

Impact of virtual identities on social media on women's self-esteem

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Abstract. The present study focuses on the influence of social media (SM) on an individual's self-esteem and self-evaluation. The construction of virtual identities in cyberspace affect individual's mental health. The article introduces the concepts of self-esteem and self-evaluation from a psychological perspective and explores the multifaceted factors that influence the formation of virtual identities on social media. Previous research suggests that prolonged exposure to idealized images on SM may lead to dissatisfaction and mood swings in individuals, especially among young women. This phenomenon may be due in part to the fact that social media allows users to edit and present an idealized self-image. The article highlights the fact that the association between social media, self-esteem and self-evaluation is a complex and worthwhile area of in-depth research, which not only has important implications for an individual's psychological well-being, but also involves a number of important issues in the fields of social psychology and psychological science.

1 Introduction

Social media (SM) becomes an important component of individuals' life, greatly influencing the way people communicate and access to information. People construct images based on their real or partially fictionalized information in the cyberspace of social media. Real users use virtual images on the web to present their lives and opinions. However, there is a great deal of concern about whether virtual identities can negatively affect an individual's self-esteem and whether they can affect objective and fair standards of self-evaluation. Some people will express themselves more confidently through virtual images, which will enhance self-esteem and self-evaluation; on the other hand, it will cause a strong sense of vanity or low self-esteem. From a psychological point of view, self-esteem and self-evaluation have been a hot topic of research, which has become more urgent and complex with the rise of social media. Past research has focused on exploring the effect of SM use and psychological well-being, but relatively little research has been done on how virtual identity affects self-esteem and self-evaluation. This paper therefore explores this issue from a number of perspectives, aiming to explore the negative impact of virtual identities on individuals' self-esteem on social media, and examines two perspectives on how this affects psychological science and whether it leads to a distortion of relatively objective and fair standards of self-evaluation.

1.1 Introduction of research subjects

1.1.1 Introduction to the concepts of self-esteem and self-evaluation

Self-esteem is individuals' perceptions of their own worth and capabilities, and is a psychological need that is subject to constant change as a result of internal feelings and external feedback. Self-evaluation is an individual's judgment of his or her own traits, behaviors, and abilities, such as ratings of his or her appearance, personality, and talents, which can be positive or negative. These two concepts play an important role in an individual's mental health and social interactions, and they largely determine the state of people's mental health.

1.1.2 Influencing factors

The formation and maintenance of virtual identities on social media are influenced by various variables.. Individual self-perception includes understanding one's own values, interests, strengths and weaknesses. The social environment factors (e.g.social expectations and recognition) influence the shaping of virtual identity. Family education, cultural background and personal goals also play an integral role. Finally the characteristics of different social media platforms and tools also influence the way virtual identities are presented. Thus, virtual identities on social media are both individual self-expression and shaped by the external environment and technological platforms.

2 Relation between facebook usage, negative emotion and self-esteem

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2.1 Characteristics of the study population

In previous research, several studies have emphasized the negative impact of virtual identities on self-esteem. SM platforms often proclaim unrealizable standards of beauty, achievement and well-being., and prolonged exposure to such ideal images can lead to feelings of personal dissatisfaction, which can lead to low self-esteem. With over 1.3 billion users in the world dimension, Facebook is a social program that is very influential for people of all ages. With about 44 percent female users, the user base is huge [1]. Therefore, psychologists investigated the effects of Facebook use on female's emotions and body image. In terms of the characteristics of the study population, the study focused on young women and the possible confounding variables may involve factors such as the age, social background and self-esteem of the individuals.

2.2 Data analysis methods and results

This experiment required more than one hundred participants who were randomly assigned to browse their Facebook accounts, magazine websites, and appearance-related posts uploaded by others, and then complete status questionnaires on mood, body dissatisfaction, and appearance differences (weight, skin, appearance, hair, etc.). Results showed that subjects spending time on Facebook suffer from more negative emotion compared to control groups [2].

