

Examining Media Co-socialization by Parents and Its Impact on Body Satisfaction among Female College Students in Mainland China on WeChat

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Abstract. This study investigates the phenomenon of media co-socialization by parents on WeChat, focusing on its implications for body satisfaction among female college students in Mainland China. With the ubiquity of digital media platforms, parental involvement in children's media experiences, including discussion and content sharing related to body image, has gained prominence. While relevant research has examined the relationship between social media and body satisfaction among adolescents and parental influence, few studies delve into digital platforms like WeChat or address this context specifically in Mainland China. Employing in-depth interviews and content analysis, this study reveals diverse modes of parental media co-socialization on WeChat, spanning health advice, beauty tips, and fashion guidance. Its impact on body satisfaction varies, from minimal influence to reduced impact as students gain independence, or enhanced satisfaction due to positive feedback. Participants' attitudes towards parental influence on body image ideals range from acceptance of disagreements to avoidance of discussion. This research contributes vital insights into the complex dynamics of media co-socialization and its implications for body satisfaction. It underscores the need for tailored approaches to address body image concerns and promote open family communication.

1 Introduction

Media co-socialization by parents has gained increasing attention in recent years due to the ubiquity of digital media platforms. This phenomenon pertains to parents' active involvement in their children's media experiences, encompassing shared media consumption, discussion, and the exchange of messages related to various media content, including body image-related content. This is particularly relevant in the context of Mainland China, where WeChat, a widely used social media platform, plays a pivotal role in interpersonal communication.

It is shown that there is a growing body of research focusing on the relationship between social media use and body satisfaction among adolescents [1,2]. Moreover, parental influence, particularly parental supervision, criticism and attachment, emerges as a significant factor in shaping body satisfaction among young adults [3–7]. Relevant studies emphasize the importance of appearance-ideal internalization and comparison in understanding this complex relationship. Some researchers especially investigate digital media's influence on family communication and privacy management, highlighting the evolving nature of family interactions in the digital age, and providing a relevant context for understanding media

co-socialization [8,9].

However, few studies explicitly investigate how these interactions unfold on digital platforms like WeChat. For instance, there are researches discussing the impact of new media on family interactions but they do not delve into specific digital platforms like WeChat [10]. This limitation makes it challenging to gauge the applicability of their findings to the current media landscape. There are also studies examining parental criticism and body satisfaction among emerging adults, but they may not directly apply to the Mainland Chinese context [4].

Understanding how parents engage in media co-socialization on WeChat and its potential effects on the body satisfaction of female college students in Mainland China is crucial. Given the influence of media on body image ideals, exploring this intersection can shed light on the role of parents in shaping their children's perceptions of body satisfaction and body image.

This study elucidates the complex landscape of parental media co-socialization on WeChat and its impact on body image and satisfaction among female college students in Mainland China. By identifying modes of co-socialization, content types, and varying degrees of influence, it offers valuable insights for research and practice in the field of body image and media literacy.

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2 Method

15	Zhang Jiayi	Female	Senior	Urban	23
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This study adopts a qualitative research design to investigate media co-socialization by parents and its impact on body satisfaction among female college students in Mainland China using WeChat. Qualitative research is well-suited for exploring complex social phenomena, allowing for an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives. Through in-depth interviews, this research aims to gain comprehensive insights into the interactions between parents and college students on WeChat, their media co-socialization practices, and the resulting effects on body satisfaction.

2.1 Participant selection process, sample size, and demographics

This study only involved cisgender women, who were assigned female at birth and identified themselves as girls or women. The participants for this study were purposefully selected based on specific criteria, who actively use WeChat and have engaged in media co-socialization with their parents among female students in mainland, China. To ensure a diverse and representative sample, efforts were made to include participants from different regions, cultural backgrounds, and socio-economic statuses.

The initial recruitment process involved contacting potential participants through university networks and social media groups. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study. The sample size for qualitative research was typically determined by data saturation, the point at which gathering more data no longer yields new insights or themes. The study aimed to achieve data saturation with approximately 15 participants (see Table 1).

Participants' demographics, including age, educational level, region of origin, and parental background, were collected to provide context and enhance the richness of the data. All participants were ensured of confidentiality and the anonymity of their responses.

