

Literature Review

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Introduction

In recent years, there has been a surge in the popularity of wellness culture. Whether that means being mindful of what food is digested, practicing yoga or pilates, or even believing the power of crystals, it seems impossible to escape the word 'wellness'. While people have been practicing healthy lifestyles for ages, it seems that there has been a new level of health. Many of these practices have historically been viewed negatively due to stereotypes, but social media has impacted the way in which people view different wellness practices (Kemp et al, 2022).

The media's role in the growth of popularity of wellness culture is important for many reasons. Assuming that these practices do have benefits and are helpful, it is important to effectively promote the benefits to help others on their health journey. However, determining if a wellness initiative is actually beneficial is a chief concern. When we are able to examine where society gathers wellness information and credibility, we can better understand how people interact with wellness.

The media's role in promoting wellness culture is important because it influences how people think and approach their health. It is also important to see how susceptible to marketing people are. From a marketing perspective, companies and businesses can see what sells to consumers. This can then be important to see if the stuff being marketed is actually beneficial to consumers, or just financially beneficial to brands and businesses. It is important to see the origin of a specific wellness practice to then see if it can be trusted and what the science behind the benefits are. A lot of promotion is done without using facts or science, so it can be hard to figure out if the intent is from a marketing standpoint or a health benefit standpoint.

Along with social media, celebrities have played a significant role in the promotion of wellness culture. Celebrities already have a huge audience of people that look up to them,

making endorsements they make of wellness practices influential. The most obvious example of this is Gwyneth Paltrow and her brand *Goop*, but other celebrities are able to incorporate the promotion of wellness more subtly. The media has been instrumental in the growth of wellness culture by providing a platform for the promotion and discussion of wellness practices.

The ways in which celebrities interact with wellness culture and its promotion likely has a very important role in the amount of people interested in these wellness practices and the culture as a whole. Camille Rowe, a model and influencer, created a video series on *Vogue* discussing what wellness is and researching different forms of wellness. While the video was interesting in seeing Rowe's experience with each activity, there wasn't concrete evidence that each activity was beneficial. However, because Camille was seen doing these things, exposure was high and interest was piqued. This is how celebrity endorsements work within the wellness industry. If someone sees a public figure that represents beauty, money, class, and overall success, people are going to want to find ways to know how to be more like that figure. Whether that is Kendall Jenner using liquid IV's for health reasons, or Megan Fox promoting her spiritual life, people are going to listen, become interested, and follow.

It is important to also consider the original desire when looking at those who practice wellness activities. Original desire can vary with some believing they can better themselves with exercise, while others try to benefit themselves mentally, or spiritually. Most research and marketing tactics are aimed at people that already have this belief to better themselves. No matter the actual cause of what got people to join in these practices, they all share the desire to improve themselves.

Marketing companies and businesses have the power to influence people's beliefs. When people are constantly comparing themselves to the perfect lives that are shown to them through

social media, they can believe they have room for improvement. This then causes people to look for alternative solutions to becoming better, such as wellness cultures. Meditation and crystals are marketed to create an inner peace and happiness, while yoga and juice cleanses promote a lifestyle that will physically improve one's body. These are just some examples of the countless practices that are marketed to 'fix' a specific problem or improve upon something. When people who are already trying to better themselves to become more like the figures they see in the media are given a new way to improve themselves, they are more likely to try it out.

There has been a notable surge in the popularity of wellness culture in recent years. Wellness culture is the broader term that includes practices that range from liquid IVs to crystals, aimed at promoting physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. This culture and growth in popularity has been significantly influenced by the media and social media influencers. The media's role in regards to wellness is important for many reasons. It helps promote potential benefits, but also can be used by companies and businesses to benefit themselves. Understanding where these wellness ideas originate teaches societal values. Additionally, celebrity influence can be used to promote the wellness culture. Research has shown that consumers are increasingly interacting with influencers on social media, which can possibly explain why certain wellness trends are suddenly becoming popular (Alkan & Ulas, 2022). The most important commonality among those who participate in wellness culture is the desire for self-improvement. The belief that they can enhance themselves physically, mentally, or spiritually is needed when people are participating in these wellness practices. In conclusion, the media's role in the surge of wellness culture is significant because it influences how people approach their health.

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What is Wellness Culture?

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, wellness is ‘the quality or state of being in good health especially as an actively sought goal’. This definition in itself leaves room for interpretation and discussion regarding what wellness is in connection to people. Through the media, society has chosen specific activities and practices that fall under the umbrella of wellness. Some of these practices include yoga, cold-water swimming or baths, crystals, liquid IV’s, general exercise, and so much more. While a wellness practice comes down to a specific person’s interpretation, the media and society do push specific narratives about what practices will help in wellness and overall improve someone’s life. The rise of popularity in wellness did not come randomly. Brands, influencers, businesses, and other people in charge use social media to promote their products and ideas about wellness. Rachel O’Neill, a member of the Department of Sociology at Warwick University, suggests that because the wellness industry is run by these groups, it is predominately white women. The media portrayal of wellness activities rarely feature people of color and focus on practices that only are relevant to economically privileged individuals (O’Neill, 2020). O’Neill held discussions with black women in regards to the wellness industry and how their experience is different from others. It is important to examine how different individuals or different groups of people interact with wellness and the promotion they see of wellness. It is helpful in understanding the relationship between the media and society by looking into the groups that interact with these specific wellness practices. It is also important to see where these wellness practices can be most beneficial and can be promoted. There has been countless studies done regarding wellness culture and how these practices could be beneficial to specific groups of people. The overall synopsis is that wellness practices would

