

The Impact of Perfect Image Portrayal on TikTok (Douyin) on Appearance Anxiety Among Young Chinese Women

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Abstract. Social media, especially visual platforms such as Douyin, have greatly influenced the values of young Chinese people, especially young women. The prevalence of idealised body images and aesthetic standards on social media has contributed to physical anxiety and hurt self-cognition and mental health. The purpose of this study is to explore how the perfect image shaping on Douyin affects the appearance anxiety of young Chinese women, their mental health and self-perception. Analysing social media usage patterns highlights the significant trend of young women. Many respondents use social media for more than 30 minutes a day, especially on TikTok. These users often encounter idealised images. Despite widespread suspicion, more than half of them think that these images are real to some extent. This exposure leads to anxiety about appearance, and more than 25% of young women suffer from moderate anxiety. This anxiety has fuelled people's desire for beauty or plastic surgery, and 62.5% of people try to achieve their ideal appearance through self-care and exercise. Popular beauty filters and image enhancement tools on social media further exacerbate this anxiety because they promote unrealistic beauty standards.

1 Introduction

As a widely used media for young people, social media plays a vital role in guiding young people's values. In the early days, almost all the images that appeared in TV commercials, movies and TV series were slim and healthy, and the proportion of these images that appeared on social media was particularly high [1]. Especially in the context of social media, physical anxiety is becoming increasingly common, because women are exposed to a continuous stream of ideal body standards and ideal standards of beauty. Social media filters, perfect images, and idealized bodies removed from reality will negatively affect an individual's perception of their own body [2]. Social media also spreads the definition of beauty through the platform, leading to negative self-perception and adverse effects on women [3]. China is among the largest number of active social media users in the world, with almost 1 billion users, and highly visual social media has penetrated the daily lives of teenagers [4]. Especially for young women are especially vulnerable to pressure from the media's beauty

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standards [5]. These pressures will have a lot of negative effects on young women. Studies have shown that a high proportion of social media is used by young people with depression and anxiety [6].

Huang et al suggested that unrealistic images in the media can trigger negative emotions and further develop into mental health risks, such as anxiety [7]. Henriques and Patnaik pointed out that the image on social media websites is idealised and unreal, which brings high expectations to young women in society [8]. These expectations will lead to further dissatisfaction with your body and appearance, which will lead to higher inferiority and anxiety. People who are anxious about their image on social media find it more difficult to make friends in society and have a higher chance of depression [9]. Especially in China, young women use social media more frequently and widely. They get a lot of untrue images from social media, which will accelerate the psychological burden of young women and anxiety about their appearance.

Meanwhile, Douyin, the most widely used site for short videos, is used by over half of Chinese netizens regularly, and users spend a lot of time watching Douyin [10]. Zheng reckoned Douyin is the representative of the global media platform. It has strong users and monthly activity [11]. Each person spends more than 22 hours a month using short video applications, and Douyin users stay on the platform longer. The daily activity of Douyin reached 600 million in June 2022, and the proportion of women using Douyin exceeds that of men [12, 13]. Therefore, Douyin plays an important role in the social media used by young women. The content on Douyin may affect young women who watch it and affect the appearance anxiety of young women. This anxiety can even cause them serious psychological problems.

This study will investigate the impact of perfect image presentation on Douyin on the appearance anxiety of young Chinese women. It reveals how the perfect image on the Douyin platform affects women's mental health and self-perception and can explore the specific impact of women's appearance anxiety.

2 Method

This study is to study women who often watch Douyin platforms in schools (for example, classroom announcements, and WeChat groups). Through the questionnaire survey, the data is collected to explore the impact of the perfect image presentation on Douyin on the appearance anxiety of young girls.

2.1 Participants

The research object of this study is girls between the ages of 18 and 24 from the university. Participants use Douyin every day. Participants use social media for more than 30 minutes every day. Participants browse videos and pictures on Douyin account for a high proportion. Many of the videos and pictures viewed show the perfect image of women, from various aspects such as figure, appearance and filters.

2.2 Data collection

The questionnaire will be distributed online and will continue for three days. This study will use self-made questionnaires and adapt them to the appearance anxiety scale to ensure the authenticity and effectiveness of the questionnaire. There are three parts to the questionnaire's content. The first part is the behaviour of using social media, including watching videos or pictures. The second part is the measurement of external appearance anxiety, using the

appearance anxiety scale, and each question is scored on a five-point basis. The third part is the comparative tendency of society. All answers are conducted online.

