How Do Social Media Affect Social Appearance Anxiety of Chinese High School Students

—Take Little Red Book for an Example

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Abstract: As technology popularizes and advances by leaps and bounds, social media has become an increasing part of teenagers' lives. Social media use can shape mentality and change people's behavior, which may lead to social appearance anxiety. Adolescents are exposed to messages containing certain characteristics when browsing social networks, such as the tendency of people to show their relatively perfect body image on social media, producing low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence issues. Individuals with social appearance anxiety typically hold negative views of their bodies and appearance, and they often try to hide features or body parts that they dislike. Combining with Social Comparison Theory, people tend to compare themselves to other people, including comparing their looks to those celebrities we see on social media platforms. Such a trend is particularly pronounced and on the rise among adolescent females. Drawing on Self-Objectification Theory, the research examines how social media affects the level of Chinese female high school students' social appearance anxiety, using Little Red Book, a common social media used by the Chinese youth population, as an example. The paper uses online case study of self-reports and online questionnaire survey to analyze the present days social appearance anxiety issue among Chinese high school students in the society. The context of this essay includes the cause and effect of social appearance anxiety due to social media; correlation studies and analyses of appearance concerns are relevant to online activities, especially selfies related that receive through social media.

Keywords: social appearance anxiety, social media, social comparison, self-objectification, body image

1. Introduction

The usage of social media has increased dramatically in recent years and is now commonplace. The term "social media" refers to the creation, collaboration, and sharing of content online and encompasses a range of social Internet-based applications, including blogs, social networking sites, and virtual gaming worlds. Griffiths and Kuss claim that using social media might be referred to as a "way of being." However, using social media can give teenagers access to risky situations [1].

The majority of social media users are teenagers, with 84% of those aged 15 to 17 and 79% of those aged 13 to 14 having an active profile, respectively. Identity exploration, self-expression, friendships, and peer acceptability are significant to teenagers throughout this period of physical, social, and psychological transition. Teenagers are especially eager to learn about peer interactions, and social media gives them the freedom to do it whenever and wherever they want. On the other hand, while opinions are welcome regarding adolescents' levels of acceptability in the actual world, the quantity of "friends," "likes," and "opinions" they have accumulated on social media platforms is a definite indicator of their acceptance. Their level of societal acceptance is plainly measured by numbers. Teenage use of social media, in particular, supports adolescents' vital needs for belonging and self-presentation and also offers entertainment, aids in the development of cognitive skills, builds social capital, facilitates social interactions, and supports social interactions [1,2].

The increasing focus on visual self-presentation on social media may promote concerns related to body image and raise more questions about social media use, especially among adolescents. Social media platforms have enabled both male and female users to become active creators of content and are increasingly concentrating on photography and visual stimulation [1,3].

In the research, I chose Chinese high school girls as participants and firstly summarized the posts that cause social appearance anxiety, especially selfies that show body image with perfect tendency. After that, I used the Quasi-experiment method to find 5 matching posts on the Little Red Book and developed a specific scale based on the characteristics of these posts. When done, I invited 200 female high school students to read these 5 posts and then fill out a questionnaire which was designed based on the Social Appearance Anxiety Scale. The Social Appearance Anxiety Scale (SAAS) consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral expressions related to the appearance concerns of individuals and examines the fear of being negatively judged by others based on one's overall appearance.

Additionally, social media usage appears to give people who are unhappy with their body image, particularly teenagers, the ability to strategically manage how they show themselves through photos, selfies, videos, and other visual content. Ayar, Gerçeker, zdemir, & Bektas; Doan & Olak found that those who are socially self-conscious about their appearance may utilize social media more problematically. However, the influence of social anxiety over appearance is still not fully understood, and the predictive function of selfie expectations on problematic social media use has not been investigated [4].

Therefore, this research was conducted to determine the relationship between social media and social appearance anxiety of Chinese high school female students. The following questions will be answered in this research:

1. Why do women of high school age have social appearance anxiety?

2. Has social media increased their appearance anxiety? What are the trends?

3. What content on social media and what specific characteristics of information increase their appearance anxiety?

4. How does this content increase their appearance anxiety?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Social Anxiety and Social Appearance Anxiety

Social appearance anxiety is known as a form of "social appearance anxiety" is linked to how people perceive their bodies and is exacerbated by using social media, which can make people feel lonely [5,6].

