The Influence of Social Media on Women's Objectified Body Consciousness and Body Dissatisfaction

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ABSTRACT
The widespread use of social media has exposed idealized body images in people's lives, which has a negative impact on women's mental health. This study applies objectification theory to examine the influence of advertisements and social networking sites on their objectified body consciousness. Social comparison theory was used to illustrate how celebrities promote their bodies through the Internet, causing users to be dissatisfied with their bodies. Specifically, over-packaged body images can make people form self-surveillance and self-objectification. In fact, people who care too much about the opinions of others may feel more shame and anxiety. This paper also confirmed that the interactions between celebrities and users are associated with self-dissatisfaction. Celebrities also have an impact on the public's aesthetics, consumption and values to a certain extent. The author finally gives some suggestions to alleviate these negative effects.

Keywords: social media, objectified body consciousness, body dissatisfaction, celebrity, body image

1. INTRODUCTION

Social networking sites attach great emphasis on visualizations, including massive advertisements and images. These visual impressions idealized body shape which induces young people to objectify their bodies [1]. One study has demonstrated that women are more physically dissatisfied, compared to men, when they are frequently exposed to attractive and appearance-centric social media pictures[multiple]. According to objectification theory, women insist on integrating the observer's point of view into their concept and regard it as the standard and the object of other people's discussion and entertainment. In the long run, this can lead to self-surveillance of the body and potentially increase the chance of body dissatisfaction, shame, and anxiety [2]. With the advent of social media and the surge in the number of users, people are gradually aware of this problem. According to a report from the China Internet Network Information Center, as of June 2019, the number of Internet users in China reached 854 million, of which females accounted for 47.6% of them [3]. This study focused on how social media creates negative effects on women's mental health in China, specifically, the effects on people's self-objectification and body dissatisfaction based on body-related advertisements and celebrity effects on social networking sites. Next, the study further explained the formation of physical self-surveillance and the influence of celebrities on public thoughts, which lead to self-dissatisfaction. Moreover, there will be suggestions for young people to relieve the consciousness of body shape caused by different factors respectively.

2. BODY SURVEILLANCE WITH ADVERTISEMENTS AND SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKING

Images of the perfect body in social media often give the public a psychological hint that it is easy for people to become slim because the body is very malleable [4]. These are usually displayed in advertisements such as slimming and shaping body advertisements, and online social platforms such as Instagram, Tik Tok, Weibo. The media images are all beautified and edited to a large extent, so what is shown in front of the public is unrealistic [5]. When people are consistently exposed to numerous perfect images, they begin to pursue this unreality. Moreover, this also leads to comparison and people use it as their own standard which forms body dissatisfaction and strives for perfection [6]. However, advertisers and operators are looking at the public's attention and dissatisfaction with their own bodies, thus develop marketing strategies and cater to their ideas.

When people see the slim image in the advertisement, it will persuade people to buy products and become the same as the people in the image [5]. In other words, people may prefer the products are exhibited in an idealistic or environment, and even attractive spokespersons may be more convincing [6].

It must be admitted that with the continuous and rapid development of mobile terminals, smartphone technology, and photo sharing have become more ubiquitous and inevitable [7]. Various online social media that can share selfies and short videos are gradually becoming more prevalent. Weibo is a popular social networking sites which solely for sharing photos, videos, and speech in China. It had 511 million monthly active users in September 2020, of whom 224 million were using in a daily basis [8]. Moreover, the proportion of female users is 54.6% which means that women are more interested in social media. Users in mobile social networking can watch and comment on the posts of other users, who can be friends, strangers, or celebrities. Young people will understand the characteristics of attractive images by comparing their own visual self-portraits with those of their peers in the same environment [1]. The likes, comments, and followers received by creators will be regarded by them as indicators of whether they are accepted and liked by society.