The study can then analyze the data to understand the relationship between SM use, body image concerns and emotions. One of the factors that may have contributed to the results of this experiment is that Facebook allows users to create public profiles, and users can also have images edited before uploading to present an idealized or "hopefully possible" version of themselves [3]. Participants reported that they often looked at their own accounts as well as other people's Facebook profiles, subconsciously making comparisons, and participants came to believe that other people were happier and had better lives than they did [4]. But it's not as simple as that, and as photo editing tools become more sophisticated, it means that almost anyone can create believable fake photos. The extremely limited ability of people to spot and localize world scenes has been demonstrated through two experiments [5]. Therefore, when people see those who have almost perfect appearance or status online they will have involuntary mood swings, which can lead to envy or feelings of inferiority.

2.3 Conclusions and shortcomings of the study

Overall, this study on investigating the influence of Facebook use on female's emotions highlights the negative impact of social comparison on SM. However, further study still needs to consider additional factors and be more comprehensive in terms of sample and measurement to better understand the relation between SM and psychological health.

3 Impact of social media on women's self-esteem

3.1 Characteristics of the study population

Meanwhile, another study used a questionnaire to explore the impact of SM on women's self-esteem. Of the 10,500 women interviewed for the Global Beauty and Confidence Report in 13 countries, 65 percent felt that there was increasing pressure from advertising and the media to look "perfect" based on the dominant beauty standards on the Internet [6].

3.2 Data analysis methods and results

The study used a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis. The qualitative analysis consisted of a content analysis of the open-ended questions in the questionnaire, from which the experiences and perspectives of different women and girls were extracted. The results of the study showed that beauty stress is on the rise among women and girls, regardless of geography or age. Participants shared that when they felt dissatisfied with their appearance, they would choose not to participate in important life events and would even fail to stand by their opinions or decisions due to a lack of confidence in their appearance. Participants received the influence of information disseminated on social media, which led to them facing stricter demands on themselves and contributed to their self-esteem being challenged. This further led to appearance anxiety and increased the risk anxious and depressive disorder [6].

Not only that, but another experiment conducted a cross-sectional study through an online survey, which showed that people with more time spending on SM and had negative self-perceptions while viewing social media were more likely to consider cosmetic surgery in the future. Participants were more likely to be influenced by social media messages about beauty and cosmetic surgery when they frequently viewed and engaged in social media activities, which increased their willingness to undergo cosmetic surgery. The findings consistently emphasize the influence of SM on cosmetic surgery decisions compared to other studies [7].

3.3 Conclusion of the study and comparison with other studies

In terms of virtual identities on social media, the above studies have mainly emphasized the negative impact of virtual identities on self-esteem; however, virtual identities have more than just negative impacts. There is a diversity of impacts on individuals across different research components. Some studies have found that positive feedback and likes on social media can boost people's self-esteem. From the perspective of social psychology and other factors, researchers have analyzed the individual's self-perception, external feedback and social comparisons, and some researchers have concluded that the virtual identities provided by social

media platforms allow people to express themselves confidently, which in turn improves the user's self-appraisal of him or herself. The arena provided by social media has a strong sense of anonymity and basically frees people from the psychological pressure caused by responsibility and evaluation. As a result, people feel safer and more likely to express themselves online than in the real world. This type of self-expression can be an important component of psychotherapy, helping to improve physical and mental health, relieve stress and thus increase self-esteem and self-worth [8].

In addition to creating a platform for communication, social media also provides a platform for users to conduct online transactions. This allows virtual identities on social media to be a source of creativity and self-confidence. In Indonesia, for example, their Internet users are widely recognized as avid users of social media. So generating social capital through expanding the network could become a concrete possibility [9]. In Indonesia it is estimated that 60% of these businesses are run by women [10]. The researcher explored the effect of SM on their entrepreneurial process, with a particular focus on the influence on entrepreneurial motivation, entrepreneurial opportunity identification and entrepreneurial success.

The study employed both qualitative and quantitative research methods. In-depth interviews were used to obtain in-depth perspectives and experiences of female entrepreneurs while questionnaires were used to quantify the relationship between the research variables [11]. The study shows that the virtual identities of female entrepreneurs on social media have helped them not to be confined to the role of a housewife. Social media has increased the nimbleness of transactions, so it helps some married women to take care of their home and children while still juggling their online businesses. Women can make use of their skills such as making handmade jewelry, painting, food baking and other contents and through these they can start their own online business, making full use of the trading platform of the Internet social media to generate income and thus realizing their value. They can diversify their identities through their virtual identities on social media, that is, they can shape what they want others to see them as women's virtual identities on social media are diverse, and they can be both competent mothers and solo shopkeepers. Many interviewees expressed the frustration they felt when they changed from busy office workers to housewives, they would feel that they did not contribute much to society or their families, and their sense of self-identity was getting lower and lower. But the Internet can be a tool for them to explore their interests while raising a family. They can share their talents and hobbies on the Internet and subsequently receive positive feedback and encouragement from the virtual community. That is why many of the women interviewed reported that this virtual identity increased their sense of self-worth, allowing them to have a stronger position in the family and the community, and to gain a sense of confidence and fulfillment [12].