be favorable in many workplaces. This is because so much of society works and spends a lot of their time focused on work or physically working everyday. In the United States, about 78% of all employees report that the biggest stress factor is their work (Farrell, Geist-Martin, 2005). This leaves a huge amount of consumers looking to better themselves because of their day-to-day stress. Many of these workers could potentially report less stress and live an overall healthier lifestyle if they were surrounded by wellness culture or saw the promotion of some of these practices. The promotion of wellness could be directly through each employee's workplace, or through the media, something that is almost impossible to avoid. If people are made aware of benefits and specific practices, they are more likely to participate in the practices (Melynk, Amaya, Szalacha, Hoying, 2016). By promoting the benefits of wellness and letting more and more people know about these formally little known practices, the wellness industry can become even more successful. There has been a surge in a lot of these practitioners since COVID-19, people were trying to find new ways to better themselves when so much was taken away. By continuing to grow the media coverage of the wellness industry, it will only continue to grow its popularity.

How does Media influence others ?

Media is a form of mass communication commonly seen through television, social media, posters, etc. As generations continue to grow with technology, lives become more consumed by media, and sometimes without even realizing it, become heavily influenced by it. The generation that is being referred to was exclusively raised during the social media boom. They are known as Generation Z, or GenZers. "Social media, in turn, affect the formation of attitudes and behaviors among those who use them" (Pierre et al). The use of media can influence a person both positively and negatively.

A study recently defined the effects of native advertisements in the media. Native Ads are a way of promoting a product through the editorial content. The publisher writes the ad to mimic other non-advertising content. All with the intention to grab the audience through material they are familiar with, therefore presented in a way they would want to engage with and remember. Native Ads are designed to hide the persuasive intent behind traditional advertisements and tries the best way to avoid the manipulative, skeptical, intrusive and situational approaches to traditional advertising.

Social media is a complex concept that has many different forms and ways of being consumed. These differences can be understood by consulting back to the media richness theory, also known as MRT (Maria Giovanna Confetto et al). This theory states that when media can relay information that is clear and easy to follow, is it considered a rich media. Whereas media that requires more time to process, is known as lean. Researchers find that formats of rich media can reduce negative outcomes. This increases trust, reduces skepticism, and avoids misleading information. This means that following rich media through native advertisement is one of many effective ways in which promoting on the internet can successfully influence users.

The influence of media, whether positive or negative, is exemplified by the impact of social media on users. Native advertisement is a strategy that blends editorial content by relying on familiarity and steers away from traditional advertising pitfalls. The complexity of social media can be interpreted by understanding the media richness theory, which indicated a clear, process of information. This form of rich media aids in reducing skepticism and enhancing trust. The effective use of rich media, exemplified by native advertisements are used together to become a useful tool in influencing and engaging internet users while avoiding forms of persuasion that create negative relationships between the influenced and the influencers.

How do Wellness Culture and Media Work Together?

Wellness encompasses not only physical health, but also mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of one's life. The media plays important roles in promoting trends, and this includes the wellness industry. Whether through social media, blogs and websites, or celebrities, the wellness industry is constantly being promoted. Social media has allowed influencers to share their practices to a wider audience, with many people seeing the benefits directly. Advertisers have recognised the popularity of wellness culture and have used this to market to specific audiences about certain products and practices.

Specifically, the power of personalized advertising has increased this phenomenon (De Keyzer et al, 2022). This study discusses the impact social media has had on advertising and marketing. Social media platforms have become attractive platforms for advertisers to share their products and connect with audiences (De Keyzer et al, 2022). Brands often utilize personalized ads, which can increase the perceived personal relevance with consumers and lead to more positive outcomes in terms of engaging with the ad and its product (De Keyzer et al, 2022). By gaining an understanding of how consumers interact with brands and advertisements on social media, more knowledge is gained relating to how wellness culture spreads across online platforms.

It is also important to discuss the power celebrities have on wellness initiatives. One of the most well known celebrities who discusses wellness is Gwyneth Paltrow. Paltrow uses her status and influence to promote her brand to women. Goop is a brand that promotes various health and well-being practices and products. Bridget Conor, who works in the Department of

Culture, Media and Creative Industries at King's College in London, published an article on what drives this culture of wellness and the ideals of people who participate. The study focused on how Goop was promoted and used in the media (Conor, 2021). Goop relied on consumers sharing the ideals of optimization, individual fulfillment, and the pursuit of well-being beyond mere biomedicine (Conor, 2021). The online presence of this brand is needed to reach the target audience of women who share these beliefs (Conor, 2021).

Further, Conor also explores how Goop specifically presents its wellness products to reach the correct audience and in turn, benefit their company (Conor, 2021). This is an important perspective to take into consideration when exploring the growth of the wellness industry and community. Goop used Paltrow's status to promote the benefits and success she has found with these products or practices in wellness (Conor, 2021). When people see the products working on and benefitting Paltrow, they believe they are looking at the direct benefits, and are more likely to try out similar things (Conor, 2021). Paltrow's strong connection to the brand and its products allows her followers to feel connected to the brand, and draws new audience members in.

Wellness activities and practices are being increasingly promoted on social media because of the wide range of audiences brands and influencers can reach in a short amount of time. Social media allows for consumers to get connected with different wellness techniques and see the benefits in real time. Connectivity to brands is incredibly important with any industry, but specifically with wellness, the connectivity leads to an increase in participation.

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