

Mass Media's Impact on Students' Mental Health

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Abstract: In today's society with the popularization of the Internet, mass media that the public frequently contacts with has brought great influence to people. This study focuses on the relationship between mass media's impact about online beauty standards on students' mental health. First, there is an introduction about the situation of mass media and students as the targets. Next, there are several literature reviews including various topics related to social media, beauty standards, teenagers' mental health and so on. These essays give inspiration on the way of research and support the hypothesis stated at the beginning. Then, 170 surveyed samples are collected and analyzed by using the methods stated in the article to see the real effects of mass media's beauty standards on students' mental health. Therefore, the results are shown and by referring to other researched literatures, the conclusion can be drawn. Beauty standards on mass media will have negative effects on students' mental health and make them suffer from anxiety, depression and other problems.

Keywords: Mass media, beauty standards, students, mental health

1. Introduction

Nowadays, the global network has got undergone tremendous development which enables the online connection of billion people worldwide and is still expanding to reshape the world. One of its branches mass media refers to the communication that reaches a large audience, including pictures, videos and articles on social media. It plays an important role in shaping current trends, aesthetic standards, and public opinions. Beauty standards on mass media are almost harsh and unachievable nowadays, and this phenomenon often brings many kinds of anxiety and has created negative impacts on netizens' physical image, self-esteem, and overall mental health. Students are one of the groups who often contact and use mass media in everyday life, so this study takes students as the target group. Therefore, the research question of this paper is whether students' beauty standards ideologies and stereotypes will significantly associate with social media use and lead to mental health impacts such as anxiety, inferiority and depression.

2. Literature Review

Among the researched papers, some of the targets are teenagers and young adults, which is similar to this study. Teenage girls would like to be up to online standards and get 'likes' or 'followers' to relieve their insecurity and low self-esteem. These girls feed their vanity or achieve peer approval by editing their photos to present themselves on Instagram or other social platforms. Carefully decorated photos are closer to their ideally perfect standards, and publishing these contents is convenient for

them to compare with their peers and build up self-esteem [1]. Most of Australian teenagers frequently contact with social media and as their age increases, the usage also increases. Young people post their photos and videos on universal platform of social media, and other people can make all kinds of comments under their posts. This leads to unreachable appearance goals and negative self-evaluation which cause various anxieties [2]. Adolescent boys and girls are active users of the Internet, and they often have doubts and feel dissatisfied about their bodies. When exploring the correlation between social media and body dissatisfaction, the study found that the more people internalize their ideals, the more likely they are to feel low self-esteem or other negative emotions due to the influence of the Internet [3]. Through an investigation of female college students, it is concluded that most young girls are not satisfied with their existing image, because the definitions and trends of beauty guided by the media, such as thinness symbolize pretty. Some older women will look at themselves according to the images of women presented in magazines, televisions and other branches of mass media. Therefore, they will try to change their looks or lifestyles by imitating these ideal women [4].

In addition, there are also some studies focusing on older adults, especially women. 'Digitized dysmorphias' is a change brought about by the difference between unreal Internet photos and virtual images of real women. According to a survey of Instagram users, women who post images of themselves that are glamorized feel more concerned about and have greater anxiety on beauty stereotypes on the Internet. At the same time, they feel under pressure to adhere to a single beauty standard on social media [5]. The use of social media affects the public's perception of beauty through interactive circulation, which makes some people pay too much attention to their own appearance defects. They often compare their bodies with virtual pictures, videos or other kinds of posts on the internet, so these people suffer from anxiety or depression, and some finally start medical beauty or plastic surgery [6]. The more and more popular social media has increased the exposure of various faces, and the public's preference for facial beauty has also changed over time. By investigating the data of cosmetic surgeries, it can be seen that people may use online celebrity as a plastic surgery template and pursue more exquisite and three-dimensional appearances. By changing facial structure and adding aesthetics, people are catching up with fashion trends and making themselves look more attractive [7]. Physical beauty is closely related to mental health, and the prevalence of social media is affecting the public's standard cognition of beauty nowadays. People will have strict requirements on their appearance because of contact with the internet. For example, some girls force themselves to stick false eyelashes, wear corsets and shave their armpits in order to meet the aesthetic standards in the society, even though these behaviors will bring risks or harm their health [8]. In a research among European and American people, it is found that women prefer and pursue a slim body because of the publicity of social media, while young men, middle aged and old men also have their own image standards. Long-term use of the Internet creates incentives for change, such as some people start to exercise. But at the same time, this can lead to excessive dieting or malnutrition, which can cause health or psychological harm to people [9]. Another study also showed that viewing images of women after surgery made young viewers desire for cosmetic surgery, especially among women who used social media frequently, even if they didn't feel dissatisfied with their looks. However, as some brands or media are promoting diverse and authentic beauty, the phenomenon is gradually improving because people are beginning to accept themselves for who they really are [10].