4 Discussion and recommendations

4.1 Holistic conclusions

Through the content of the study, the present study reveals two different perspectives, which means that virtual identity on social media is a double-edged sword for individuals' self-esteem and self-evaluation, with both positive and negative effects. On the one hand, positive feedback and praise on social media can boost an individual's self-esteem, bringing confidence and a sense of self-worth to the individual. On the other hand, comparisons with others' virtual lives and idealized displays of social standards can lead to feelings of inferiority and self-denial. With the continuous development of social media, its influence is widening and its impact on people's mental health is deepening unconsciously, so it becomes crucial to achieve a balance between maximizing the positive effects and minimizing the negative ones. In the field of education, schools or educational institutions can offer courses on media mental health to help students understand the two sides of social media and the authenticity of their virtual identities, guiding them to realize that their identities on social media are not entirely real and preventing them from falling into the traps posed by low self-esteem or vanity.

4.2 Recommendations for the future

In the future, to better understand and address the sources of social media's psychological stress on the general public, researchers could employ rigorous survey and experimental methods. These studies could focus on a range of potential factors, such as interpersonal relationships, public opinion pressures, and online verbal violence, to determine how they are associated with SM use and what impact they have on an individual's mental health. By analyzing these factors in depth, people can better understand the specific mechanisms by which social media affects the mental health of the general public.

Additionally social media platforms can play an active role in helping users to better cope with the challenges posed by social media by enhancing positive mental health promotion. This can include providing mental health education and resources, encouraging positive self-perceptions, and emphasizing the importance of authenticity and self-acceptance. Social media platforms can also take steps to reduce unrealistic standards and virtual comparisons to create healthier online environments. Future research and improvements to social media platforms can help us better understand how social media affects the mental health of the general public and how positive mental health practices can be promoted through education and advocacy. This will help build a more balanced and rewarding digital social world that reduces psychological stress and improves people's quality of life.

4.3 Shortcomings of current research directions

Although the above studies reveal the impact of virtual identity on individuals' self-esteem, there are still shortcomings. First, the research sample is limited and the population surveyed is only representative of femininity in some areas. Considered from social-cultural perspective, different individuals living in different geographic areas are subject to the surrounding social groups, which affects people's upbringing as well as their perspectives on issues, so it is difficult for the current sample to comprehensively reflect the situation of society as a whole. Secondly, there is a lack of long-term observational research. Most of the experiments and surveys on self-esteem have been conducted for a relatively short period of time, and short-term information collection is not able to predict people's psychological changes and self-esteem in the later stages. Moreover, there are individual differences in these experiments, for example, some experiments are only conducted for women of a specific age group, so the results of these experiments are only single and incomplete, so more investigations and researches are needed.

5. Conclusion

Social media (SM) becomes an important component of individuals' life, greatly influencing the way people communicate and access to information. People construct images based on their real or partially fictionalized information in the cyberspace of social media. Real users use virtual images on the web to present their lives and opinions. However, there is a great deal of concern about whether virtual identities can negatively affect an individual's self-esteem and whether they can affect objective and fair standards of self-evaluation. Some people will express themselves more confidently through virtual images, which will enhance self-esteem and self-evaluation; on the other hand, it will cause a strong sense of vanity or low self-esteem. From a psychological point of view, self-esteem and self-evaluation have been a hot topic of research, which has become more urgent and complex with the rise of social media. Past research has focused on exploring the effect of SM use and psychological well-being, but relatively little research has been done on how virtual identity affects self-esteem and self-evaluation. This paper therefore explores this issue from a number of perspectives, aiming to explore the negative impact of virtual identities on individuals' self-esteem on social media, and examines two perspectives on how this affects psychological science and whether it leads to a distortion of relatively objective and fair standards of self-evaluation.

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