

Analysis of the Causes of Appearance Anxiety among Young People in the Media Era

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Abstract: In recent years, the topic of "appearance anxiety" has frequently appeared in the themes reported by major media, especially in the wider dissemination among young people. With the prevalence of the "beauty economy" and the arrival of the era of "beauty is justice", some young people have developed a pathological mentality of exacerbating their appearance anxiety due to the dissemination of information through various channels. Appearance anxiety has become widespread among young people, and its influence is also showing an increasingly strong trend. This survey mainly uses in-depth interviews and questionnaire surveys to analyze the causes of appearance anxiety among young people in the era of media and provide corresponding measures.

1. Introduction

Today, with the rapid development of the Internet and the continuous development of media technology, we have entered the era of media. In the face of the overwhelming information on the Internet every day, it has brought different psychological anxiety to different age groups. Among them, the topics related to facial anxiety have spread quite widely, such as "Do you have facial anxiety", "How to solve facial anxiety", "Reject facial anxiety", "How to view facial anxiety at a younger age" and other frequent online searches, with more than 100 million hits.

"Appearance anxiety" is the escalation of "social physical anxiety" on social media. The academic definition of "social physical anxiety" refers to the psychological reactions that individuals experience due to concerns about negative evaluations of their body shape or physique by others. More and more people are experiencing varying degrees of appearance anxiety, which has also sparked widespread attention and discussion among different groups regarding appearance anxiety. The impact of "appearance anxiety" has led some audiences to hope to achieve personal idealization of their appearance through various means such as photo editing and medical aesthetics, and become a perfect performer. And this "perfect" image generated according to unified standards has also created a single aesthetic landscape in Weibo.

According to research, the greater the audience's stickiness to social media usage, the more likely they are to experience appearance anxiety. Young users on Weibo, guided by Weibo topics, unconsciously transform the aesthetic views presented by some online opinion leaders into their own aesthetic standards, and when compared with their own appearance, further exacerbate the "appearance anxiety" of young people. The youth group excessively relies on techniques such as retouching and beautifying in the process of shaping their "ideal self", and even more so, they

cannot accept their true selves and choose medical beauty as a way to reshape themselves. From this, it can be seen that the problems arising from "appearance anxiety" are not only the medical risks borne by young people, but also the devouring of the psychological health of the audience^[1].

2. Purpose of the investigation

The theme of this survey is "Current Status of Appearance Cognition among Young People". Through online reading of relevant papers and literature, distributing point difference questionnaires, and conducting in-depth interviews with survey subjects, data was collected and analyzed to achieve the following objectives:

(1) By investigating the basic information of the audience, such as age, occupation, education level, monthly disposable income, and monthly expenses spent on appearance, analyze the correlation between this basic information and personal appearance anxiety.

(2) Understand the audience's level of personal appearance anxiety and analyze their satisfaction with their appearance using the Richter scale. Do you often discuss topics related to appearance with friends, compare your appearance with others, care about others' evaluations of your appearance, and the importance of appearance in your personal life to understand your level of appearance anxiety.

(3) Analyze the level of appearance anxiety given to the audience by social media platforms using the Richter scale. Investigate the apps frequently used by the audience, whether they often see people with better looks on social media, whether people with better looks gain more followers than the general public on social media, and whether they often see information related to skincare, fitness, medical beauty, and plastic surgery on social media to analyze the impact of social media on audience appearance anxiety.

3. Research methods:

3.1 In depth interview method

After reading previous literature and reviewing relevant materials, this study summarizes the main causes of appearance anxiety in contemporary youth groups, and based on this research, specifies an in-depth interview outline and divides the outline into three parts for interviews. Firstly, the survey focuses on the basic information of the interviewees, secondly, the impact of the interviewees on their own appearance anxiety when using social media, and finally, the degree of appearance anxiety in the interviewees is determined through the information in the first two parts. Summarize the dominant factors behind the phenomenon of appearance anxiety among respondents.

3.2 Questionnaire survey method

The questionnaire survey method, as the most commonly used method for empirical quantitative research, plays an irreplaceable role in this survey on the current situation of appearance anxiety among young people. At the beginning of this survey, due to the severe epidemic situation, online questionnaires were distributed for data collection^[2]. The platforms involved included WeChat Moments, Tencent QQ Space, and Weibo questionnaire communication groups for sampling and survey methods. Collect and summarize the distributed questionnaires, and identify the main causes and corresponding measures of "appearance anxiety" among contemporary youth groups. To provide more authentic and reliable data support for the research in this article, and to propose adjustment strategies applicable to the problem of "appearance anxiety".