These papers provide a variety of research ideas and data results, but they point to social problems without offering solutions. This paper will give some suggestions based on the research.

3. Method

To begin with, the research topic of this study is determined as Mass Media's Impact on Students' Mental Health, and the target audience for the whole study are students, including most teenagers and a minority of young adults. Prevalent mass media in today's society will always affect various trends

and users' views to an extent, especially the increasing posts issued by bloggers and celebrities make the definition of beauty more stringent both online and offline. Students always like to socialize and often use various social platforms in their spare time, so they are an appropriate group to study with.

Next step is to look up useful information on various academic websites, such as Microsoft academia and Google scholar. During the retrieval process, a lot of papers about mass media, students' mental health or their combination research was found, which made this research had clearer plan for the ongoing project.

Then, a comprehensive survey that capture relevant information about public aesthetic standards and the mental health outcomes of students to collect data about age, gender, and other key factors that may affect the studied relationship was designed for this study. The conception of questions is a complicated process, because it is necessary to ensure the consistency of survey and cover all the data to be collected.

The survey asked about whether the questionnaire takers would follow the popular fashion trends on social media or believe that media representation accurately reflects the diverse beauty standards of society, and how often did they compare their appearance to the images they see on the media. Also, there were questions about whether social media created any anxiety for them or they had ever engaged in unhealthy behaviors due to the influence of media standards on beauty, and let them rate the intensity of passive feelings induced to conform to mass media's influence. The survey included issues related to physical events like extreme diets, excessive exercise, social comparison, as well as psychological health symptoms such as body dissatisfaction, appearance anxiety, inferiority and depression.

After that, the survey was posted by the link of questionnaire to many middle school, high school and college students, and randomly sampling was used to collect data from different participants. As a result, 170 completed surveys were collected and used in subsequent statistics.

3.1. Data Collection

After publishing the survey, results from 170 people who submitted their answers were randomly collected. In the 170 samples, there were 118 (69%) students under 18 years old and 52 (31%) students over 18 years old.

In the question 'Have you ever followed any popular fashion trends on social media', people could choose at most 4 choices: 107 (63%) students chose beauty; 119 (70%) chose make-ups; 139 (82%) chose outfit; 101 (59%) chose fitness and 19 (11%) chose none of above. In the question 'Rate your level of satisfaction with your own body image', 10 (6%) people chose very satisfied; 51 (30%) chose satisfied; 36 (21%) chose neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; 65 (38%) chose dissatisfied and 8 (5%) chose very dissatisfied. In the question 'How often do you compare your appearance to the images you see in the media', 9 (5%) people chose always; 40 (24%) chose usually; 76 (45%) chose sometimes; 32 (19%) chose rarely and 13 (8%) chose never. In the question 'Do you believe that media representation accurately reflects the diverse beauty standards of society', 64 (38%) people chose yes; 29 (17%) chose no and 77 (45%) chose neutral. In the question 'Have you ever engaged in unhealthy behaviors, such as extreme dieting or excessive exercise, due to the influence of media standards on beauty', 61 (36%) people chose yes and 109 (64%) chose no. In the question 'Does social media create any anxiety for you', people could choose more than one answer: 101 (59%) students chose body dissatisfaction; 97 (57%) chose appearance anxiety; 45 (26%) chose inferiority; 43 (25%) chose none and 8 (5%) chose to fill in their own answers. These answers written included wealth anxiety, academic anxiety, envy and jealousy. In the last question 'Rate the intensity of passive feelings induced to conform to mass media's beauty standards', 20 (12%) people chose strong; 115 (68%) chose slightly and 35 (21%) chose unexperienced.

3.2. Data Analysis

Most of the questionnaire takers were under 18 and some of them were over 18.

In the second question, outfit trends are the most popular fashion topics that the surveyed students would like to follow on social media; make-ups, beauty and fitness trends also had significant followings from more than half of the students. Only a few people did not like to follow any popular trends on social media or they have different preferences that were not accounted for in the given choices.

