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Abstract : According to the National Institute of Mental Health, an estimated 31.9% of adolescents have had an anxiety disorder. Several environmental factors may help to contribute to high levels of anxiety and depression in young people (i.e., Generation Z, Millennials). However, as young people negotiate life on social media, they may begin to evaluate themselves using excessively high standards and adopt self-perfectionism tendencies. Broadly defined, self-perfectionism involves very critical evaluations of the self. Perfectionism may also come from others and may manifest as socially prescribed perfectionism, and young adults are reporting higher levels of socially prescribed perfectionism than previous generations. This rising perfectionism is also associated with anxiety, greater physiological reactivity, and a sense of social disconnection. However, theories from psychology suggest that improvement in emotion regulation can contribute to enhanced psychological and emotional well-being. Emotion regulation refers to the ways people manage how and when they experience and express their emotions. Cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression are common emotion regulation strategies. Cognitive reappraisal involves changing the meaning of a stimulus that involves construing a potentially emotion-eliciting situation in a way that changes its emotional impact. By contrast, expressive suppression involves inhibiting the behavioral expression of emotion. The purpose of this research is to examine the efficacy of social marketing initiatives which promote emotion regulation strategies to help young adults regulate their emotions. In Study 1 a single factor (emotion regulation strategy: a cognitive reappraisal, expressive, control) between-subjects design was conducted using an online, non-student consumer panel (n=96). Sixty-eight percent of participants were male, and 32% were female. Study participants belonged to the Millennial and Gen Z cohort, ranging in age from 22 to 35 (M=27). Participants were first told to spend at least three minutes writing about a public speaking appearance which made them anxious. The purpose of this exercise was to induce anxiety. Next, participants viewed one of three advertisements (randomly assigned) which promoted an emotion regulation strategy—cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, or an advertisement non-emotional in nature. After being exposed to one of the ads, participants responded to a measure composed of two items to assess their emotional state and the efficacy of the messages in fostering emotion management. Findings indicated that individuals in the cognitive reappraisal condition (M=3.91) exhibited the most positive feelings and more effective emotion regulation than the expressive suppression (M=3.39) and control conditions (M=3.72, $F(1,92) = 3.3, p < .05$). Results from this research can be used by institutions (e.g., schools) in taking a leadership role in attacking anxiety and other mental health issues. Social stigmas regarding mental health can be removed and a more proactive stance can be taken in promoting healthy coping behaviors and strategies to manage negative emotions.

Keywords : emotion regulation, anxiety, social marketing, generation z

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