4. Empirical research on appearance anxiety among young people in the era of media:

4.1 In depth interview method

The first step in this study is to use the in-depth interview method to understand the interviewee's true thoughts on "appearance anxiety". One of the research methods chosen for this study is the in-depth interview method. Firstly, the topic of "appearance anxiety" is relatively abstract and complex, and relying solely on questionnaire survey data cannot fully reflect the audience's true reaction. Moreover, the topic of "appearance anxiety" is designed with some private information, and the related questions of in-depth interviews are directly related to the interviewee's psychology. It is necessary to conduct in-depth interviews with some audiences to obtain some first-hand research data.

4.1.1 Interview outline

Table 1: Interview outline for a survey on appearance anxiety among young people in the era of media

Interview content	Topic outline
Personal basic information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Age 2. occupation 3. Social media usage
Social media's impact on appearance The impact of anxiety	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The number of content related to appearance topics on social media 2. Comments and forwarding frequency on appearance topics on social media 3. The level of self-image awareness on social media 4. Do you frequently check comments when posting photos on social media 5. Will appearance standards on social media have an impact on oneself
Appearance anxiety level	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do you feel like you have "appearance anxiety" 2. What are the points that make oneself feel anxious about appearance 3. Where does "appearance anxiety" come from 4. Will you change yourself due to appearance anxiety 5. What ways do you hope to improve anxiety?

As shown in Table 1, due to the impact of the epidemic, the interview format can only be set as online phone calls, and the interviewees are all randomly selected samples. Twelve respondents who are interested in this topic were selected, with the youngest being 18 years old and the oldest being 35 years old. Firstly, provide the interview outline to the interviewees for familiarization, and then arrange a fixed time for in-depth interviews with them

The interview process adopts a one-on-one model to minimize the psychological pressure of the interviewees and ensure the authenticity and effectiveness of the interview content. During the interview, the interviewer uses the questions in the interview outline as the basis and adopts a flexible interview format. The interviewees can provide other answers based on specific situations. After the interview, the conversation voice during the interview is converted into specific interview data, and the interview data is summarized and analyzed in depth^[3].

4.1.2 Interview results

After analyzing the interview records of 12 interviewees who underwent in-depth interviews, it was found that except for one interviewee who clearly stated that they did not have any "appearance anxiety", the other 11 interviewees all had some anxiety about their own appearance. Eight respondents clearly stated that these anxieties stem from other people's evaluations of themselves in areas such as life, work, and social interactions. They believe that appearance has a significant

impact on daily work and social interactions, leading to a certain level of "appearance anxiety".

Five respondents said that various aesthetic information from the Internet social platform will bring anxiety to a certain extent. They will often publish their photos on the social platform and follow the comments of their friends or fans after the dynamic release. After receiving various social media content or news about appearance, these interviewees further deepened their subconscious definition of "beauty". Most of these definitions came from the network opinion leaders who built a single aesthetic standard on the Internet through their own social platforms, which made the majority of fans and audiences have a stereotype of "beautiful appearance". Four respondents clearly stated that they will make changes to their current state of "appearance anxiety". These respondents are more inclined to use modern medical beauty techniques for plastic surgery to achieve satisfactory results and alleviate their "appearance anxiety" state.

By further summarizing the interview results, it can be concluded that there is an interactive relationship between the interviewee's appearance anxiety and self presentation on social media. The self presentation of respondents on social media is also influenced by factors such as topic interaction, peer evaluations, information push, technical beauty, and traffic dividends.

4.2 Questionnaire survey method

Due to the school lockdown caused by the epidemic, all investigations were conducted online, which lasted for ten days. The survey was conducted from November 1, 2022 to November 11, 2022. The method of online random sampling was used for this survey, with designs for various age groups and occupational groups. 222 questionnaires were distributed, 230 were collected, and 222 were valid. Throughout the entire online survey process, from the initial group meeting to finalizing the topic, to the subsequent questionnaire design, distribution, collection, and data processing after collection, all team members participated in the entire process and used SPSS statistical analysis software to analyze and summarize the survey results, ensuring the authenticity and effectiveness of each questionnaire.

