

Links Between Different Kinds of Social Media Use and Social Appearance Anxiety

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Abstract: As time goes by, the development of science and technology gives humans more opportunities to network. More and more teenagers are using social media platforms. At the same time, the term facial anxiety has become a hot topic, with a large number of young people suffering from this problem. Transitional facial anxiety may lead to some psychological problems. To explore this topic, the study will explore the relationship between social media and face anxiety. In this study, questionnaires were distributed to major social platforms to collect results. The participants were 401 teenagers aged 13 to 19. The study found that teens who used social media were more likely to have facial anxiety, girls were more likely to have facial anxiety, the amount of time spent on social media did not affect facial anxiety, and teens who used Little Red books tended to have higher facial anxiety.

Keywords: Social media, Teenagers, Appearance anxiety

1. Introduction

Nowadays, in burgeoning society, the widespread presence of social media is loved by the majority of people, such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. In this paper, teenagers are defined as aged between 13 and 19. According to the research, there are 93%-97% of 13-17 years old adolescent use at least one social media. Moreover, adolescents spend about 3 hours a day on social media, and their use of social media is primarily visual communication [1]. The research shows that teenagers are more likely to use social media to look at or post pictures or videos.

Along with the popularity of social media, a standardized definition of "beautiful" has emerged. Normally, "beautiful" is a subjective topic, and everyone should have their own definition for that. However, social media is shaping the way people define beauty, such as a person who is described as beautiful needs to have big eyes, double eyelids, and a high nose bridge. People who do not meet the standards begin to feel insecure about their appearance, which is known as appearance anxiety. Appearance anxiety is the anxiety experienced by a person when they think their appearance is being observed or judged [2]. In 2021, The China Youth University Media released a questionnaire survey of 2063 college students on "appearance". The results show that 59.03% of college students have appearance anxiety [3]. Although there is a lot of research on the topic of appearance anxiety, due to the increased popularity of new social software, increased teens are using such media. Especially when teenagers look at videos or photos that match their own aesthetics. When they like it, big data will recommend more trends of the same style, which causes teens to socially compare themselves to their peers from the internet, then, in turn, causes teens to be negatively affected psychologically.

This series of operations also leads to appearance anxiety, and it may have some symptoms, such as fear of being judged by others about one's appearance, reduced socializing, or depression. Therefore, the phenomenon of appearance anxiety brought about by emerging social media on teenagers is worth studying.

In this study, research on how the use of social media structures adolescents' aesthetics and how the time use of social media causes social appearance anxiety will be conducted. In order to find ways to solve this problem. This research will combine with social norms theory to discover how peers change the perception of beauty and the appearance norms that adolescents think. Helping teenagers reduce appearance anxiety and prevent some mental illnesses that are likely to occur effectively. Also, let the teenagers grow up to be more confident in facing themselves. The method used in this study is collecting questionnaires and using the Social Appearance Anxiety Scale to measure adolescents' appearance anxiety levels and self-evaluation.

2. Literature Review

In past research, the topic of appearance anxiety has been popular, and many scholars have done research on it. Besides, articles about face anxiety have appeared on various platforms, such as Weibo and TikTok. However, most researchers address the topic of appearance anxiety in women, and there is little information on men. Therefore, the subjects who participated in this study included both teenage boys and girls. In June 2022, a paper titled "Research on Women's" Face Anxiety "from the Perspective of Self-presentation -- A Case Study of Weibo Platform" was published. Based on self-presentation theory, this paper explores the interaction between self-presentation and "female" facial anxiety in microblogs by combining qualitative and quantitative methods [4].

The theory used in the study is social norms, which are often defined as "rules and standards understood by group members that guide or constrain social behavior without legal force [5]. It describes people who want identification. They want a sense of belonging and even ostracism from the group. This is related to the teenagers' use of social which posts pictures on social media and receiving likes and comments to measure their social acceptance levels. Based on previous research on the effects of social media and appearance anxiety [6], the following hypothesis was proposed:

H1: The time of social media use was positively associated with appearance anxiety.

