 2008; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). Key themes and constructs from previous research guaranteed relevance and coherence with the study's objectives. To establish content validity, the initial questions were reviewed by two experts in media psychology and adolescent development, whose feedback refined clarity, sequencing, and sensitivity. A pilot test with five adolescents not included in the main study was conducted to ensure question comprehensibility and capacity to elicit rich responses; minor revisions improved clarity and flow. The interviews were adaptable in style and touched on issues such as:

- How individuals become exposed to and identify misinformation online.
- How misinformation affects their perception of themselves and others.
- How Misinformation shapes their conversations with friends, family, and on social media.

Procedure of Data Collection

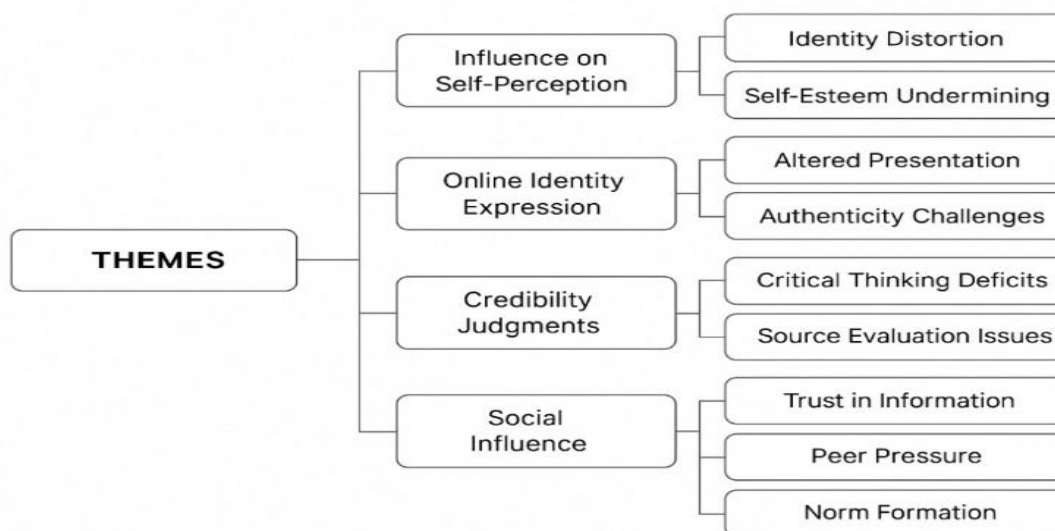
The procedure lasted for approximately three weeks, with two class sessions held each week. Participants and their guardians provided informed consent before participation. The SPPA questionnaire was administered in group sessions (maximum 10 participants per session) in classroom settings. Each session lasted approximately 45 minutes. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted in private rooms at the language institute with participants selected to represent low, moderate, and high internet exposure levels. Interviews lasted 30–45 minutes, were audio-recorded with participant consent, and were later transcribed for analysis. The trained interviewer used probing questions to explore discourse patterns and misinformation evaluation strategies.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics were calculated and presented in tables, while one-way ANOVA with post hoc tests examined differences in self-perception scores across misinformation exposure groups. A figure illustrating mean self-perception scores by exposure level was included to aid interpretation. Qualitative interview transcripts were coded verbatim and thematically analyzed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach: Familiarization of data, making initial codes, theme searches, reviewing themes, labeling and defining themes, and production of the final report. Four main themes emerged: Influence on Self-perception, Online Identity Expression, Credibility Judgments, and Social Influence, each accompanied by multiple subthemes as illustrated in Figure 1. Coding was independently performed by two researchers, with an inter-rater reliability of $\kappa = 0.85$.

Figure 1

Thematic Analysis of Adolescents' Discourse



Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was secured from the appropriate institutional review board before data gathering commenced. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and their guardians. Efforts were made to protect participants’ anonymity, ensure data security, and confirm that participation was voluntary. The research process also followed the ethical principles of respect for individuals, beneficence, and justice.

After completing the data collection and analysis processes, the key results are presented below, highlighting the relationship between misinformation exposure, self-perception, and adolescent discourse.

Results

This section presents the results of the study in relation to the two main research questions. Both quantitative and qualitative findings are discussed in detail, accompanied by relevant tables and charts for clarity.