Table 1. Basic information

		gender	grade	region	age
1	Ai Mi	Female	Senior	Urban	22
2	Da Mi	Female	Junior	Urban	20
3	F	Female	Senior	Urban	21
4	Jing Yazhi	Female	Senior	Rural	22
5	Kai Qi	Female	Senior	Urban	22
6	Meng Meng	Female	Junior	Urban	21
7	rr	Female	Senior	Urban	22
8	Shi Qi	Female	Sophomore	Urban	21
9	Xiao Sha	Female	Senior	Rural	22
10	Xi Xi	Female	Senior	Urban	21
11	Xiao Yao	Female	Senior	Rural	20
12	Xiao Z	Female	Junior	Rural	21
13	Xuan Bao	Female	Junior	Urban	22
14	Yolo	Female	Junior	Urban	21

2.2 Data collection methods

Data for this study were primarily collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews allow for open-ended questioning and in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions of media co-socialization with their parents on WeChat. The interview protocol was carefully designed to address the research questions and encourage participants to share their thoughts and experiences candidly.

Interviews were conducted in a one-on-one setting to create a comfortable and confidential environment for participants. Each interview was audio-recorded, with participants' permission, to capture accurate and detailed responses. Field notes were taken during and after each interview to record non-verbal cues and contextual observations.

Additionally, content analysis of WeChat interactions between participants and their parents was conducted. Screenshots of relevant conversations and media content shared on WeChat were collected and anonymized to protect participants' privacy. The content analysis provided supplementary data to support and triangulate the findings from the interviews.

The combination of in-depth interviews and content analysis allowed for a comprehensive exploration of media co-socialization dynamics and its impact on body satisfaction among urban female college students in Mainland China on WeChat.

2.3 Research questions

**Research question 1: How do parents engage in media co-socialization with their female college student children on WeChat, and what types of media content and body image-related messages are shared or discussed during these interactions?

**Research question 2: To what extent does media co-socialization by parents on WeChat influence the body satisfaction and body image perceptions of urban female college students in Mainland China?

**Research question 3: What are the perceptions and attitudes of female college students in Mainland China regarding the role of parental media co-socialization in shaping their body satisfaction and body image ideals on WeChat?

3 Result

3.1 Types of shred media content

3.1.1 Health care

Health-related information, including tips on nutrition and exercise, is frequently shared. This underscores parents' role in promoting their children's well-being.

"There are quite a few related to health and fitness. They rarely send me anything too closely related to body shape or physique. It's generally about health, like when they send me messages saying that summer's 'San Fu Tian' has arrived and what to eat for health and wellness. Also, my dad is a Tai Chi martial arts instructor, and he sends me links and posts like 'Learning martial arts makes women more charming' or sort of things."

_Xiao Sha (00:02:12)

3.1.2 Beauty enhancement tips

A substantial portion of shared content revolves around advice and tips related to enhancing physical appearance, reflecting societal beauty standards.

"My mom knows that sometimes I'm trying to lose weight. She might send me some posts about specific areas I want to target in my weight loss, including how to reduce visceral fat."

_F (00:01:51)

3.1.3 Fashion guidance

Fashion and dressing advice feature prominently, suggesting that parents use WeChat to influence their children's clothing choices and body image perceptions.

"My mom would send me clothes she thinks look good, and she also advises me on how to dress nicely, often suggesting that I wear high heels."

_Xi Xi (00:02:47)

3.2 Impact on body satisfaction and body image

The extent to which parental media co-socialization on WeChat influences body satisfaction and body image perceptions among female college students in Mainland China varies. Some experience minimal impact, while others observe a reduction in influence as they receive positive feedback.

3.2.1 No discernible impact on body anxiety

A substantial number of participants reported that parental media co-socialization on WeChat had no discernible impact on their body image or body satisfaction. They maintained a relatively stable self-image regardless of parental interactions.

3.2.2 Moderate reduction in Influence

Conversely, some participants noted a reduction in the influence of parental media co-socialization as

they gained independence and control over their lives. Positive feedback from romantic partners also contributed to reduced body image concerns.

3.2.3 Positive feedback enhancing body satisfaction

A subset of participants highlighted the positive feedback they received from parents, which boosted their body satisfaction. Such affirmations played a significant role in shaping their perceptions.

3.3 Parental influence on body image ideals

This provides insights into the diverse perceptions and attitudes of female college students in Mainland China concerning the role of parental media co-socialization on WeChat in shaping their body satisfaction and body image ideals. These perceptions range from passive acceptance to conceptual conflicts and varying levels of influence on ideal dress choices.

3.3.1 Acceptance of disagreements on ideal dress

Instances were described where parents disagreed with ideal dress choices but ultimately accepted their children's decisions. This acceptance allowed for a degree of autonomy in personal style.