This survey questionnaire is divided into three parts. Firstly, the first part is a descriptive statistical analysis of the sample, which includes information such as age, occupation, education level, monthly disposable income, and monthly expenses for appearance and dressing up (including cosmetics/clothing, etc.) for initial audience descriptive statistical analysis; The second part is to set relevant questions for the audience's level of "appearance anxiety", such as satisfaction with their appearance, whether they often discuss appearance topics with friends, and whether they care about others' evaluations of appearance, in order to understand the audience's level of "appearance anxiety"; The third part is the impact of the audience's use of social media on their level of "appearance anxiety", including frequently used apps, whether they believe that appearance management (including body shape) is also a reflection of personal abilities, whether they often see information related to skincare, fitness, medical beauty, and plastic surgery on social media, and whether they worry about others evaluating photos after posting them on social media. The main causes of "appearance anxiety" among contemporary youth groups and corresponding measures are summarized. To provide more authentic and reliable data support for the research in this article, and to propose adjustment strategies applicable to the problem of "appearance anxiety"^[4]

4.2.1 Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Samples

As shown in Table 2, firstly, conduct descriptive statistical analysis of valid samples to analyze the basic information of the audience, as shown in the following figure

- (1) Age of respondents: The respondents are mainly concentrated between the ages of 18 and 25.
- (2) Occupation of respondents: Among the 222 respondents, the proportion of respondents who work as students and ordinary staff is relatively high, at 65.57% and 15.77% respectively. However, due to the strong rigor of the two professions of enterprise executives and government officials, the

proportion of these two professions is relatively small, at 1.8% and 5.86% respectively. Private owners account for 0.45%, while other employed or unemployed individuals account for 8.56%. The sample distribution in this survey is relatively reasonable.

(3) Monthly disposable income: Among the respondents, the proportion of monthly disposable income between 1001-2500 is the highest at 44.59%, which is closely related to the largest proportion of middle school students in the survey sample group; The sample proportion of disposable income within the range of 0-500 yuan is 11.71%, and the sample proportion between 2001 million and 5000 yuan is 15.32%; Samples priced above 5000 yuan account for 13.96%.

(4) Education: In the valid sample of this survey, undergraduate and master's students and above have the highest proportion, accounting for 58.11% and 33.33% respectively, which is consistent with the age group of the "youth group" in this survey.

(5) Monthly appearance consumption situation: The highest proportion of respondents in the two ranges of 0-300 yuan and 301-600 yuan per month for appearance and dressing expenses (such as Baokoo cosmetics and clothing) were 40.54% and 36.04%, respectively. This is strongly correlated with the fact that the majority of the respondents are students. The proportion of 601-1000 yuan was 15.32%, and the proportion of 1001-2000 yuan was 5.41%; Over 2000 yuan only accounts for 2.7%, indicating that the overall income level of the respondents is not high.

Table 2: Basic information of the surveyed sample users

	Question items	frequency	percentage
Age	Below 18 18-22 23-25 26-30 Over 30	ten one hundred and twenty-nine sixty-eight eight seven	four point five fifty-eight point one one thirty point six three three point six three point one five
occupation	student Ordinary staff Corporate executives Private owners officials at organs other	one hundred and fifty thirty-five four one thirteen nineteen	sixty-seven point five seven fifteen point seven seven one point eight zero point four five five thousand three hundred and eighty-six eight thousand three hundred and fifty-six
income	0-500 501-1000 1001-2500 2501-5000 Over 5000	twenty-six thirty-two ninety-nine thirty-four thirty-one	eleven point seven one fourteen point four one forty-four point five nine fifteen point three two thirteen point nine six
educational background	Junior high school and below high school Specialist undergraduate course Master's degree or above	three three thirteen one hundred and twenty-nine seventy-four	one point three five one point three five five point eight six fifty-eight point one one thirty-three point three three
Spend monthly on appearance	0-300 301-600 601-1000 1001-2000 Over 2000	ninety eighty thirty-four twelve six	forty point five four thirty-six point zero four fifteen point three two five point four one two point seven

4.3 Reliability and Validity Analysis

4.3.1 Reliability analysis

Reliability analysis is used to measure whether the sample's answer results are reliable, that is, whether the sample actually answered scale items; Reliability analysis is only applicable to quantitative data. Cronbach reliability coefficient α If the coefficient value is above 0.8, the reliability of the test or scale is very good; A reliability coefficient above 0.7 is acceptable; If it is above 0.6, the scale should be revised but still retains its value; If it is below 0.6, the scale needs to be redesigned with new items. This questionnaire α The coefficient result value is 0.822, which is greater than 0.8, indicating a high reliability of the questionnaire. As shown in Table 3, the statistical data can be used for analysis.