Research Question 1

Does long-term exposure to misinformation during adolescence affect self-perception development into young adulthood?

In addressing Research Question 1, we present critical findings derived from our analysis. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for the self-perception scale that was used in the study. The data includes the number of participants (N), the mean score (M), standard deviation (SD), and Cronbach’s alpha. The mean score indicates the average level of self-perception among participants, while the standard deviation reflects the variability of responses. The Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.86 indicates high internal consistency, suggesting that the items reliably measure aspects of self-perception.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Self-Perception Scores by Internet Exposure Group

Internet Exposure Group	Low Exposure (N=17)		Moderate Exposure (N=16)		High Exposure (N=17)		Cronbach’s Alpha
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Self-Perception	48.23	5.41	44.87	6.12	39.65	4.89	.86

Table 2 shows the average self-perception scores for adolescents with low, moderate, and high levels of internet exposure. As exposure increases, the average self-perception score drops noticeably. Those in the high exposure group had the lowest score (M = 39.65, SD = 4.89). This suggests a potential connection between increased exposure to online misinformation and lower self-perception among the participants. Additionally, the self-perception scale showed satisfactory reliability in this study, with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.86.

Table 3

The Results of ANOVA for Determining the Role of Internet Exposure in Self-Perception

Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
----------------	----	-------------	---	------

Between Groups	854.72	2	422.86	9.75	.001
Within Groups	2023.45	47	43.04		
Total	2869.17	49			

Table 3 presents the results of a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), which showed statistically significant differences in self-perception scores across the three exposure groups, $F(2,47) = 9.75$ and the significance level is $p < 0.001$. This suggests that adolescents' internet exposure level significantly affects their self-perception.

Table 4

The Scheffé's Test for the Comparison of Self-Perception Means by Internet Exposure Level

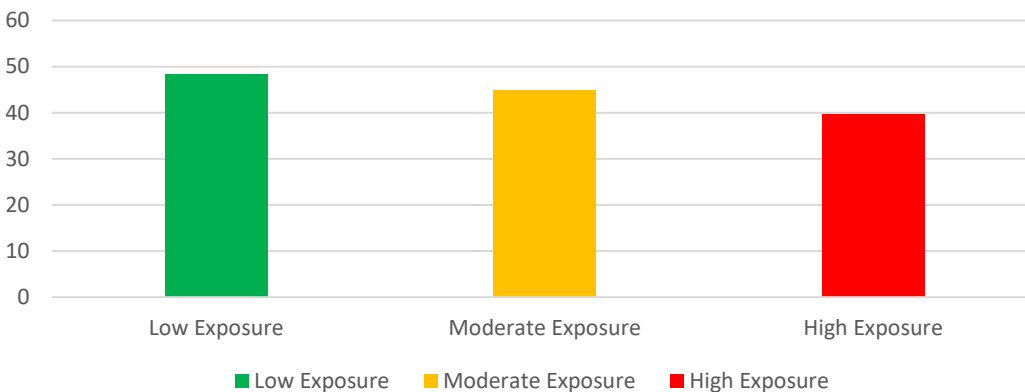
F	L	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Self-Perception	Low vs. Moderate	3.36	1.82	.18	-1.31	8.03
	Low vs. High	8.58*	1.81	.00	3.96	13.20
	Moderate vs. High	5.22*	1.84	.01	.54	9.90

Post-hoc analysis using Scheffé tests revealed specific patterns of group differences. Table 4 shows that people in the low-exposure group had a mean difference of 8.58 ($p < 0.001$, 95% CI [3.96, 13.20]) in self-perception compared to people in the high-exposure group. Similarly, the moderate-exposure group also reported significantly higher self-perception scores than the high-exposure group (mean difference = 5.22, $p = 0.01$, 95% CI [0.54, 9.90]). The difference between low and moderate exposure groups, however, was not statistically significant (mean difference = 3.36, $p = 0.18$, 95% CI [-1.31, 8.03]). Taken together, these results suggest that higher levels of Internet exposure are consistently associated with lower self-perception among adolescents.