Studies have shown that the more intense social media use is, the more likely it is to develop facial anxiety [7].

Meanwhile, according to the 2019 Chinese Women's Confidence Report, one in six Chinese women feel anxious when they look in the mirror or take photos, and "makeup" is the number one way to improve their confidence [8]. This shows that women suffer from facial anxiety at a significant rate. Therefore, the hypothesis is listed below.

H2: Compared with boys, girls are more likely to have appearance anxiety.

2.1. The Types of Social Media

There are a lot of social media out there, and everyone uses different software. This study also wanted to examine appearance anxiety by looking at different social media apps used by different teens. TikTok is one of the most popular social platforms in China, where teenagers are more likely to be influenced by aesthetic ideas. In this environment of amplifying the level of appearance, many teenagers are not confident about their appearance. For these reasons, the following hypothesis is proposed

H3: Using different types of social media cause different level of appearance anxiety.

H4: Teenagers who use TikTok are more likely to have appearance anxiety.

3. Method

This survey was in the form of an online questionnaire. The questions included the audience's age, gender, time spent on social media, type of social media use, and a rating scale on how anxious they were about their appearance called SAAS [9]. The questionnaire was posted on Wechat moments, TikTok and Weibo. The participants involved in this survey are between 13 to 19 years old. In the end, a total of 401 questionnaires were collected, among which were all valid. The responses were from 21 different regions. As shown in Table 1, the response rates were 8.48% for 13 years old, 11.22% for 14 years old, 12.22% for 15 years old, 16.71 for 16 years old, 21.2% for 17 years old, 15.71% for 18 years old, and 14.46% for 19 years old.

Table 1: Percentage of age.

13	14	15	16	17	18	19
8.48%	11.22%	12.22%	16.71%	21.2%	15.71%	14.46%

3.1. Measures

3.1.1. Time

There are three different times people use social media, one is less than 1 hour, one is 1-3 hours, and the other is more than 3 hours. The author will compare the time of use of social media and appearance anxiety level.

3.1.2. Gender

Comparing the two genders, which one is more likely to have appearance anxiety. The response received include 184 girls and 217 boys.

3.1.3. Type of Social Media Use

The question gave 8 different types of social media, which are TikTok, Xiaohongshu, Kuaishou, Instagram, Facebook, Weibo, Zhihu, and WeChat [4].

3.1.4. Level of Appearance Anxiety

In order to understand the level of appearance anxiety, the author used the appearance anxiety level scale to measure the level of appearance anxiety of each person [8]. SAAS is a psychometrically valid measure of social anxiety about an individual's overall appearance.

4. Result

4.1. The Use of Social Media

The question asked for do they use social media; half of the people answered yes. Because the research wants to figure out whether teens who use social media have higher levels of appearance anxiety than teens who don't. According to the appearance anxiety level test, it was found that the average total score of those who chose to use social media was 36.784. The average score for non-users of social media was 34.35. From this data, it can be seen that teenagers who use social media

do have a higher level of appearance anxiety than those who do not use social media, but the difference is not significant.

4.2. Gender

In order to explore the different levels of appearance anxiety, participants were asked to fill in the gender questionnaire. According to the same scale, the results are shown in Table 2. The average total score was 37.117 for girls and 35.041 for boys. The gap between the two sexes was not large, but girls scored higher.

Table 2: Percentage of Gender-related to appearance anxiety (continue).

Classification and Summary Analysis results - Basic indicators (average)			
Title	Your gender		summary
	Female	Male	
My appearance makes me nervous when communicating with others	2.451	2.429	2.44
I get anxious when people mention my appearance	2.333	2.245	2.29
I have a habit of blaming my looks for my success or failure	2.529	2.061	2.3
I think the way I look affects my life	2.431	2.143	2.29
I feel nervous in front of the camera	2.196	2.061	2.13
I don't feel at ease with people	3.392	3.551	3.47
I feel nervous when someone is looking at me	2.451	2.327	2.39
I worry that people won't like me because of my looks	2.569	2.367	2.47

Table 2: (continued).

