Social Media, Celebrity, and Appearance Anxiety in Adolescent

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Abstract: This review paper delves into the intricate nexus between social media, celebrity culture, and the growing instances of appearance anxiety among adolescents. The rapid proliferation of social media platforms and the consequent rise in celebrity idolization has reshaped the way adolescents perceive beauty standards and their own self-worth. This dissertation seeks to synthesize extant literature on the subject, investigating how exposure to celebrity-driven content on social media platforms contributes to or exacerbates appearance anxiety among this vulnerable demographic. Results indicate a strong correlation between frequent interaction with celebrity content and heightened levels of self-consciousness and appearance anxiety among adolescents. This is particularly prevalent in scenarios where idealized and often unattainable beauty standards are perpetuated. This research has many implications: it highlights the need for interventions in digital media consumption, helps parents and educators understand the challenges of the digital age, and advocates for social media companies to take accountability and take action to lessen the harmful effects of celebrity culture. By highlighting these concerns, the study emphasizes the imperative to foster a healthier digital environment for the well-being of adolescents.

Keywords: social media, celebrity culture, adolescents, beauty standards, social comparison

1. Introduction

The advent of the digital age has led to an exponential growth in the number of people using social media platforms and the amount of time spent per capita [1]. Social media consists of various online platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, TikTok, and Facebook that allow individuals to connect, share, and collect information in real time. The corollary to this digital revolution is the rise of celebrities and influencers who dominate these platforms and have a huge impact on teenage users [2].

The rise of social media platforms has not only revolutionized the way individuals connect and communicate, but has had a profound psychological impact, especially on vulnerable groups. Adolescents are at a crucial time of identity formation, yet they find themselves immersed in a digital realm dominated by celebrities, influencers, and a plethora of idealized images [3]. The well-publicized controversy surrounding the impact of platforms such as Facebook on the mental health of adolescent users [4] further highlights the urgency of this issue. As these platforms continue to evolve, it has become crucial to delve deeper into their psychological impact. Through a

comprehensive review of existing literature, this paper analyzes and synthesizes relevant research and scholarly writings to determine the impact of social media and celebrity culture on body image and appearance anxiety in adolescents. By reviewing existing research, we identify patterns, trends, and insights into the relationship between these factors.

Here are the review questions of this paper: RQ1: Correlations between social media use and adolescent appearance anxiety. RQ2: How does exposure to celebrity content on social media affect adolescents' perceptions of body image?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Social Media and Appearance Anxiety

In the complex process of identity formation among adolescents, social media has become a key area in which they make connections, seek recognition, and construct their self-image [5]. At this stage, adolescents are more sensitive to the perceptions of their peers [6], which is further complicated by ubiquitous digital platforms.

It is evident that by today, social media is ubiquitous in the daily lives of adolescents, but an in-depth study of the psychological processes it triggers is important for this paper. The most prevalent of these processes is the innate human tendency to compare oneself to others [7]. The large number of users and the platforms on which they are exposed to information give people the opportunity to enrich their social comparisons [8]. In the age of social media, this natural tendency is amplified. People tend to show their most positive, refined, and beautiful sides on social media [9]. While facing struggles with self-worth and identity, teenagers are bombarded with carefully edited images of "perfect lives," "ideal bodies," and "golden-proportioned faces," as well as videos. Platforms that are known for their visual content, such as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, tend to be the arenas for these comparisons.

Historically, aesthetic standards have been shaped by cultural, social and geographical factors. However, with the global reach of social media, people have begun to gravitate towards a more "universal" ideal of beauty. Filters, editing and photo beautification further distort these standards, often setting unrealistically high standards. The introduction of filters and user-friendly photo editing tools reinforced the quest for "perfection" on social media. A study of young Nigerian girls between the ages of 12-18 showed that users share photos primarily to show the best possible body image according to certain socially constructed standards [10]. So, these features allow users to edit blemishes, adjust body proportions, and even modify facial structures to present an altered version of themselves. Over time, as these digitally enhanced images are normalized, the Research has shown that investing heavily in and editing self-presentation on social media increases facial dissatisfaction and negativity in young women [11].

The framework of social media relies on likes, comments, and shares. People tend to share their photos in order to get more "likes" [12]. The number of likes or comments equates to recognition and self-worth as well as higher self-esteem [13]. When their posts, especially those emphasizing appearance, receive a lot of attention, it reinforces the notion that "appearance equals worth." On platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, "likes," "comments," and "shares" are often a form of recognition. Posts that conform to popular aesthetic standards may garner more engagement, thus subtly reinforcing those standards. In their quest for approval, adolescents may internalize the notion that conforming to these standards is the only way to gain approval and popularity.