Figure 2

The Mean Scores of Self-Perception by Internet Exposure Group

Mean Self-Perception Score by Internet Exposure Group



The bar chart (Figure 2) illustrates the mean self-perception scores of adolescents categorized by their level of exposure to misinformation. Participants with low exposure to misinformation demonstrated the highest average ($M= 48.23$) self-perception score, whereas those with moderate ($M= 44.87$) and high exposure ($M= 39.65$) showed progressively lower scores. This trend suggests a negative association between misinformation exposure and self-perception, indicating that as adolescents are increasingly exposed to misleading content online, their perception of self-worth and identity clarity may decline. These findings support the hypothesis that misinformation can adversely affect adolescents' psychological development, particularly in areas related to self-perception and confidence.

Research Question 2

How does participation in social media programs change the discourse among adolescents regarding misinformation?

This section explores how participation in social media programs influences adolescents' discourse surrounding misinformation. Through thematic coding, we reveal the nuanced perspectives of adolescents regarding their identity, credibility judgments, and social norms in the context of misinformation. Table 5 presents a comprehensive framework that captures the multifaceted ways in which adolescents perceive and respond to misinformation, highlighting the significant impact on their self-perception and social dynamics.

Table 5

Thematic Coding Framework: Adolescents' Perspectives on Misinformation's Impact

Code-name	Definition	Example
META: INFLUENCE ON SELF-PERCEPTION	Statements reflecting how misinformation affects adolescents' view of themselves.	"Sometimes I don't even know what to believe about myself anymore."
Identity Distortion	Confusion about one's identity due to conflicting online narratives.	"Social media says one thing, my parents another. I don't know who I am."

Self-Esteem Undermining	Lower self-worth as a result of comparing to idealized online images.	"Everyone online is perfect and I feel like I can never measure up."
META: ONLINE IDENTITY EXPRESSION	How adolescents present or manage their identity online under misinformation.	"I post what people want to see, not who I really am."
Altered Presentation	Changing self-image or posts to match online expectations	"I only share filtered pictures because I don't want to look real."
Authenticity Challenges	Struggles with being genuine due to fear of judgment.	"If I'm honest online, people judge. So I act different."
META: CREDIBILITY JUDGMENTS	Perceptions and evaluations of online information credibility.	"We just repeat what we see. We don't know what's true."
Critical Thinking Deficits	Difficulty questioning or analyzing online content.	"I don't know how to check if something is fake."
Source Evaluation Issues	Struggles to assess whether a source is reliable.	"All posts look the same; who knows what's real?"
META: SOCIAL INFLUENCE	How peers and social dynamics shape reactions to misinformation.	"Everyone shares it, so I just do too."
Trust in Information	Reliance on peer-shared content without verification.	"If my friends share it, I believe it."
Peer Pressure	Pressure to conform to peers' beliefs or trends.	"I don't want to argue, so I agree with whatever they say."
Norm Formation	Adoption of group norms shaped by repeated exposure to misinformation.	"After a while, you just accept what everyone says is normal."

Thematic analysis of interview data revealed four major themes affecting adolescent discourse and identity formation in digital environments. A prominent meta-theme, "Influence on Self-Perception," captured how conflicting online narratives induce confusion about self-identity and undermine adolescents' self-worth. Participants expressed a fragmented sense of self, torn between online ideals and real-life feedback, with statements such as, "Sometimes I don't even know what to believe about myself anymore" or "Everyone online is perfect, and I feel like I can never measure up." These insights align with existing research suggesting that idealized digital content distorts youth self-concept (Livingstone, 2008).

The second major theme, "Online Identity Expression," reflected how adolescents manage their online presence under the pressure of misinformation. Many participants indicated that they adjust their self-presentation to conform to online expectations, avoiding authenticity due to fear of judgment. This is exemplified in remarks like "I only share filtered pictures because I would rather not look real." Such behavior suggests a performative identity shaped by algorithmic norms and peer validation systems.

A third overarching theme, “Credibility Judgments,” illuminated the cognitive challenges adolescents face in assessing the reliability of online content. Expressions like “We just repeat what we see. We don’t know what’s true” and “I don’t know how to determine if something is fake” underscore deficits in critical thinking and source evaluation. This reflects Chou et al.’s (2018) findings on digital misinformation’s erosion of analytical engagement.

Finally, the “Social Influence” theme showed how peer dynamics and online norms reinforce misinformation. Adolescents reported trusting peer-shared content without verification and conforming to popular discourse to avoid conflict or exclusion. Quotes like “If my friends share it, I believe it” and “After a while, you just accept what everyone says is normal” suggest a powerful normalization of unverified information through repeated exposure.