I worry that people will talk about my appearance behind my back	2.451	2.204	2.33
I often fear that I will not live up to other people's standards of what I should look like	2.373	2.163	2.27
I care about how people judge me	2.392	2.204	2.3
I think my appearance makes me unattractive	2.373	2.122	2.25
I didn't feel pretty enough and I was afraid of being judged by others because of my appearance	0.294	0.286	0.29
I feel uncomfortable when people look at my physical flaws	2.412	2.286	2.35
I don't think people think I look good	2.176	2.163	2.17
I worry that my appearance will prevent me from finding a partner	2.294	2.429	2.36

4.3. Time

The teenagers' appearance anxiety levels were measured based on how much time they spent on social media each day. For those who used social media for less than an hour a day, the average score was 39.557. In fact, those who used social media for one to three hours averaged 33.292, and those who used social media for more than three hours a day averaged 38.801. Therefore, the previous hypothesis is not valid. According to the questionnaire, people who spend less time on social media have higher appearance anxiety scores, which means they are more anxious. While the results show that the amount of time spent on social media did not affect the teens' levels of appearance anxiety.

4.4. The Type of Social Media

Through questionnaire analysis, it could be found that the most popular social networking software is TikTok, with a total of 356 respondents. The second is Kuaishou. The average total of facial anxiety was calculated for each person using different apps. The average score of appearance anxiety among those who used Tiktok frequently was 36.09, Xiaohongshu is 36.349. Kuaishou has 36.278. The average scores of Instagram, Facebook, Weibo and Zhihu are 35.735, 32.025, 35.015 and 35.552, respectively. According to the results, users of Xiaohongshu, not TikTok users, had the highest level of appearance anxiety.

5. Discussion

The study examined the relationship between appearance anxiety among adolescents and social media. Firstly, the research finds that there is no definitive evidence that social media time, software, and whether or not they use social media contribute to higher levels of appearance anxiety. The scale used has a total of 15 to 75 points. A score of 75 was severe appearance anxiety. From the 401 questionnaires, the average score is about 30 to 40 points, which is mild appearance anxiety. Secondly, it can be seen that women do have more appearance anxiety than men. Thirdly, adolescents who used the Little Red Book had greater appearance anxiety. The reason for face anxiety may be that teenagers are frequently pushed to find people they find very attractive, but they don't think their own looks meet the standard of attractiveness. This causes appearance anxiety. In fact, most social media apps do this.

6. Conclusion

In summary, the study didn't look at what actually causes appearance anxiety but the relationship with social media, the problem does exist in society. And there are some groups that are troubled by this. Therefore, it is important to solve the problem of appearance anxiety. The rate of cosmetic surgery has also been on the rise in recent years, which means more people are unhappy with their looks. Ultimately, the question that should be asked is who defines beauty and how beauty is defined. It is because beauty is defined that more and more people feel that they are not up to par and are less confident about their looks. On apps like TikTok or Xiaohongshu, there are many accounts that sell facial anxiety for profit. Therefore, aesthetic cognition in real life will become fuzzy [10]. The medium has raised everyone's standards of beauty. In the teenage community, it's not just about defined beauty but also about peer pressure. Teenagers who go out for puberty are often the most concerned about their appearance, figure and weight. Most people think that beauty means big eyes, a high nose, and a thin body. In fact, everyone is a unique individual. If all the people in the world were born according to a standard appearance, how terrible the world would be. All people should learn to respect their looks and be proud of who they are. Additionally, there are limitations in this study. However, due to the limited research level, more detailed research has not been carried out in a limited time, and the research of this paper still has the following shortcomings. Firstly, research methods could be more varied. Secondly, since the questionnaire is uploaded on social software, most of the people who fill it may come from the same region or school, which will greatly affect the results. In terms of research content, the depth and length of this paper are not enough. The main prospect of the study is that other statistical methods can be used to analyze the data in more detail.

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