The Influence of Chinese Social Media "Xiaohongshu" on Appearance Anxiety Among University Students in Shanghai

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Abstract. "Appearance anxiety" has become a social phenomenon, and many studies have shown that the use of social media like Facebook, makes people more likely to feel anxious about appearance. At the same time, in today's society, social media is not only a platform for people to share and communicate with each other, but also a platform for business transactions. Xiaohongshu, for example, is a platform that combines social and commercial attributes. In order to create an "anxious" environment, the content published on the platform is carefully designed, which induces the audience to buy the goods within the platform. This paper aims to gain a deeper understanding through quantitative research. A survey of 97 university students at a university in Shanghai was conducted by distributing questionnaires. The result shows that among the 76 university students who used Xiaohongshu, in turn, had physical anxiety, especially in terms of body shape. But this anxiety doesn't tempt users of Xiaohongshu to buy the corresponding products recommended by this site.

Keywords: Social Media · Appearance Anxiety · Shanghai

1 Introduction

With the rapid development of the Internet and the rapid rise of "we media". Although the traditional media in China shows obvious decline, TV media, as the representative of traditional mainstream media, still shows strong coverage and high frequency contact rate. However, through mobile Internet channels, Chinese social media users maintain a high level of interaction stickiness, showing the characteristics of high frequency and low duration. In the communication channel ecology of current political news, mainstream media have absolute advantages in traditional media channels, while the channel acceptance of the most authoritative government portal website is not high.

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Among social applications, Weibo and traditional portal websites have obvious channel advantages, while other social media applications, especially overseas media, are inferior. The reliability of traditional large media channels and government websites is highly evaluated, while only traditional portal websites in new media channels are slightly better than others, and the media trust degree is inversely correlated with the newness of the platform.

Xiaohongshu is the largest lifestyle sharing community in China. It is also an e-commerce platform based on UGC (user-generated content) social networking. On Xiaohongshu, users can record their life through short videos, texts and other forms. Inspired by the slogan of "Inspire Lives, share and discover the wonders of the world", Xiaohongshu allows users to record their Lives through short videos and texts, share their lifestyles and interact with each other based on their interests. As of October 2019, Xiaohongshu has over 100 million monthly active users, 70% of whom are born in the 1990s, and continues to grow rapidly.

Psychological research has found that appearance anxiety presents a certain degree of age structure stratification, "the existence of appearance anxiety is often the young people in their 20s." Some university students pay too much attention to themselves and are self-centred, so they are more prone to face anxiety and even social fear due to face anxiety. "For example, some university students dare not go out to meet people because of acne". Media survey found that university students on their own appearance satisfaction rating presents a certain difference. 55% gave their looks a score of 3, saying they were average. 25% are satisfied with their appearance, scoring 4 points; Only 10% said they were very satisfied with their appearance, 10% said they were not very satisfied with their appearance, and few people said they were very dissatisfied. At present, with the development of social media and the rapid transmission of information, personal judgment on appearance is increasingly influenced by external factors such as the social environment. "At the same time, the Internet can bring the world's most beautiful men and women to us anytime, anywhere. Faced with the impact of a large number of dominant images, we tend to unconsciously form a subjective impression that there are many good-looking men and women in the world, but we are not one of them, and even feel that we are not good-looking, which is a potential social comparison problem."

2   Literature Review

In previous studies, more studies believe that appearance anxiety is more likely to appear in young women, especially those who spend more time on social media [1]. Research indicate that young women are more vulnerable to pictures on social media and produce anxiety [2]. EA Vogel, JP Rose, LR Roberts think that social media provides space and technology for people's comparison, and will give people the illusion that "others get better than themselves". Using social media for a long time will reduce people's self-confidence and make users have negative emotions about themselves [3]. In addition, previous studies have compared the effects of various media on women's facial anxiety and concluded that different types of mass media have different effects on women's satisfaction with their own body. Some researchers believe that different media have different effects on young women's self-objectification. Compared with traditional media

(such as TV and magazines), young women using social media (face book) will have more self-objectification.

However, in the influence of mass media on women's body image: upward social comparison, it is also pointed out that if this motivation is driven by self-evaluation motivation, its negative effect will weaken [4]. When women realize that their physical appearance will be taken as the main observation and evaluation object by others, women will internalize the perspective of a third person and regard themselves as the object of observation and evaluation based on their appearance [5].

It is also found that anxiety about one's appearance is more likely to occur in the comparison between peers. It is found that in adolescence, regardless of men and women, friends and peers are the most important factors affecting appearance internalization and body image satisfaction. In conversation with friends, talking about topics about appearance is directly proportional to their dissatisfaction with their appearance. This situation exists between men and women, but girls will have more such feelings [6].