Objectified body consciousness is an inclination to see oneself as an object that others can comment on and evaluate [2]. Objectification theory is used to observe the consequences of women living in the sexual objectified environments. When women are in a social environment that regards the female body as use and entertainment for a long time, they will internalize the observer's perspective to form self-objectification [7]. The behavior of habitual body surveillance is a manifestation of self-objectification [2] which can lead to potential mental health including shame and anxiety. Compared with other media such as paper media and television, the Internet and social network exposure result in a major role in the formation of self-objectification [7]. The reason why social media is so prominent as a feature of objectified body consciousness is because attractiveness has become a cultural advantage of social media. At the same time, it encourages people to have visual self-presentation while receiving self-evaluation, thus forming self-monitoring [1].

3. CELEBRITY INVOLVEMENT

3.1 The aesthetic influence of celebrities on the masses

Celebrities are people who influence in a certain field, such as actors, singers, athletes. They are often exposed to magazines, television, and online social media, and receive excessive public attention. Thus, all the details of the celebrity, such as figure, appearance, and living habits will be enlarged and even spread widely. The images of slender and charming female celebrities are continuously presented throughout the media, which strengthens the unattainable ideal of a perfect body [9]. In the Chinese public's impression, female celebrities even have a fixed standard for their body. For example, they can be said to have a perfect body if they weigh no more than 50 kg. This phenomenon exposes women to a lot of exposure to thin idealized body pictures. The public subtly agrees with the so-called good figure standards and compares them with their own figures, thus drive for thinness. This is attributed to the social comparison process which illustrates human beings are born with the urge to evaluate themselves [10]. When objectively evaluated standards do not exist, they will make evaluations by comparing themselves with others. It can be said that most women cannot compare with the perfect figure on the screen, and body dissatisfaction and negative emotional impact caused by the social comparison process are inevitable [9].

In addition, the characteristics of social networking sites shorten the distance between celebrities and the public and give the right to actively interact and communicate to both parties. Users have autonomy, which means they can choose whom to follow freely and participate in content creation and online communication with celebrities [11]. Therefore, the exposure to thin and unrealistic content is in the train of social networking sites. In recent years, many celebrities have initiated body shape challenges and have caused a great disturbance in China. Among them, the most influential one is the challenge called "Comic Waist". Specifically, the female imitated the actions of the characters in the comics, placing her thighs flat on the chair, her waist close to the chair facade, and her upper body lying on the ground. The whole figure showed an inverted Z-shape, with the waist bent back close to 90 degrees. This kind of extreme body shape challenge quickly became popular on social networking platforms because the women in the image showed a slim waist, attractive body curve, and high flexibility of the body. This challenge created 1.66 billion discussions on Weibo, and 14,000 people participated. Not all women can do this action, it requires the body must be slender and the waist must be flexible and soft enough. At the same time, many users said that this spread body anxiety after seeing it. Moreover, a doctor pointed out that the "comic waist" challenge is a posture of lumbar hyper extension, which can easily cause muscle stretching and even increase the risk of lumbar degeneration. This challenge to the body shape will not only cause physical harm to people but also aggravate the comparison between women and their peers or celebrities and

encourage unrealistic body standards for women, resulting in body dissatisfaction and body shame.

3.2 The influence of celebrities on fan consumption and fan values

The intimacy between fans and celebrities increases as they consume more celebrity-related media content [12]. This emotion is similar to actual interpersonal relationships and is sustainable. Fans could glean vicarious pleasure from this kind of relationship with celebrities, even if it is non-reciprocal [12]. When fans follow and imitate celebrities, the process of identification takes place. They use celebrities as role models and agree with their remarks, including views on advocating skinny for beauty.