In a study in Central Anatolia, Turkey, 1,363 participants explored the interactions between adolescents' use of social media, appearance anxiety, and binge drinking behavior. They spent an average of approximately 3 hours per day on visually oriented social media platforms, which exposed them to popular ideals of appearance. Data were collected using instruments such as the Social

Appearance Anxiety Scale (SAAS), the Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS), and the Emotional Eating Scale (EES-C). The data showed that 24.4% had social media addiction, but no direct link was found between social appearance anxiety, social media addiction and emotional eating. However, gender, perceived lower household income, and the influence of social media influencers exacerbate social appearance anxiety, especially in girls. These factors, as well as social media addiction, were associated with increased appearance-related anxiety, suggesting potential mental health risks for adolescents influenced by social media [14].

Another study highlights the psychological risks associated with the extensive use of social media (SM), especially in terms of promoting social comparison and focusing on appearance. A study involving 763 adolescents analyzed their participation in social media, particularly activities and content related to appearance [15]. The results of the study showed a positive correlation between SM engagement and psychological problems such as depression, social anxiety, and appearance anxiety. Both general and appearance-related concerns were uniquely responsible for these psychological symptoms.AR preoccupation also amplified the relationship between time spent using SM and appearance rejection sensitivity (appearance-RS), although gender did not moderate the effects of AR SM preoccupation. This study highlights that not only the frequency of SM participation, but also the nature and content of SM participation, particularly around appearance appraisal, increases the risk of depression, social anxiety, and appearance-related sensitivity.

2.2. Celebrity Influence on Adolescent Body Image

Social media has given rise to a new type of celebrity – Social Media Influencer (SMI). Unlike traditional celebrities who usually become famous through movies, music or sports, these new-age celebrities can become instantly famous entirely through their online presence. With nothing more than a smartphone and an internet connection, they can curate and share snippets of their lives, amassing millions of followers in the process.

It used to be that most of the interactions between fans and celebrities were seen on TV, in magazines and newspapers, resulting in secondary attachments [16,17]. But now, platforms like Instagram and TikTok give fans daily access to their favorite celebrities, from behind-the-scenes footage to personal life updates. Fans can comment on posts and celebrities can respond directly, making the relationship between fans and celebrities more intimate and personal.

Celebrity culture has long been a staple of popular culture, but its evolution on social media platforms has been both rapid and transformative. Particularly for adolescents at the stage of self-identity, influencers on social media play an important role in this development, as they offer a variety of possible selves that young people may wish to experiment with [16]. Being in their influence on adolescents encompasses a variety of aspects such as aesthetic standards, behaviors, and consumption intentions. A good example of this is celebrity endorsement. In fact, regular celebrity endorsements are quite common, however, social media further contributes to their influence [18]. A simple post showing a celebrity using a product can make it instantly popular, which is often referred to as the "halo effect" [19]. Unlike traditional celebrities, social media influencers have stronger audience penetration and buying influence [20], especially in industries such as fashion, cosmetics, and daily necessities.

Celebrity endorsements of beauty products and cosmetic surgery amplify idealized beauty standards and increase adolescents' susceptibility to appearance anxiety [3]. In a pilot survey of early adolescents (ages 11 to 14) in the northeastern United States, Charmaraman et al. explored the link between social media engagement and body dissatisfaction. They found that 19% of adolescents expressed concerns about body image, and that higher rates of social media use were associated with higher levels of dissatisfaction and higher levels of depressive symptoms, online social anxiety, and social isolation. In particular, those who regularly followed celebrities on social media reported

increased platform checking and were more likely to experience depressive symptoms and online social anxiety, highlighting the negative socio-emotional impact of teens following celebrity content on social media.

But the truth about the social media industry these days is that celebrities' personalities often overshadow their actual work. Their appearance, home environment, personal challenges, relationships, and daily life may get more attention than their professional achievements. This shift has led to a focus on personal branding, with celebrities' personal beliefs and lifestyles greatly influencing the views of their fans [21]. It is because of this trend that the influence of celebrities on adolescents' perceptions of beauty has intensified. Through a systematic review of the existing literature by Brown and Tiggemann, they identified 36 studies that met the inclusion criteria, covering a variety of methods including qualitative, correlational, big data analysis and experimental design. Their comprehensive review emphasized a consistent theme: exposure to celebrity images, coupled with appearance comparisons and high levels of celebrity admiration, tends to adversely affect an individual's perceived body image [22].

Adolescents often view celebrities as role models [23]. Ho, Lee, and Liao surveyed 1,059 adolescents in Singapore and explored the relationship between adolescents' social comparisons with friends and celebrities on social networking sites (SNSs), and its impact on body image dissatisfaction (BID) and the desire to be thin (DT) or muscular (DM) of desire. The study found a significant correlation between SNS use and body image dissatisfaction, with social comparisons on SNSs being significantly associated with body image dissatisfaction, DT and DM. The study also identified gender differences; women's comparisons with celebrities on SNS were significantly associated with BID and DT, whereas men's were primarily associated with BID. This highlights the complex interplay between celebrity influence, SNS participation and adolescent body image, emphasizing the need for further research and practical interventions in this area.