The use of social media can have a direct impact through internalization of beauty or upward social comparison, or these two principles can be used separately. These studies are more or less based on the two principles of upward social comparison and internalization of beauty, trying to prove that social media is a factor that causes people, especially young women, to have facial anxiety in the way of examination [7]. But some research shows the majority of appearance comparisons in women's everyday lives occur in person [8].

Some scholars regard appearance anxiety as a publicity means for enterprises to make profits. Chinese scholar believes that the concept of "appearance anxiety" is developed under the influencers economy and is a concept that companies use the media to publicize in order to obtain more benefits. Through the definition of "perfect image" created by influencers [9], the perspective media can spread, so as to solidify the audience's aesthetic vision, make the audience's aesthetic simplification, and create individual anxiety, so as to promote the consumption desire of beauty instruments, food, cosmetics and other related commodities [10].

Although a large number of researchers have studied facial anxiety before, most scholars study western content and rarely discuss such a problem in Chinese society. Moreover, when doing their research, most of them focus on Facebook, which is very convincing, but cannot be representative for all types of social media. This paper can supplement the content of this research direction. The purpose of this paper is to study how "Xiaohongshu" app, which combines economy and community, causes people's appearance anxiety and the impact of this anxiety. This paper refines the problem and discusses the impact of social media on the specific population of university students in Shanghai.

3 Methods

The research samples of this study are selected from university students in Shanghai, mainly based on the following considerations: First, university students have grown up with the booming development of the Internet, and they are called "aborigines" in the Internet era. University students are more active in consuming information products from social media. Second, in university, individuals tend to pay more attention to

social gender and choose their own body image. University is a key turning point for each individual's gender socialization. Third, nowadays university students have higher discretionary income and consumption intention, and they are active promoters of the consumer market. Finally, due to the author's own conditions and limitations, the most contact and understanding of the object is Shanghai university students. Therefore, the research object is set as contemporary Shanghai university students.

In this paper, we chose to make questionnaires on Wenjuan.com and distribute them on the right wenjuan.com platform. A total of 104 online questionnaires were distributed in two weeks, and 97 valid questionnaires were obtained after recycling and eliminating unqualified ones, with an effective rate of 93.3%. In terms of whether the surveyed group uses Xiaohongshu, users who use Xiaohongshu account for 78.35% of the total number of users surveyed, and those who do not use Xiaohongshu account for 21.65% of the total number of users surveyed. The sample meets the research needs.

4   Results

The biggest anxiety brought by Xiaohongshu is the body shape, although there is no special connection with the tag that people prefer to see. Among the tags in Xiaohongshu, people are more inclined to look at beauty and skin care tags, and those who choose these tags took up 27.63% of the total number. It was followed by dress tag and food tag, with these two tags accounting for 23.68% and 14.47% respectively. Of 21 students who chose beauty and skin care, 11 thought Xiaohongshu to make them feel anxious about their body. 18 people who chose wear tag have a complicated anxiety about their body parts, and undergraduates who chose the food tag also believe that the Xiaohongshu has a great impact on their body anxiety. Overall, 44.74% of people believe that Xiaohongshu will make themselves into anxiety about their own body, 25% of them think that the app has increased their anxiety about their facial features, body shape, skin colour and hair volume, and 11.84% of people believe that it will not make themselves anxious about the 4 parts mentioned above.

The subjects themselves were at a high level of appearance anxious, 76.32% students stay at a high or average level. Only 5.26% thought they suffering appearance anxiety all the time, and having a desire to become more pretty. Among the 76.31% of the students, 39.47% of them occasionally felt anxious, and 36.84% would feel anxious under the influence of peers around them. Another 17.11% people seldom experienced this kind of anxiety, and 1.32% were satisfied with their body image. This questionnaire not only shows these group of students have a low degree of appearance anxiety, but also a short browse time in Xiaohongshu APP. Of the 76 people who used Xiaohongshu, most of them spent less than 3 h a day on it, with 40.79% of people use it for no more than an hour. Besides, it seems that Xiaohongshu has a little influence with their appearance anxiety. 64.47% of the subjects believed that the level of anxiety had increased a little, another 27.63% believed that their anxiety level had not changed after using Xiaohongshu, and only 7.89% of the people thought their anxiety had increased a lot. Furthermore, 43.42% of students believed that after browsing Xiaohongshu, they could still maintain a positive attitude towards their appearance.

Even though pictures is the main factor of appearance anxiety in social media, text still have its influence. In this survey, most people believed that like pictures, text played

a role in making them feel anxious about their appearance. More details, 52.63% of students believed that the influence of text was weaker than that of pictures, while 26.32% believed that the influence of words was same as that of pictures. And there is 9.21% of people thought that 9.21% of people believe that text have a powerful influence than pictures in leading people to body image dissatisfaction. In contrast, 11.84% of people thought images have more impact than text.