Together, these themes demonstrate how misinformation is not merely an issue of content but a social and psychological force that reshapes adolescent identity, discourse, and digital behavior. This analysis draws on both latent and manifest content, combining theory-informed expectations with patterns emerging directly from the data, in line with the dual inductive–deductive strategy endorsed by Joffe (2011).

The quantitative and qualitative findings are strong evidence of the effects of long-term exposure to internet misinformation among adolescents. Significant statistical trends revealed a correlation between higher daily internet use and lower self-perception scores. The discourse analysis showed that adolescents who are exposed to the internet extensively passively reproduce misinformation in a routine manner, while moderately exposed teenagers, especially those who have learned media literacy training, engage in more thoughtful, adaptable, and critically driven communication. These findings emphasize the value of well-balanced use of the internet and the role educational programs may play in improving adolescents’ immunity against the psychological and social influence of misinformation.

Discussion

In the present study, by conducting research and using the selected instruments, convincing evidence was found regarding the impact of exposure to misinformation on adolescents’ self-perception and discourse development. The results showed a clear relationship between exposure to misinformation and self-perception scores, such that participants exposed to misinformation showed significantly lower self-perception compared to their peers exposed to less information. This finding is consistent with recent research by Digennaro and Tescione (2024), who found similar patterns in the impact of social media on adolescents’ body image and self-concept. This large effect size supports the proposed design presented by Kianpour et al. (2024), who argued that advanced digital technologies are fundamentally changing the way young people construct and maintain their identities.

The qualitative findings offer vital perspectives on the mechanisms underlying these quantitative differences. They also suggest that increased engagement with digital media can disrupt natural identity formation processes during adolescence, with participants experiencing identity distortion and confusion as a result of exposure to misinformation. These findings align with Zhang’s (2025) assertion that adolescents encounter considerable difficulties in assessing the veracity of information within digital contexts.

The critical thinking skills observed in high-exposure participants contradict common assumptions about the technological competence of digital natives and support the need for

targeted media literacy interventions. The reliance on peer validation for information validity, as demonstrated in the present study, is consistent with findings by Zuzaya-Durazzo et al. (2024) regarding adolescents' misinformation sharing behaviors.

Another issue that can be inferred from the findings is that social influence and peer pressure highlight how traditional developmental challenges during adolescence are reinforced by digital environments. The finding that high-exposure participants showed greater sensitivity to peer influence in both information sharing and identity expression could suggest that digital platforms may create echo chambers that reinforce rather than challenge existing beliefs and behaviors. This highlights the mechanisms by which misinformation spreads quickly among adolescent peer networks.

Another point emerging from the findings is the issue of authenticity challenges, which represent a fundamental tension in adolescents' digital identity development. The concern with measuring online validation and engagement among high-exposure participants suggests that digital environments may prioritize external validation over authentic self-expression.

This body of findings has implications for understanding how exposure to misinformation affects not only beliefs but also the underlying processes of identity formation and self-perception development. From a discourse analysis perspective, the findings support Ghorbanzad's (2024) argument that language serves as a tool for identity construction and can be instrumental in influencing social perceptions and meanings. The observed differences in discourse patterns in the exposure groups support the belief that engagement with digital media affects not only adolescents' beliefs but also how they communicate about themselves and their world.

Conclusion

This study provides substantial evidence for understanding the influence of exposure to digital media on self-perception and discussion abilities in adolescents. Where qualitative data suggest how digital environments shape the development of identity and communication, quantitative data demonstrate a statistically significant association between self-perception scores and levels of exposure to misinformation.

Despite certain limitations, the findings have significant implications for educational policy and practice. First, the initial sample consisted solely of female adolescents from a single private institution in Kashmar, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings to other age groups, genders, or socioeconomic backgrounds. Secondly, the use of self-reported questionnaire data can lead to biases, such as social desirability or memory inaccuracies.

The stable association between misinformation exposure and diminished self-perception underscores the urgency of including media literacy in early intervention programs for adolescents. In addition, they should focus to a greater extent on nurturing critical thinking abilities as well as enhancing knowledge about resource evaluation methods and increasing awareness of peer influence in digital environments. The findings further the case for such literacy initiatives in school to improve how adolescents cope effectively with misinformation.