2.3 Statistical analysis

A total of 40 questionnaires have been recycled. There are 8 invalid and 32 valid questionnaires, with a final recovery rate of 80%. The accuracy of the questionnaire answers is checked one by one. To protect privacy, the names of participants are hidden. The age of the participants is counted. Researchers delete incomplete, duplicate and invalid answers. Researchers analyse and calculate each questionnaire

3 Result

3.1 Use of social media

Analysing the questionnaire data revealed significant insights into overall social media usage patterns. Approximately 60% of respondents indicated that they use social media for more than 30 minutes daily, with some users engaging for even longer durations. Notably, these individuals allocate about 50% of their social media time to Douyin. Data analysis further indicates that over 50% of young women frequently encounter idealized images on social media platforms. Moreover, 59.4% of these young women perceive the authenticity of such images as moderately real, while most users express scepticism regarding the idealized portrayals on social media. Despite this scepticism, young women report experiencing anxiety about their appearance and body image in response to the perfect images prevalent on Douyin (see Table 1).

Table 1. Answer to the Questionnaire.

Question	Answer	Answer proportion	Number of people
Do you often see videos or pictures of perfect appearance and perfect body on Douyin?	Never	0%	0
	Seldom	9.4%	3
	Sometimes	40.6%	13
	Often	40.6%	13
	Very often	9.4%	3
How real do you think the "perfect" appearance and image pictures on Douyin are?	Completely unreal	3.1%	1
	Slightly real	28.1%	9
	Medium real	59.4%	19
	Very real	6.3%	2
	Extremely real	3.1%	1
How anxious you are about your appearance after seeing the "perfect" pictures and videos	Never	21.9%	7
	Slightly	50%	16
	Medium	18.8%	6
	Very	6.3%	2
	Extremely	3.1%	1
When you see the "perfect" pictures and videos on Douyin, how much pressure do you feel?	Never	18.8%	6
	Slightly	46.9%	15
	Medium	21.9%	7
	Very	6.3%	2
	Extremely	6.3%	2
Before posting your photos to Douyin, how much do you think it	Never	3.1%	1
	Seldom	6.3%	2
	Sometimes	40.6%	13

is necessary to edit and beautify the photos?	Often	34.4%	11
	Very often	15.6%	5
Have you ever considered getting a "perfect" appearance on social media through content surgery?	Never	43.8%	14
	Seldom	31.3%	10
	Sometimes	15.6%	5
	Often	3.1%	1
	Very often	6.3%	2
What actions do you take to maintain a positive image under the influence of Douyin? (Multiple choices)	Limit the use of Douyin	6.3%	2
	Accounts that pay attention to the real appearance	46.9%	15
	Carry out self-care	62.5%	20
	Participate in physical exercise	56.3%	18
	Seek the support of friends and family	15.6%	5
	Other	9.4%	3

3.2 The current situation of women's appearance anxiety

The prevalence of idealized images on Douyin significantly impacts young women's perceptions of their appearance. Most young women experience slight anxiety when confronted with these perfect images in pictures and videos. Notably, more than 25% of young women report experiencing moderate anxiety. This anxiety stems from the contrast between their appearance and the idealized images presented in the media. Furthermore, over half of the young women surveyed expressed a desire for beauty enhancements or plastic surgery after viewing these images. Additionally, 62.5% of young women attempt to achieve this idealized image through self-care and physical exercise. The dissemination of perfect images on social media often involves the use of beauty filters, face-thinning tools, and skin-smoothing techniques. These unrealistic portrayals exacerbate appearance anxiety among viewers. When young women observe these idealized images, they unconsciously compare themselves to these standards, fostering aspirations and expectations for similar perfection. The anxiety related to appearance Douyin primarily originates from concerns about personal image, appearance, and body shape, which are magnified on social media platforms. The increasing availability of filters and image-enhancing tools on social media further intensifies this dissonance, leading viewers to feel dissatisfied with their appearance.