Table 3: Reliability Analysis

sample size	Number of projects	Cronbach α coefficient
two hundred and twenty-two	twenty	zero point eight two two

4.3.2 Validity analysis

Table 4: Validity Analysis

project	Factor 1	Commonality
You often see people on social media who look better than you (including your body shape)	zero point six three	zero point three nine seven
Do you think appearance management (including body shape) is also a reflection of personal abilities	zero point five seven	zero point three two nine
Do you think people with outstanding appearance will gain more fans on social media platforms compared to the general population	zero point six two	zero point three seven nine
You often see information about skincare, fitness, medical beauty, and plastic surgery on social media platforms	zero point six four	zero point four zero eight
Do you think appearance can affect a person's social and work life	zero point seven zero	zero point four nine six
You may worry about others commenting on photos after posting them on social media platforms	zero point six seven	zero point four five three
When you see photos of people whose appearance (including body shape) is better than yours on social media, you will be more concerned about your appearance	zero point seven zero	zero point four eight seven
Eigenvalue (before rotation)	six point zero four	-
Explanation rate of variance% (before rotation)	30.18%	-
Cumulative variance interpretation rate% (before rotation)	30.18%	-
Eigenvalue (after rotation)	six point zero four	-
Explanation rate of variance% (after rotation)	30.18%	-
Cumulative variance interpretation rate% (after rotation)	30.18%	-
KMO value	zero point eight two eight	-
Barth spherical value	one thousand seven hundred and forty-three point eight two two	-
Df	one hundred and ninety	-
P-value	-	-

Validity is used to measure whether the design of item (quantitative data) is reasonable, and is verified through factor analysis (exploratory factor analysis) method; Researchers anticipate the corresponding relationship between variables and items in their minds; After conducting factor

analysis, the corresponding relationship between factors (i.e. variables, referred to as factors when using factor analysis) and the item is determined; When the expectations of the two are basically consistent, it indicates a good level of validity. For the validity of the survey results, we conducted factor analysis using the KMO coefficient. According to the KMO test index, a value above 0.9 indicates that it is very suitable for factor analysis; A value between 0.8 and 0.9 indicates a good fit; Indicating suitability between 0.7 and 0.8; Between 0.6 and 0.7, it indicates acceptable; 0.5~0.6 indicates poor performance. As shown in Table 4, the KMO value of 0.828 in this survey is valid and has certain reference value.

4.3.3 Questionnaire data analysis

Through further analysis of the data, 62.61% of women have varying degrees of "appearance anxiety", of which about 8.11% have severe "appearance anxiety" and are extremely dissatisfied with their appearance. 81.08% of respondents choose to perform beauty editing steps when posting photos or videos on social media, while only 19.92% of women will present themselves from the original camera through Weibo. Among the group of "appearance anxiety", about 44.13% of users have a certain level of understanding of medical cosmetic surgery projects, while 40.09% of respondents feel that they need cosmetic surgery and hope to change their appearance through it. It is not difficult to find through questionnaire surveys that "appearance anxiety" has become a psychological problem that troubles the vast majority of respondents, and there is a growing trend. The group under "appearance anxiety" hopes to take certain actions to change their appearance and achieve their ideal self. In the media based social context, a large amount of "appearance anxiety" information has flooded our daily lives. In the context of consumption, audiences passively adapt to the standards of beauty shaped by the media. In this process, the audience's subjective consciousness is submerged, and their aesthetics become alienated and distorted.

5. Reason induction

Based on the research results of in-depth interviews and questionnaire surveys, this article summarizes the dominant reasons for "appearance anxiety" from three aspects.

5.1 Abnormal aesthetic standards constructed by online opinion leaders

The concept of "opinion leader" was first proposed by Lazarsfield and collaborators in 1948. They pointed out in "People's Choice" that the majority of voters do not directly obtain information from mass media, but are influenced by others in interpersonal communication. Those who have extensive exposure to information and are active in interpersonal communication, spreading information or opinions to

An opinion leader is someone who influences the thoughts of others and has a certain influence on them. With the Internet becoming the main source for people to obtain information, as the expansion of opinion leaders on the network platform, the concept of online opinion leaders should be applied. In the era of highly developed media, opinion leaders in social media typically shape the appearance of beauty, that is, the appearance of celebrities and internet celebrities. They provide a single template for aesthetics, allowing audiences and fans to imitate the image of aesthetic standards they promote to cater to the market.