2.2. Objectification Theory and Self-Objectification

A culture's propensity to view women's bodies as objects rather than as active, autonomous beings is known as objectification. Numerous methods can be used to objectify someone. Women's bodies, for instance, might be thought of as reproductive vessels, as in Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* [7].

The quotation from Fredrickson and Roberts perfectly illustrates how objectification, both by others and by oneself, impairs performance. Objectification is, at its core, a disturbance. Whatever activity or thinking a woman is involved in, objectification has the power to interrupt and divert her focus to her outward appearance [7-9].

2.3. Selfie Behavior

Selfies and selfie sharing are the most common activities on social media in this regard, facilitating the need for self-exploration, communication, attention-seeking, and favorable feedback from peers and strangers. Numerous researchers have investigated various aspects of the self-portrait phenomenon, such as personality traits and self-objectification experiences. Other researchers who have looked into the gender differences in selfie behavior have found that both male and female adolescents use selfies to present themselves on social media and share various types of selfies. Women, for example, upload solitary, group, or pair selfies while experimenting with different poses, lighting, and settings. While men submit personal selfies to increase their popularity, display their sexual appeal, and increase self-confidence, women do not. Other studies have examined age- and gender-related differences in selfie behavior, identifying characteristics that lead to higher selfie involvement among women and adolescents [3,9-12].

To share favorable self-presentations online and obtain positive feedback, young women seem to be more involved in selfie editing and selfie-posting tactics, as emphasized by other studies. As some studies have observed, greater exposure to one's body image on social media may lead to more social comparisons, which are often closely related to appearance issues [3,10-12].

According to Valkenburg, Peter, Schouten, Doğan, and Çolak, concern about appearance tends to decrease when feedback on one's social media profile is positive and tends to increase when feedback is negative. In this regard, Hart, Leary, and Rejeski defined social appearance anxiety as preoccupation with one's physical appearance and the fear that one's appearance (body and face shape, height, and weight) may be negatively evaluated by others. In contrast to social anxiety and body image anxiety, in Hart et al.'s study, social appearance anxiety specifically refers to concerns about personal attractiveness and is a combination of personal problems and social comparison anxiety. Furthermore, social appearance anxiety appears to be particularly associated with the need to make a positive impression on others, most likely due to a perception of inadequacy to achieve this goal. In this regard, a possible bidirectional relationship between (problematic) social media use and (online and offline) body image problems should be considered [3,12,13].

2.4. Body Image, Positive Bias and Social Comparison

2.4.1. Body Image

According to Sills, D.'s research and summary in 2023, a person's body image is how they perceive themselves in their minds, and it may be related to how they behave in reality. Parental views, other early experiences, internal elements like mood or emotions, as well as other circumstances, can all have an impact on a child's body image in different ways. Body disorder, when unhappiness with slight or undetectable faults in appearance turns into a significant fixation, is a serious kind of negative

body image. Numerous factors, such as effectiveness in school or the workplace, pleasure in romantic relationships, and general quality of life, can be impacted by poor body image [3,4,7,10,13].

However, this imagined fault won't even be observed by other people, and those who have negative body perceptions could constantly have pessimistic and obsessional thoughts about their appearance. Other indications of a negative body image include: Examples include obsessing about seemingly insignificant aesthetic faults, thinking oneself to be ugly or unattractive, avoiding social situations, continuously comparing one's appearance to others, and needing validation from others. Another example is never being content with one's looks [3,7,10,13].

2.4.2. Positive Bias

In 2019, Margret Banford summarized that any form of cognitive bias is unjust to the recipient because each person is unique and deserves to be treated as such. Even constructive bias restricts people and keeps them from reaching their objectives. It forces you to behave in a certain way, which is limiting and unfair. People should be respected as unique individuals. This prejudice could make us think we don't have any issues. Unfortunately, bias of any kind can affect how we perform our jobs. Positive bias entails categorizing individuals differently. It affects how you perceive them. It influences how you respond when they behave differently than how you expect them to. The same principles apply to positive bias. Even while we may not see it to be restricted, it still is. It restricts the prejudice on both sides. It keeps us from really recognizing how beautiful people are. Additionally, it keeps the target of our bias from being a complete human being. Because it makes our life simpler, we categorize people into small boxes. We can comprehend someone if we give them a label. Positive bias starts off in this way. When you categorize someone as positively prejudiced, it makes it harder to comprehend when they think outside the box. Or, to put it another way, labeling people decreases your chance of appreciating their humanity [11,14].