2.3. Interplay of Celebrity Influence and Social Media

The significant impact of celebrities on an individual's body image has attracted the attention of academics who have explored the relationship between celebrity worship and self-perceptions. Aruguete et al. utilized instruments such as the Celebrity Attitude Scale (CAS) and the Eating Attitude Test (EAT) with college students in order to discover the correlation between body image and celebrity worship. They hypothesized that there was a positive correlation between strong celebrity worship and self-dwarfing and eating pathology, especially among women and those attracted to physically attractive celebrities. Surprisingly, while the study found associations between celebrity worship and eating disorders and enjoyment of sexualization, these associations were stronger among male participants. This reveals a subtle relationship between celebrity influence and body image, arguing for the inclusion of men in relevant studies and challenging traditional assumptions that nuanced exploration is necessary to fully capture the impact of celebrity on an individual's psyche [24].

The interplay between celebrity influence and social media such as Instagram can greatly influence users' body image perceptions. Brown and Tiggemann built on previous research on the negative effects of viewing thin models by exploring the effects of attractive celebrity and peer pictures on female body image through 138 female college students. Participants chose one of three categories of images on Instagram: celebrity photos, attractive unknown peers, or travel images (control group). The study showed that viewing both celebrity and peer pictures led to increased body dissatisfaction and low mood compared to the control group, while there was no significant difference between celebrity and peer pictures, suggesting that attractiveness was the main factor. National appearance comparisons mediated this relationship. Higher levels of celebrity worship were associated with

increased body dissatisfaction when exposed to images of celebrities, highlighting the negative impact of exposure to attractive images on social media [25].

3.   Discussion

The connection between social media, celebrity influence and adolescent development is both a challenge and an opportunity in the modern digital age. Promoting healthy adolescent development requires recognizing and navigating this complex interplay.

Social media is ubiquitous in the lives of adolescents, with platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter serving as conduits for the constant exchange of information and ideals across the globe. In a digital realm where the lines between influencer and audience are increasingly blurred, today's teens are not only passive observers, but also active content creators.

Celebrities, both in the traditional sense and the new definition of celebrity, have made significant contributions to this digital conversation. The lives they showcase often become the measure of success for teens, which inevitably leads to comparisons. Access to celebrity lives through social media expands the scope of such comparisons, but also risks creating unrealistic expectations of beauty standards and self-esteem among teens. However, it is worth noting that celebrities can also use the same platforms to promote positive social change, advocate for mental health, challenge superficial perfectionist cultures, and provide a space for teens to meaningfully interact and discuss challenges.

However, the convergence of the lure of celebrity and social media also brings with it concerns such as the commodification of personal experience, the pressure to conform to often elusive standards, and the potential normalization of toxic behavior. These challenges are further exacerbated by the intersection of offline and online realities, so it is imperative to discern their unique impact on adolescent well-being.

Thus, it is incumbent upon educators, parents, and policymakers to capitalize on the beneficial aspects of social media and celebrity influence to promote media literacy and mental health support while protecting adolescents from harmful influences. Future research in this area will require a multifaceted perspective that takes into account both the rapidly evolving culture of social media and celebrity and the diverse experiences of adolescents in different sociocultural contexts. Our goal is to find strategies that both maximize the positive potential of these factors and minimize their negative impact on adolescent development.

4.   Conclusion

Social media, celebrity culture, and adolescent development are intertwined in a way that greatly influences the cognitive, emotional, and social skills of modern adolescents. Addressing RQ 1, our study highlights the significant correlation between social media use and adolescent appearance anxiety. While these platforms promote self-expression and connection, they also serve as venues for comparison, subtly contributing to appearance anxiety in adolescents seeking external validation. Regarding RQ2, the impact of celebrity content on adolescent body image perceptions is profound. Celebrities often define what is "desirable," and regular exposure to their carefully curated images may distort adolescents' aesthetic standards. However, some celebrities use their platforms to promote body positivity and authenticity, thereby mitigating negative perceptions.

While the digital age provides connectivity and knowledge, it also presents challenges, especially for teens who are struggling to find self-identity and social acceptance. The interaction between social media use, celebrity exposure, and appearance anxiety is evident, with celebrities often setting the standard for beauty and success in this digital realm. However, positive celebrity endorsements and messages can motivate and promote adolescent mental health.

Going forward, a multifaceted approach that includes education, media literacy programs, and positive celebrity endorsements must be taken to address these challenges and promote the overall health of adolescents. As social media and celebrity influence continue to evolve, adaptive strategies, ongoing research, and collaboration among educators, psychologists, tech industry stakeholders, and policymakers are critical. By developing effective strategies and frameworks, our goal is to ensure that social media and celebrity culture positively contributes to the healthy development of adolescents by providing them with the tools necessary to navigate the digital age while remaining true to themselves.

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