Studies have shown that celebrities would affect people's dressing styles and consumption habits. According to social comparison theory, the psychological gap appears when people compare themselves with the perfect image created by celebrities. This motivates them to imitate the celebrities, for instance, celebrity's same clothes or cosmetics. This kind of imitation can shorten the gap between them and celebrities and resolve self-celebrity differences [12]. Furthermore, when there are more opportunities for contact with celebrities, fans seek to be closely related to the lives of celebrities. When entertainment celebrities endorse certain products, their fans will realize that these products represent the characteristics of celebrities. They may pursue the product to solve the gap between themselves and their perfect image. Therefore, this phenomenon also explains why most advertisers favor celebrities to endorse their products. According to the 2020 Weibo Beauty Industry Report [13], as of June, there were more than 350 million makeup-related interactions. Beauty video has more than 6.5 billion views, 55% of which are imitating the same style of celebrity variety shows. There are 220 million beauty bloggers on this platform that specifically recommend and sell various beauty and skincare products for the public, accounting for 67% of the total beauty users [13]. Internet celebrities have become a powerful product recommendation medium. Combined with Weibo hotspots and celebrity effects, beauty-related topics have greatly improved the assets of major brands. As a result, celebrities have a powerful influence on the consumption and values of fans. Their words and deeds on the Internet have intensified fans' pursuit of a perfect image, as well as changes in aesthetics and values.

4. DISCUSSION

Although women cannot avoid the self-objectification and dissatisfaction with the body brought by social media, learning to establish a more positive and objective attitude may alleviate the psychological damage. Firstly, it is a good way to establish multiple self-values and appreciate one's value from multiple dimensions. The body is not just used to be appreciated or evaluated by others, it is a good way to learn to separate the mind from the body shape and observe again. Recalling the great things that have been achieved before, these achievements may not be related to your appearance, body, and weight. Good appearance and body shape may bring people some sense of superiority, but these are not all the values that a person can embody. Exploring more self-possibility can help people realize their self-evaluation from multiple aspects, instead of just being restricted to superficial appearance and body. Furthermore, looking at the advertisements and information on social networking sites more objectively and rationally can get rid of the process of social comparison. Everyone is an independent individual, they are not flat, they have self-worth, and are appreciated and recognized by others. When receiving the impact of idealized images and advertisements, choose to look at it calmly. More importantly, do not attack and criticize why you cannot achieve the same as them and learn to establish a correct self-perception. In the book "The Courage to Be Disliked", it is mentioned that people should learn self-acceptance, if one cannot do it, one can honestly accept this "one's incapable self", and then try the best to work in the direction one can do it [14]. Therefore, when faced with objective body consciousness and self-dissatisfaction, one should strive to accept the imperfect self and not adhere to other's points of view. The establishment of correct and diverse self-evaluations and rational treatment of unreality things can help one achieve a better self.

5. CONCLUSION

Continuously exposure to a large number of idealized images, including advertisements and social networking sites, will cause women to form self-surveillance. Furthermore, the formation of self-objectification. The influence of celebrities on the Internet and the unrealistic publicity promoted can cause users to be dissatisfied with their bodies. This could be illustrated that the influence of celebrities on the public is very important, in terms of aesthetics, consumption, and values. As more and more interactions with celebrities on the Internet, users' intimacy with celebrities will gradually increase. Their admiration for celebrities turns into identification, more importantly, unsatisfactory results are presented when the perfect image of a celebrity is compared with itself. Hence, imitating celebrities is inevitable, including their figure, clothing, speech, behavior, etc. In general, the unrealistic and perfect images in all aspects of online media will hurt women's mental health and even cause body anxiety and physical health problems. However, the issue of individual differences is ignored in this

research. Every woman has different views and perceptions of things. When facing the objectification and comparison of others, the degree of personal internalization will not be equal, and some people may be more sensitive. In addition, age, sexuality, ethnicity, class, living environment, and personal experience may bring different effects and results. The lack of diversity makes the results of the analysis not fully corroborated. These limitations may be studied more specific through more detailed questionnaires and statistical models. Despite these restrictions, this study provides a new perspective on online media and women's mental health and may also supply more objective persuasion for struggling women.

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