Encouraging critical thinking in adolescence will improve self-esteem and lead to a healthier communication culture, both on and offline. Educators, parents, and policymakers must actively support efforts to build information resilience among youth. Additionally, the data show that moderate internet use (in conjunction with media literacy and critical use competencies) may

serve as a protective factor against the negative effects of misinformation. It suggests that efforts to lessen screen use must now move from generalized “screen time” advice to pedagogically driven initiatives, which will enable young people to critically engage with digital content.

In summary, as adolescents increasingly navigate a complex digital world filled with both credible and false information, understanding the psychological and social impacts of misinformation becomes essential. This study, however, also highlights the vulnerabilities and strengths of young people—that when provided with resources, they are able to recover. Education that supports critical and media literacy and cultivates a healthy skepticism will empower the next generation to contribute in a constructive, responsible manner in shaping their identities for the digital age.

Future research is necessary to track the long-term developmental trajectories of adolescents with differing patterns of digital media exposure and to systematically explore different intervention strategies. Understanding and identifying these relationships are key to fostering healthy development in increasingly digital environments.

References

- Abbas, S., Sheraz, F., Mudassar, N., Batool, S., & Anwar, M. (2024). Impact of social media usage on perception of relationships and mental health among adolescents. *Pakistan Journal of Medical and Health Sciences*, 18(3), 1245-1252. <https://doi.org/10.53350/pjmhs0202418316>
- Akers, J., Bansal, G., Cadamuro, G., Chen, C., Chen, Q., Lin, L., Mulcaire, P., Nandakumar, R., Rockett, M., Simko, L., Toman, J., Wu, W., Zeng, E., Zorn, B., & Roesner, F. (2018). Technology-enabled disinformation: Summary, lessons, and recommendations. *Technical Report UW-CSE*, 12(2), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.1812.09383>
- Anwar, M. (2024). The impact of social media on adolescent identity formation and mental health: Opportunities, risks, and policy implications. *Sinergi International Journal of Psychology*, 5(2), 124-138. <https://doi.org/10.61194/psychology.v2i2.496>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Chang, R. (2024). The self-perception debate: Do social media and platforms need better regulation? *SHS Web of Conferences*, 187, 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202418704001>
- Chou, W.-Y. S., Oh, A., & Klein, W. M. P. (2018). Addressing health-related misinformation on social media. *JAMA*, 320(23), 2417–2418. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2018.16865>
- De Vries, D. A., Peter, J., de Graaf, H., & Nikken, P. (2015). Adolescents’ social network site use, peer appearance-related feedback, and body dissatisfaction: Testing a mediation model. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 45(1), 211-224. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-015-0266-4>

- Digennaro, S., & Tescione, A. (2024). Scrolls and self-perception, navigating the link between social networks and body dissatisfaction in preadolescents and adolescents: A systematic review. *Frontiers in Education, 9*, 1390583. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2024.1390583>
- Ghorbanzad, A. (2024). Discourse analysis: A comparative case study of two literary works of English and Persian female writers from socio-cognitive perspective. *International Journal of Practical and Pedagogical Issues in English Education, 1*(4), 63-73. <https://doi.org/10.22034/ijpie.2023.185567>
- Handford, M., & Gee, J. P. (Eds.). (2023). *The Routledge handbook of discourse analysis* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Harter, S. (2012). *The construction of the self: Developmental and sociocultural foundations* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.
- Hutchings, S. C. (2025). Uncovering the uncoverers: Identity, performativity and representation in counter-disinformation discourse. *Cultural Studies, 39*(2), 234-251. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2024.2384942>
- Irwanto, I., Bahfiarti, T., Unde, A. A., & Sonni, A. F. (2025). Information disorder's impact on adolescents: Publication trends and recommendations. *Frontiers in Communication, 10*, 1495536. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2025.1495536>
- Jiotsa, B., Naccache, B., Duval, M., Rocher, B., & Grall-Bronnec, M. (2021). Social media use and body image disorders: Association between frequency of comparing one's own physical appearance to that of people being followed on social media and body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18*(6), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18062880>
- Joffe, H. (2011). Thematic Analysis. In D. Harper & A. R. Thompson (EDS.), *Qualitative research methods in mental health and psychotherapy: A guide for students and practitioners* (PP. 209–223). WILEY. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119973249.ch15>
- Kianpour, M., Triandafyllidou, A., Allen, T., & Mazroui, S. (2024). Understanding cultural and identity narratives in the age of advanced digital technologies. [UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPT]. Toronto Metropolitan University.
- Li, Z., & Li, H. (2024). Social and emotional development of secondary school children in the digital age. In *Proceedings of the 2024 9th International Conference on Modern Management, Education and Social Sciences (MMET 2024)* (Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research). https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-309-2_71
- Livingstone, S. (2008). Taking risky opportunities in youthful content creation: Teenagers' use of social networking sites for intimacy, privacy and self-expression. *New Media & Society, 10*(3), 393–411. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444808089415>
- Lüders, A., Dinkelberg, A., & Quayle, M. (2022). Becoming “us” in digital spaces: How online users creatively and strategically exploit social media affordances to build up social identity. *Acta Psychologica, 228*, 103643. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2022.103643>