Driven by modern visual culture, more and more users are presenting a homogenized appearance, which is the aestheticized appearance. The manifestation of beauty itself is diverse, and the content presented to the audience by opinion leaders on online social media makes female users solidify the standards of beauty into stereotypes in the information cocoon, believing that the beauty constructed by opinion leaders is the standard of beauty. In order to meet the standards, the female population has to change their appearance by learning beauty information and using beauty techniques. While

pursuing appearance templates and their associated features, they gradually lose their self-awareness and constantly compare their "ideal self" with their true self in the pursuit process, thereby inducing inner anxiety^[5].

5.2 Algorithm recommendation mechanism leads to a single aesthetic standard for users

Algorithm recommendation refers to a new type of information distribution method that uses computer algorithms to analyze user basic information, network browsing situation, and network social behavior data, in order to speculate on the content that users may be interested in and accurately push information to them. In the era of highly developed media, algorithmic recommendations are based on mining, classifying, and analyzing user data, providing users with more accurate information recommendation services. This has indeed brought some convenience to users to a certain extent. However, the mechanism of algorithmic recommendations also makes the audience more and more trapped in their own information cocoon, and the massive amount of related information solidifies the audience's thinking. For example, various functional sections in the Weibo platform, such as hot search lists, super conversations, circles, and rankings, frequently display massive information related to appearance on user pages. The algorithm push of big data also makes users unconsciously receive a large amount of definitions about "beauty". As a result, users have a singular aesthetic standard due to algorithmic recommendation mechanisms, which is a distorted aesthetic view.

5.3 Social dividends of appearance public opinion marketing

Through this survey, it was found that 95.95% of respondents believe that appearance management (including body shape) is also a reflection of personal abilities, which directly proves that appearance has become a key factor in judging audiences in the current era, and its importance is almost equivalent to ability. Whether in social or workplace settings, people with higher appearance often enjoy some conveniences that other groups cannot enjoy. In today's era, with the rapid development of media and the explosive growth of information transmission methods, the audience's image evaluation is easily influenced by the overall social environment. As a self-presentation social platform, Weibo attracts more attention and likes from visually appealing groups. These views and levels of attention invisibly contribute to the "social dividend" and also cause some level of appearance anxiety among many ordinary people. In the survey, 81.53% of respondents indicated that they are more concerned about their appearance (including body shape) when they see photos of people who have better appearance than themselves on social media. It is precisely because of differences in appearance that differential treatment is formed on social platforms, that more and more audiences only focus on improving their appearance and neglect their own ability development. They also do not want to be the helper of "appearance anxiety", but they often find it difficult to maintain rationality when faced with the impact of reality^[6].

6. Summary and suggestions

With the rapid spread of "appearance anxiety" on social platforms, appearance has become a highly sought after goal for a wide audience through its practical value. Based on the analysis of the results of this in-depth interview and questionnaire survey, it can be concluded that the distorted aesthetic standards and algorithmic recommendation mechanisms constructed by online opinion leaders lead to a single standard of user aesthetics, and the social dividend brought by appearance public opinion are the main reasons for contemporary young people's appearance anxiety.

In summary, this survey proposes debugging strategies to alleviate audience "appearance anxiety". Firstly, in the face of the "appearance anxiety" brought about by the massive amount of information in the era of media, the audience should establish their own aesthetic standards,

examine diversified beauty from their own perspective, enhance their comprehensive cultivation, and achieve external and internal dual growth; Secondly, online opinion leaders should shoulder their social responsibilities as public figures to the greatest extent, be responsible for their own words and deeds, and actively guide the topic of positive values to spread information, so that the Internet can grow in a healthy environment; Finally, the government and social media platforms should strengthen supervision over various medical beauty institutions and plastic surgery hospitals, regulate the promotional information of merchants in various media occasions, resist false advertising and excessive marketing, and advocate for correct cultural values. Nowadays, "appearance anxiety" is no longer a topic that only exists among young people. Beauty is not static, nor is it a single formulaic product. In the current era of rapid information updates and iterations, it is crucial to learn to establish correct judgments about beauty.

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