2.4.3. Social Comparison

According to the Social Comparison Theory, people evaluate their social and personal values by contrasting themselves with others. This hypothesis, which was created by Leon Festinger in 1954, explains how people compare their actions, accomplishments, and opinions with those of others. We all compare ourselves to others in our social milieu, whether it's our appearance to media celebrities or our skills to those of those around us. The Social Comparison Theory in psychology explains why we have a need to constantly compare ourselves to others [5,15].

Two different kinds of social comparison are put forth by Leon Festinger: upward and downward comparisons. Comparing individuals who you believe to be in a worse or lower position than you in some way is known as a downward social comparison. It typically has a beneficial effect, supporting increased self-confidence and self-esteem. Additionally, from a relative standpoint, this makes us feel better about ourselves, regardless of our deficit. When used excessively, downward social comparison—which is frequently utilized when people are feeling low or unsure about their skills or status—can cause complacency and impede personal growth. When we compare ourselves to those who are wealthier than we are, such as pupils with superior grades or even our tutors, we are making upward social comparisons [5,15].

On the other hand, when we compare ourselves to others who are wealthier than we are, such as pupils with better grades or even our mentors, we are engaging in an upward social comparison. This has the great advantage of motivating us to constantly seek out ways to enhance our perceptions of ourselves. However, it might also FEEL like we are never good enough because there is always someone better than us, making us feel unsatisfied and inadequate. When people are trying to better themselves or progress themselves, upward social comparison is frequently used. However, if the

comparison objective is out of reach, it can result in low self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy, or even envy [5,15].

3.   Methods

The purpose of this study is to shed light on how social media use affects the development of social anxiety about appearance in modern Chinese youth. The experiment was limited to a group of female high school students in China, and data from Little Red Book, a hugely popular social, creative, and commercial platform in China, was analyzed as an example of a typical related social phenomenon. How and why do these specific groups respond to images or words online that promote an ideal body image or cause worry and anticipation?

The approach utilized in the study was used to gather accurate information on social anxiety related to looks, as well as to comprehend the actual responses and psychological journeys of female high school students. This is the source of the data on which the analysis that follows will be based.

1) By locating pertinent posts on Little Red Book that have traits that could contribute to social anxiety related to appearance

2) By counting the traits and psychological underpinnings of their content traits and comments under the posts from different dimensions, particularly those posted by females in high school

3.1.   Quasi-experiment

3.1.1. Background

Quasi-experimental studies Quasi-experimental study designs, often described as non-randomized, pre-post intervention studies, are common in the medical informatics literature, including a wide range of non-randomized intervention studies.

3.1.2. Quasi-experiment

I decided to evaluate the posts on the popular among today's youth platform Little Red Book. They are typically distinguished by the exhibition of comparatively excellent photos of their colleagues, according to a thorough reading of the pertinent posts.

The first category of postings primarily consists of selfie sharing, where the face of the subject is faultless and has different exaggerated beauty effects. The second kind of post may purport to include the student party in "rejecting social appearance anxiety," "reconciling with the face," or related subjects in an effort to lessen social appearance anxiety and appeal to the general public. However, when the post displays a "perfect" image, people are drawn to it with the intention of consoling themselves (all people have flaws and similar theories), but when they see that others (some of whom use this topic to show their own appearances) have a better body shape and beauty of face than they do in order to "reject anxiety", they read the comments instead and discover that they do, too. Instead, I can tell from the comments that some of the look anxiety has grown as a result of this piece. known as Versailles frequently. The third and worst is to use the commuters' and students' stress over appearance to advertise certain low-cost goods with discounts. This subpar traffic marketing raises anxiety about increasing purchasing power. As an illustration, in the before and after photos of a salicylic facial mask, you can see how the skin on the model's face improves after using the product. This is done on purpose through copywriting and other techniques to give the impression that everyone around them is constantly trying to look better, which makes users—especially students—more anxious about their appearance in public. The fourth generates the impression that women are being observed, and the title contains an implied objectification, such as "Men like those women who..." and such similar expressions.