Last, when studying whether the appearance anxiety caused by Xiaohongshu would affects people's willingness to buy goods on this platform, the questionnaire shows that 76.32% of the students did not buy the skin care and make up products recommended on Xiaohongshu. Moreover, even if they buy, it did not have much influence with the appearance anxiety caused by the Xiaohongshu paper. Only 10.53% of people buy the products recommended by it because of the appearance anxiety Xiaohongshu brought to them. Therefore, the impact of Xiaohongshu paper on the appearance anxiety of this group of students is very little, and this externally imposed appearance anxiety is difficult to persuade consumers to buy the products recommended in the paper. In other words, students purchased the product entirely through their will.

5   Discussion

According to the survey, the biggest anxiety Xiaohongshu brings to Shanghai university students is their body shape. Foucault mentioned the concept of discipline in his book Discipline and Punishment. Foucault believes that "discipline" refers to "the body aimed at shaping the 'tame body', which can obey instructions on the one hand and meet the established technical or operational requirements on the other hand". In the era of social media, people are constantly watching every move in society with the help of mobile devices and real-time software. All kinds of social dogmas about people's body shape reflect the social environments discipline and gaze on people's body shape. These virtually promote people to increase the shackles of body management, not easy to relax.

To some extent, mild body anxiety can stimulate people's desire to exercise and reduce the risk of obesity. But body anxiety can lead to a host of physical and mental problems.

In the 97 valid questionnaires, 76.32% of the students have higher than average anxiety, which causes them to be irritable and have no intention to study. They spend a lot of time looking for diet and exercise on social network every day. But as Xiaohongshu weight-loss methods are mixed, some students suffer from insomnia, hair loss and even serious mental illnesses such as anorexia and bulimia due to the wrong dieting methods.

Although most students are in appearance anxiety, the questionnaire reflects that Xiaohongshu can hardly promote Shanghai university students to buy the products recommended by the communicator by simply spreading appearance anxiety. The reason is that most Shanghai university students have formed a relatively healthy consumption concept and can purchase products other than daily necessities by correctly evaluating their own needs and combining their living expenses and living standards. They will not impulsively buy products they do not need due to the appearance anxiety spread by hand to the platform.

However, 10.53% of students bought the products recommended by the blogger because of their appearance anxiety caused by Xiaohongshu. These students are all

female and from the lower grades of sophomore and below. The types of products they buy are also very distinctive, with acne removal and weight loss as the main. To some extent, these characteristics reflect the psychological changes brought by the identity changes of some Chinese students when they change from high school students to university students, and also represent the changes in the focus of the society on these students. In high school, the society only cares about students' study and completely ignores other things. In university, the society begins to put forward requirements on students' appearance, which urges some university students to improve their appearance by using some cosmetics or drugs.

To reduce appearance anxiety, this article offers the following suggestions. First, from the perspective of university students themselves, in terms of value establishment, university students should consciously establish correct and positive values, and take positive and healthy internal qualities such as cultural literacy and moral concepts, rather than physical appearance and body shape, as an important dimension to measure individual value. In the use of social media, we should pay attention to cultivating our ability to distinguish and criticize media information, filter unhealthy and unreasonable "ideal beauty" body information on social media, and avoid internalizing unhealthy ideal beauty promoted by social media as a self-examination standard.

Second, in terms of laws and regulations, relevant government agencies should issue corresponding restrictions to control undesirable information on social media. In the process of evaluating social media, we need to pay attention not only to the user experience, but also to the experience and feelings gained in the actual experience of social media, as well as its psychological and physiological impact on users. In this way, the potential risks in social media are perceived and social media platforms are regulated.

Third, schools need to pay attention to the guidance of students. As a bridge for most students to transition from teenagers to adults, it is necessary for schools to undertake the obligation to popularize scientific, objective and healthy body concepts to women, and to improve students' self-esteem and media critical literacy. This will help them critically examine media content and make clear the difference between the perfect body image presented in the media and reality. To this end, the school can hold relevant theme lectures, carry out relevant theme activities, etc.

6   Conclusion

To sum up, this paper believes that Xiaohongshu will bring appearance anxiety to Shanghai university students, but these anxieties is not enough to drive the consumption of Shanghai university students on Xiaohongshu platform. University students should strengthen their spiritual world, use the precious learning time in university to improve their outlook on life, world outlook and values, establish a positive attitude towards life, and form healthy living habits. Reduce the focus on appearance and avoid being tied to social media standards of body perfection. Social media platforms should also create a better online atmosphere, more inclusive of different body shapes and looks, and create a harmonious and beautiful cyberspace.

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