In the third question, the majority of students felt dissatisfied with their body images, while the second most felt satisfied. A significant portion of students were neutral; a smaller percentage were very satisfied; the least number were very dissatisfied and the overview leant towards dissatisfaction.

In the fourth question, the majority of students would sometimes compare their appearance to the images they see on social media, while the second most would usually do that. A significant portion of students rarely did that; a smaller percentage never did that; the least number always did that and the overview leant towards the frequency of sometimes.

In the fifth question, the majority of students had neutral opinions on the idea that media representation accurately reflect the diverse beauty standards of society, while the second most agreed with the idea. The least number did not agree with this idea and the overview leant to neutral opinions.

In the sixth question, the majority of students did not ever engaged in unhealthy behaviors due to the influence of media beauty standards, while the others did engaged in these behaviors. This result shows that most people were able to resist engaging in unhealthy behaviors, but some people were severely affected by the influence of mass media and lost their well-being.

In the seventh question, body dissatisfaction was the biggest symptom brought by the social media; appearance anxiety was also chosen by more than half of the surveyed students; inferiority occurred on some students and a few students claimed that social media didn't bring any anxieties for them. Individuals chose to provide their own answers, which showed that social media actually created various symptoms and they had unique type of anxieties like wealth anxiety

In the last question, the majority of students rated their intensity of passive feelings induced to conform to mass media's beauty standards as slightly, while the second most rated unexperienced. The least number rated the feelings as strong and the overall intensity leant to slightly.

4. Discussion

Under the Internet explosion and usage of various media platforms, students nowadays find pressure to conform strict beauty standards and has been linked to negative outcomes such as body dissatisfaction, appearance anxiety and inferiority.

By collecting and analyzing data, it showed that most surveyed students would follow prevalent fashion trends, felt dissatisfied with their own bodies, sometimes compared themselves to images on social media, had neutral opinions towards the accuracy of beauty standard reflected by social media, did not have unhealthy behaviors, suffered from body dissatisfaction and had slightly passive feelings due to mass media's beauty standards

In addition, some collected literatures also support these points of view. One paper links appearance anxiety to social media addiction and popular content online. Under the influence of Internet celebrities and so on, teenagers and young people will constantly compare themselves with the perfect images they see, resulting in jealousy, anxiety and other emotions. At the same time, these contents can stimulate people's desire to improve their appearance, which can lead to an unhealthy range of activities [11]. Another paper shows that among female college students, the more frequently they use social media platforms such as Xiaohongshu, the more serious their appearance anxiety. People who often follow fashion news or appearance areas on social media will be instilled with new

beauty standards by the media and interfere with their original ideas. In the long run, female college students establish unreasonable standards for beauty, and are demanding of themselves and affecting their mental health [12].

Here are some suggestions for reducing mass media's impact on students' mental health:

Balance social media usage: People should encourage themselves to limit their time spent on social media platforms and engage in offline activities that can promote both physical and mental well-being.

Promote media literacy: Adolescents and young adults should learn to analyze and question the images and messages they encounter on social media critically. This can help them to distinguish the unrealistic photos and beauty standards portrayed in social media.

Seek for professional help: If an individual is experiencing severe mental health problems, it is essential to meet and communicate with professional psychological counselors who can provide appropriate guidance and support.

Build up self-esteem: Adolescents and young adults can keep telling themselves they are the best and try to find their own shining points. Once they realize that everyone is unique and doesn't need to meet any standards, they will really accept themselves and become confident then.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, nowadays students always stay up date with the latest trends as most people would like follow all kinds of popular topics on social media. Many seemingly perfect posts has affected their beauty ideals to be more strict and forced them to question or change themselves. This creates pressure and causes anxieties on students as they will feel anxious or depressed comparing themselves with online posters or bloggers. Although some poeple do recognize the negative influence of mass media reshaping beauty standards, they still feel depressed or unconfident towards challenging these deformed standards. Therefore, most students have got mental health problems and some of them even do bad things to their bodies which will affect their physical well-being. Only a few people can stay away from fashion trends and avoid getting the negative influence they are going to create, so they still have faith in themselves.

The mass media has a great number of audience, and students especially have frequent contact with it. Although using mass media has some advantages, but it will bring passive feelings to students which will negatively affect their mental health to some extent.

There are many other influences that mass media bring to students and other groups, such as changing people's moral standards, contributing to the success of Internet celebrities, affecting the economic growth of society and so on. Therefore, it will be a suitable topic to continue to study mass media in the future.

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