- Marwick, A. E., & Boyd, D. (2014). "It's just drama": Teen perspectives on conflict and aggression in a networked world. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 17(9), 1187–1204. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2014.901493>
- Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants. *On the Horizon*, 9(5), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1108/10748120110424816>
- Stoliarchuk, O., Yang, Q., Diedkov, M., Serhieienkova, O., Ishchuk, A., Kokhanova, O., & Patlaichuk, O. (2024). Self-realization as a driver of sustainable social development: Balancing individual goals and collective values. *European Journal of Sustainable Development*, 13(4), 313–327. <https://doi.org/10.14207/ejsd.2024.v13n4p313>
- Tan, H., & Yu, Y. (2024). A study on identification of youth identity through a gender lens in network buzzwords: A critical discourse analysis. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 11(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-02618-0>
- Tsfati, Y., & Cappella, J. N. (2003). Do people watch what they do not trust? Exploring the association between news media skepticism and exposure. *Communication Research*, 30(5), 504–529. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650203253371>
- Virós-Martín, C., Montaña-Blasco, M., & Morales, J. M. (2024). Can't stop scrolling! Adolescents' patterns of TikTok use and digital well-being self-perception. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 11(1), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03984-5>
- Wang, Y., McKee, M., Torbica, A., & Stuckler, D. (2019). Systematic literature review on the spread of health-related misinformation on social media. *Social Science & Medicine*, 240, 112552, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2019.112552>
- Zelenin, V. (2024). The role of social networks in shaping the identity and self-realisation of young people. *Amazonia Investiga*, 13(76), 128-137. <https://doi.org/10.34069/AI/2024.84.12.19>
- Zhang, L. (2025). The impact of internet age network information dissemination on adolescents. *Interdisciplinary Humanities and Communication Studies*, 8(1), 45-52. <https://doi.org/10.61173/174e7940>
- Zhu, T., Wang, Y., & Luan, Q. (2024). Research on Innovative Application of Virtual Reality Technology in Digital Media Education. In *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Educational Innovation and Multimedia Technology (EIMT 2024)* (1-8). Wuhan, China. EAI. <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.29-3-2024.2347721>
- Zohrabi, M. (2013). Mixed method research: Instruments, validity, reliability and reporting findings. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 3(2), 254-262. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4304/tpls.3.2.254-262>
- Zozaya-Durazo, L. D., Sádaba-Chalezquer, C., & Serrano-Puche, J. (2024). "Fake or not, I'm sharing it": Teen perception about disinformation in social networks. *Young Consumers*, 25(3), 298-315. <https://doi.org/10.1108/YC-06-2022-1552>

Kimia Adineh is a PhD student in TEFL with over six years of teaching experience at institutes, schools, and universities. She has presented and published conference papers, reviews for IJPIE, and teaches ESP and General English. Her research interests include ELT, educational psychology, and technology-enhanced learning.

Ali Zangoei is currently an assistant professor of TEFL at Department of English, Torbat Heydarieh Branch, Islamic Azad University, Torbat Heydarieh, Iran, where he teaches both undergraduate and post-graduate courses. He has published some articles in many national and international journals. His main research interests are language testing, pragmatic assessment, qualitative research, and teacher education, and CALL.