3.2. Questionnaire Design

3.2.1. Background

To measure concern over having one's complete appearance, including body shape, negatively evaluated by others, the Social Appearance Anxiety Scale (SAAS) was created. The SAAS and social anxiety markers had a positive correlation. The SAAS has also been associated with a wider disparity between perceived, actual, and ideal physical characteristics, beliefs that one's appearance is fundamentally flawed and socially unacceptable and that being unattractive is bad for one's social standing, feelings of unattractiveness, emphasis on appearance and its maintenance, and an obsession with being overweight. It was a definite predictor of social anxiety in addition to signs of a poor body image. According to research findings, the SAAS is a gauge of social anxiety relating to one's general appearance.

3.2.2. Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire I created had 133 valid answers submitted. The questionnaire's design combined the SAAS scale, and the multiple-choice and open-ended questions and answers were used to guide the target population in tracing back some of the questions. The questionnaire's main purpose was to gather the personal and emotional experiences of Chinese female high school students regarding social appearance anxiety. The goal of the questionnaire is to investigate whether the material shared on social media has an effect on social anxiety, how it does so, and what particular traits these influencing contents have in order to make a straightforward classification.

The questionnaire includes the questions below.

For the following questions, please select a number from 1 to 5 according to your situation: 1 means strongly disagree, 2 means disagree, 3 means neutral, 4 means agree, and 5 means strongly agree.

1. I feel comfortable with the way I appear to others.
2. I feel nervous when having my picture taken.
3. I get tense when it is obvious people are looking at me.
4. I am concerned people would not like me because of the way I look.
5. I worry that others talk about flaws in my appearance when I am not around.
6. I am concerned people will find me unappealing because of my appearance.
7. I am afraid that people find me unattractive.
8. I worry that my appearance will make life more difficult for me.
9. I am concerned that I have missed out on opportunities because of my appearance.
10. I get nervous when talking to people because of the way I look.
11. I feel anxious when other people say something about my appearance.
12. I am frequently afraid I would not meet others' standards of how I should look.
13. I worry people will judge the way I look negatively.
14. I am uncomfortable when I think others are noticing flaws in my appearance.
15. I worry that a romantic partner will/would leave me because of my appearance.
16. I am concerned that people think I am not good looking.

Please answer two open-ended questions below.

1. Have you seen any similar posts as those posts shown in the questionnaire? Please give your opinion such as feelings and their effects on you about these five categories of posts.
2. What kind of online material makes you uncomfortable or makes you feel poor about yourself because of your appearance and body image?
3. How did you feel about the most recent instance of appearance concern you can recall?

It is crucial to note that when designing the questionnaire, I first displayed five posts in the first section and instructed the readers to read the posts before responding to the questions. This was done in an effort to elicit the readers' memories of similar reading experiences and experiences, making the responses more efficient and quick. In order to compare participant responses to the questionnaire, I utilized a 5-point Likert scale while designing questions to quickly gauge each participant's level of look anxiety. Third, the survey employed open-ended questions to gather data. Examples of open-ended questions were: What kind of online material makes you uncomfortable or makes you feel poor about yourself because of your appearance and body image? How did you feel about the most recent instance of appearance concern you can recall? I gathered descriptive vocabulary and emotional reactions to the actual experiences that Chinese female high school students had as a result of seeing these types of posts, and I focused on watching the logic of their journey in order to analyze how the content of these posts had an impact. I asked the participants about their perceptions of these four types of posts. Third, open-ended questions were used in the survey to collect information. The following are a few examples of open-ended questions: What kinds of online content make you feel uneasy or bad about yourself because of your appearance and body image? What impression did the most recent episode of appearance anxiety leave on you? In order to assess the impact of the information in these posts, I gathered descriptive words and emotional responses to the actual experiences that Chinese female high school students had as a result of seeing these kinds of postings. I also concentrated on following the logic of their path and questioned the participants about how they felt about these four different post categories.