4 Discussion

The anxiety experienced by young women regarding short videos on Douyin predominantly stems from the portrayal of unrealistic and idealized images. Content focusing on body image significantly impacts users' mental health [14]. These depictions influence viewers' perceptions of beauty, leading them to believe that only the physiques and appearances seen on Douyin are attractive. Consequently, many users employ filters to modify or enhance their appearance on the platform. The beautification tools available on Douyin allow users to attain an idealized image. Consequently, content creators often use Meitu tools or filters to ensure their videos align with public aesthetic standards. This perpetuates a cycle where young women compare themselves to these idealized images, resulting in feelings of inadequacy and anxiety about their appearance.

On Douyin, users often share photos and videos, which are frequently edited and processed before posting. A prevalent practice involves using software to enhance physical attributes, such as lengthening legs and refining facial features. Women meticulously adjust details in their images. These manipulated visuals often significantly diverge from the true appearance of the individuals. When female viewers encounter these photos, they reflect on their appearance and contemplate the level of attention received by the women in the videos. This attention is measured by the number of likes, followers, and positive comments on the content. Consequently, young female viewers may develop the belief that achieving a perfect image garners admiration and affection from the audience, leading to heightened anxiety about their own perceived imperfections.

Numerous videos on Douyin incorporate an array of filters that alter users' facial features, such as kitten filters, butterfly filters, and long hair filters. These filters provide audiences with diverse options to enhance their self-presentation by minimizing facial imperfections and concealing detailed features. For instance, the kitten filter imparts a cuter appearance, while the long hair filter enhances the luxuriance of the user's hair. These filters significantly modify the authentic appearance and image of the users. Consequently, female users often refrain from posting unfiltered and unedited photos on Douyin or other social media platforms. Wang posited that young individuals invest considerable time scrutinizing their mobile phones and deliberating over which photos to share [15]. This trend contributes to the scarcity of realistic videos and images on social networks and media. When unprocessed photos of young women are posted on Douyin or similar platforms, it induces considerable anxiety. They perceive that authentic, unaltered photos should not be disseminated on social media, reflecting a profound apprehension regarding their natural appearance.

As a social media platform with a vast audience, Douyin attracts many young women who post videos and photos. Fardouly and Rapee pointed out that women share idealized pictures on social media [16]. The platform should encourage users to present their most authentic selves when publishing videos and photos. Douyin should prioritize giving more visibility to content creators who refrain from using filters or retouching tools, thereby motivating creators to share realistic images. Promoting such authentic content would enhance the quality of communication on the platform. Meanwhile, as content creators, individuals should strive to post genuine images of themselves, showcasing their true appearance to their audience, which would help to enhance the publicity of the real image. Video publishers can also diversify their content by sharing interests, social values, and other engaging subjects, thereby emphasizing inner growth and personal development. To mitigate the influence of idealized images on social media, young women need to develop critical thinking skills, recognizing that many images on social media are not entirely real. "Social media literacy," which is the capacity to evaluate social media content critically, is essential for mitigating the detrimental effects of social media on body image [17]. Female audiences should cultivate this critical perspective, acknowledging that many videos are edited with software and filters. Additionally, young women should focus on following life-sharing accounts rather than promoting perfect body images to alleviate their anxiety. Engaging in real-life activities can also provide a valuable escape from social media pressures, helping young women find confidence through social interactions and activities.

5 Conclusion

This study investigates how young women's anxiety levels are impacted by the idealized images on social media, particularly on the Chinese Douyin platform. The research results show that exposure to these idealised images will lead to high attention to personal images. Therefore, young women may engage in exercise, skin care, beauty, and even plastic surgery to make their image in line with these ideals. In addition, when posting photos on social

media, these people often use filters to modify and enhance photos to present a more perfect image. However, this research has some limitations. First of all, it only studied the Chinese version of Douyin, ignoring other platforms and cultural backgrounds. The influence of social media on one's body image could differ depending on the nation and social media platform. For example, Little Red Book is a platform mainly used by women to share photos and videos. Compared with Douyin, it may cause varying degrees of anxiety. In addition, future research should consider the psychological impact of idealised images on different age groups and explore whether different social media platforms will trigger different emotional reactions. In addition, the duration of social media use is not taken into account, which may significantly affect the level of anxiety. Future research should adopt a more comprehensive approach by analysing the impact of idealised images on various social media platforms and population groups (including different ages and races). Such research will contribute to a deeper understanding of how young women's negative emotions and mental health are impacted by the idealized image that exists in the social media environment.

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