

Urgent action needed to tackle regulation and labelling of online content: charity and campaigner join forces with a new Safe Online Spaces campaign

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National eating disorders charity Anorexia and Bulimia Care, and Watford-based campaigner Suzanne Samaka have collaborated to launch the campaign, bringing together two petitions designed to protect the mental health of people affected by eating disorders and negative body image. Calling for trust and transparency from advertisers and content creators, the campaign asks the UK Government to amend the laws and put governance in place to ensure that targeted advertising content is effectively monitored, and modified photos are labelled, making online spaces safe for all,

- 82% of the UK population are social media users. Whilst these platforms provide a plethora of ways to connect and share, they also expose society to increasingly problematic content such as unrealistic body image ideals and targeted advertising promoting diet culture.
- A recent inquiry found that 61% of adults and 66% of children reported feeling negative about their body image most of the time (2) and with 87% of children aged 12-15 participating in social media use (1), a figure which rises to 91% for those aged 16-24 (3).
- Research indicates that both consumption of digital media and social networking is related to body image concerns, appearance comparisons and disordered eating (4 & 5), all recognised risk factors for eating disorders (6).
- Typically, eating disorders develop between the ages of 13-17 (7) Though recent evidence suggests children as young as five years old are experiencing both body dissatisfaction and eating disorders (8).
- There are already currently 1.25 million people in the UK with an eating disorder (9) and, they have the highest mortality rate of any psychiatric disorder (10).

There is mounting evidence that images and adverts which promote weight loss, drastic changes in body shape and even weight management, all perpetuate diet culture which negatively impacts how people feel about their own appearance and consequently how they behave towards their own body (8). This means that not only do we have a space which puts people at risk, but potentially sabotages those battling their disorder or puts those in a place of recovery at risk of relapse.

Trust: Our Call to Advertisers - The [Stop Targeting Eating Disorders](#) petition, launched by Daniel Magson, Chair of Anorexia and Bulimia Care, asks that platforms ban content or advertising of products which are deemed potentially harmful to those affected by eating disorders.

Daniel says: *"Every time I speak out about how my eating disorder has affected me I get adverts targeted at me to trigger my eating disorder. This is not only morally wrong, it's dangerous and needs to stop. The Safe Online Spaces campaign calls on the UK Government to put governance in place to stop advertisers targeting people affected by eating disorders and any associated eating disorder related search terms with products such as body/face altering software, calorie tracking apps and supplements to support weight loss. Social media companies aren't putting in efficient measures to moderate this content, clear government policy is needed to hold them accountable."*

Since the petition was launched:

- Pinterest has recently paved the way and banned all advertisements with weight loss related language and imagery (11), creating a supportive online environment for its users, particularly those directly impacted by eating disorders.
- Instagram publicly apologised (12) for promoting diet and weight loss content to users with eating disorders, no resultant action appears to have followed.
- Facebook (which owns Instagram), Twitter and TikTok have made comment when approached that they intend to reduce harmful content on their platforms.

Transparency: Our Asks for User-Generated Content - The [Change Social Media Laws to State When Content is Filtered or Edited](#) petition was launched by campaigner Suzanne Samaka, and calls for transparency around images shared online to create an environment where people understand the treatment that images have received to look a certain way and to stop perpetuating unrealistic body image ideals. The [#HonestyAboutEditing](#) campaign has gained significant momentum, including

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parliamentary support from Dean Russell, Member of Parliament for Watford.

Suzanne says: “Young people’s self-esteem is getting damaged by the ever growing content that they see on social media that is filtered and edited. The Safe Online Spaces campaign calls on the UK Government to amend laws for social media platforms whereby if body related content is posted and a filter or editing app is used, it must be labelled as altered so the user is aware. I have personally seen the lasting effects that eating disorders, anxiety, depression and loneliness can have on the lives of young people today. Prevention is better than a cure and I fear that society will not have the resources available to support the growing numbers of young people who are affected.”

- A recent law passed in Norway has banned advertisers and social media influencers posting modified photos without stating that they have altered the original image (13).

Anorexia and Bulimia Care and Suzanne Samaka hope that bringing their voices together in this joint campaign will strengthen their drive for change. For more information, please visit:

<https://www.anorexiabulimiare.org.uk/get-involved/campaign>

Notes to editors:

-Anorexia and Bulimia Care is a national charity providing support to anyone affected by eating disorders in the UK. www.anorexiabulimiare.org.uk

-To request interviews, please contact joanne@anorexiabulimiare.org.uk

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