4. Discussion

The majority of the female high school pupils who responded to the study said they experienced some level of look anxiety. A large percentage of 94.0%, or 125 out of 133, stated that they had experienced or were now feeling appearance anxiety in varied degrees. A total of 75.1% of respondents acknowledged that they have felt self-conscious about their appearance as a result of social media. Nine of these subjects were found to have high social anxiety related to looks. In contrast, those who struggled with social appearance anxiety frequently had low mood, internal conflict, reluctance to socialize, and lack of confidence. They also frequently experienced a fear of talking to others.

In the research, I examined the five post categories stated below. It is clear from these posts' prevalence of selfies that the authors are presenting a near-perfect version of themselves. Aside from four posts from four various categories, the fifth article is a reflective one about look anxiety on social media platforms; I have also excerpted some of the higher responses and liked ideas to include in the questionnaire. I have chosen a representative post from each of the categories I have broken down into. The first type is the more prevalent, where some bloggers or users show off their ideal appearance—a body that is suitable for the media and skin that is nearly flawless—by using special effects or beauty cameras. When they see peers of a similar age displaying a more perfect appearance than their own, teenagers, particularly female high school students, tend to ignore their flawed and hidden sides. This social comparison results in low self-esteem and distress when comparing people's images online with their own appearance in reality.

The second kind took part in the discussions on "Rejecting face anxiety" and "Reconciling with the veiled face" but instead offered a "perfect" image. The comments in this example indicated that people were most likely experiencing anxiety and sought solace from their fear and lack of confidence in "positive" posts like this one. The majority of users, however, believed that the post displayed an attractiveness superior to their own, and they were perplexed by the idea, "Why do I feel concerned when other people are so good-looking? Users may also think that simply attractiveness is a requirement for confidence, which would make them feel as though their body image is below the

so-called average. The term "Versailles" is also used to describe this kind of post, which, whether on purpose or accidentally, affects the user emotionally.

The third category of concealed advertisements uses office workers' or students' concerns about their look in public to advertise low-cost goods with discounts. These posts frequently include phrases like "people around you are using," "students must come try this product," and "the use of this product by the female student" to elicit social comparison. The postings are intended to boost the product's purchasing power. These articles boost the appearance of concern while also enhancing the purchase power because they contain inflated and dishonest traffic marketing.

For instance, the skin condition of a model's face before and after using a salicylic acid mask is contrasted in advertising. These ad posts employ language to suggest that everyone around them is constantly attempting to improve their appearance, which amplifies customers' concerns about their appearance. Our target population is more susceptible to this form of anxiety marketing, and they are also more likely to buy these products because of their social anxiety.

The fourth sort, whether on purpose or accidentally, fosters an environment in which women are objectified through names and issues like "Men like xxx kind of women." Because of this, self-objectification causes women to fear their appearance and unconsciously see themselves as being watched. However, during my study, I also discovered that numerous messages on social media supported women's unwillingness to be objectified from a male standpoint. Users who submit pictures or descriptions of their daily activities could add phrases like "Against male condensation" to ensure that no male users are suggested to them by the platform's algorithm.

5. Conclusion

An exploratory study and analysis utilizing the platform Little Red Book as an example were done in order to investigate how social media affects social appearance anxiety in Chinese female high school students. I divided the posts on Little Red Book that made me self-conscious about my appearance into four categories, choosing one representative post for each group. Selfies that display a relatively ideal body image fall under the first type. These selfies may apply makeup to conform to popular aesthetics or just display the user's personal style. Posts that seem to be about "rejecting face anxiety" but instead display an almost flawless body image fall into the second category, which makes individuals feel inferior since they can't compete. The third form is commercial marketing, which makes people feel as though their appearance is less than ideal by utilizing peer comparison to entice customers to purchase things. Posts with hints of self-objectification fall into the fourth type; they frequently use an analysis of women from a masculine perspective as their foundation.

Research has shown that social media use can cause social appearance anxiety in female high school students and a significant percentage of female high school students suffer from it. When seeing some information on the Internet, under the influence of self-objectification, girls tend to make unconscious comparisons with female body images on the Internet. They are prone to think that these images are more perfect than they are and fail to see the flaws behind the photos. The research has shown that a sizable portion of female high school students experience social anxiety related to their appearance as a result of using social media. Under the impact of self-objectification, girls often compare their bodies unconsciously to those of women they see online when they are viewing information. They have a propensity to overestimate how wonderful these pictures are and fail to recognize the imperfections in the pictures.

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