3.3.2 Avoiding discussion due to potential arguments

Some participants chose to avoid discussing ideal dress choices altogether due to the potential for heated arguments. This avoidance strategy maintained peace within the family.

"I would feel that my mom's perspective leans towards practicality. If we're strictly discussing the topic of the ideal body shape and appearance, I might place more importance on body types with distinctive aesthetics. So, if we can't see eye to eye on this issue, then it's better not to discuss it."

_Xi Xi (00:12:50)

3.3.3 Letting the child decide

In certain cases, parents allowed their children to make their own decisions regarding ideal dress, granting them agency in shaping their body image. "In terms of my dad, he's quite supportive. Because after I got sick (with binge eating disorder), I feel like he's really careful around me, as long as I'm happy, everything is fine."

_Meng Meng (00:13:41)

3.4 Perceptions of parental influence

3.4.1 Conceptual conflict without arguments

Some reported differences in perceptions but noted that these differences did not lead to arguments. They maintained a peaceful coexistence of perspectives.

"Perhaps, for example, sometimes I might find a celebrity attractive or think their fashion sense is great, but my parents might think that the way I am right now is the most attractive, or that a more natural look is the best. I sometimes wish I could be like that too, but it seems like they believe I'm fine as I am. When I mention that someone else looks good, they don't see it the same way."

_rr (00:14:06)

3.4.2 Occasional arguments in conceptual conflicts

Others acknowledged conceptual conflicts but mentioned that these disagreements were generally not highly intense. However, occasional arguments did arise due to differences in body image ideals.

3.4.3 Passive expression of differences

A subgroup of participants recognized conceptual conflicts but chose to express their differences passively. They refrained from verbal resistance in such situations.

"Very rarely, our conversations are infrequent. Because discussing these topics inevitably leads to arguments, as parents may communicate in a way that younger people like us might not accept. We often end up arguing because of the tone of the conversation. So, later on, we avoid engaging in discussions about aesthetics or related topics because it tends to lead to arguments."

_Kai Qi (00:17:13)

3.4.4 Verbal resistance with passive attitude

Conversely, some participants engaged in verbal resistance during conceptual conflicts while maintaining a passive attitude. They expressed their dissent but did not actively confront their parents.

4 Discussion

It is revealed that parents engage in diverse modes of media co-socialization with their female college student children on WeChat. This includes interactive engagement, discussions of financial aspects, and an emphasis on health. The types of shared media content encompass health education, beauty enhancement tips, and fashion guidance. These interactions convey body image-related messages, impacting the cognitive perceptions of their children. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of parental media co-socialization. Understanding these modes and content types can inform interventions aimed at

promoting positive body image and health among young adults.

Regarding the influence of parental media co-socialization, it was displayed as a spectrum of effects. A significant portion of participants reported no discernible impact on their body image or body satisfaction. However, others noted a reduction in influence as they gained independence or received positive feedback from romantic partners. Positive feedback from parents also played a role in enhancing body satisfaction. Importantly, WeChat was identified as an extension of parental scrutiny, further impacting body image and satisfaction.

These findings highlight the complex interplay between parental media co-socialization and body satisfaction. It suggests the need for nuanced approaches in addressing body image concerns among college students.

In exploring perceptions and attitudes of female college students regarding parental media co-socialization, we discovered varying responses. Some reported conceptual conflicts but no significant arguments, while others engaged in occasional arguments over body image ideals. Passive expression of differences and verbal resistance with a passive attitude were also noted. Parental influence on ideal dress choices ranged from acceptance of disagreements to avoiding discussions to grant children autonomy.

The diversity of responses underscores the need for personalized approaches when addressing body image concerns among this demographic. It also highlights the importance of fostering open communication between parents and college students.

5 Conclusion

This study contributes to the growing body of research on the influence of parental media co-socialization on body image and satisfaction among young adults in the digital age. The identification of various modes of media co-socialization, content types, and the nuanced influence on body image offers valuable insights for both scholars and practitioners.

Practically, it emphasizes the importance of promoting healthy body image discussions within families and the need for digital literacy programs for both parents and students. Future research should delve deeper into the mechanisms underlying these influences and explore interventions to mitigate potential negative impacts.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of our study. First, our sample primarily consisted of urban female college students in Mainland China with a sample of 15 participants, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could include more diverse samples to explore

potential cultural differences in parental media co-socialization. Additionally, the study relied on self-report data, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Future research could employ mixed-methods approaches to provide a richer understanding of the dynamics at play. Longitudinal studies could also help track the long-term effects of parental media co-socialization.

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