

# Research on the Influence of Chinese Social Media on Women's Self-esteem Catalyzed by the Homogenization of Female Images in China

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**Abstract.** Social media in modern society are platforms where everyone can present themselves, and they are also “stages” where women can present diverse images of women and convey messages of women's strength. Most of the images of women are from a male aesthetic perspective, and men's discourse in the image of women is higher than that of women. Nowadays, the status of women in Chinese society is gradually rising, but women still do not have a great say in image aesthetics. This phenomenon is particularly evident in social media platforms, where women's aesthetic shift towards diversity has significant limitations and fails to break free from restrictive aesthetic frameworks, leading to the problem of women's self-esteem being undervalued. Numerous advertisers market and pursue commercial gain by selling anxiety and constantly instilling the idea that the value of women depends on the image of female beauty. Social media platforms need to guide women to the correct concept of aesthetics, and the government and legal authorities need to formulate relevant laws and guide correct values to enhance women's sense of self-esteem and promote a more diversified aesthetic and the concept of a healthy and beautiful image.

## 1 Introduction

According to a report published by research firm data reports, by the beginning of 2023, China had 1.05 billion Internet users, with an Internet penetration rate of 73.7%. Among them, the number of social media users accounts for 72.0% of the total population, reaching 1.03 billion. Social media platforms have become spaces for sharing personal views and showcasing diversity, particularly for women expressing female empowerment. However, in modern society, physical appearance is often exaggerated and used as a standard to judge individuals. This has led to widespread "appearance anxiety," especially among young women. Social media and advertising frequently link a woman's beauty to her self-worth, distorting the self-perception of young women. They often view a perfect image as essential to gaining recognition and increasing their value. As primary social media users, young women are highly influenced by the beauty standards promoted online, leading to the commodification of women's bodies and the manipulation of body aesthetics by media and

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society. In China, “whiteness, youthfulness and slenderness” is still the aesthetic standard for women's image that many people respect, and since the emergence of the media, women's image has been publicized to maximize the display of beauty. Capital has quickly grasped the marketing trend of body anxiety, which has led to the formation and continued development of the “whiteness, slenderness and youthfulness” aesthetic.

Cosmetics ads, fashion shows, and media promote a "perfect" female body image, turning it into a key commercial element. This creates a beauty standard that young women chase, striving for bodily perfection. Social media, by showcasing retouched images, reinforces the idea that beauty is defined by whiteness, youthfulness, and slenderness. Those fitting this ideal gain more influence in visual culture.

From the perspective of traditional cultural background, China has a long history of patriarchal culture, women have a low status in traditional society, and in order to gain men's favor, women have to submit to men's aesthetic standards, so pleasing men have become a natural thing for women. In traditional culture, women are regarded as aesthetic objects, and male society is the main body of aesthetics, and male aesthetic interests and concepts of aesthetics are the way to evaluate women's beauty.

With the development of society, the status of women in society has gradually risen, but women's aesthetics have not completely escaped the influence of male aesthetics. Nowadays, this phenomenon is manifested in social media platforms, in order to cater to male aesthetics behind the still manipulate women's aesthetic alienation, women's aesthetics turned to the road of diversification has great limitations, the acceptance of diversified women's image of the beauty of the decline of women's self-worth assessment of the problem.

In social media, due to the influence of advertising and marketing and the social environment, the phenomenon of women's anxiety about their appearance and their preference for homogenized aesthetics is becoming more and more serious. This is not only a psychological phenomenon, but also more profoundly affects their perception and experience of their sense of self-worth, which brings unprecedented challenges and changes to their sense of self-worth. Social media platforms have consistently catalyzed the homogenization of women's aesthetics, affecting women's concept of aesthetics and failing to form an equal concept of aesthetics, and there are many potential limitations of this digital media environment that affect the underestimation of women's sense of self-worth and increase in their psychological well-being and women's aesthetics on their way to diversification.

This study will analyze the causes and potential factors behind the homogenization of women's aesthetics on social media from the perspectives of social environment, sexism, media advertising, and influencer marketing, the limitations of conveying diversified images of beautiful women and messages of women's strengths, and the underestimation of the impact of the sense of self-worth that occurs when pursuing the so-called homogenized aesthetics on social media platforms, and propose possible strategies to address these issues. This study will propose possible solutions to this problem, and promote the idea of a healthy and beautiful image that is not “standardized” in terms of aesthetics and the presentation of women's selves in a more diverse way.

## **2 Literature review**

With the booming development of the Internet and the active use of social media platforms, more women have begun to pay attention to their own bodies and pursue the so-called “white, young, and thin” as a monolithic aesthetic, and many people share their body image information on social media by displaying over-perfected and retouched photographs and videos, which create a standardized aesthetic concept to show the public that “white, young, and thin” is the fashion trend and trend, and gain recognition to achieve self-worth [1].The

American communication scholar Lippmann put forward the theory of “mimetic environment” in his book “Public Opinion”, believing that the information environment people come into contact with is not a complete reflection of the real environment, but is intentionally processed and reshaped by the media in the process of communication. He emphasized that media information has a great impact on people's consciousness. The continuous progress of modern electronic media technology has fully activated the human senses, allowing people to experience and feel more deeply the virtual environment constructed by the media, in which people examine themselves and others [2]. Because of the feudal society, women's status is low and they can only rely on men's lives, catering to men's aesthetics to gain more attention and please them is a necessity for survival. For example, during the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, women went on diets and reduced their waists in order to gain favor, precisely because the King of Chu liked a thin waist. But so far the cultural industry has not shown any independence and freedom. On the contrary, women are controlled by the social elite, which deliberately manipulates and standardizes aesthetics in order to cater to consumers and the general public. It is certain that there is a market for the body aesthetics it shapes, and the patriarchal culture pays for its consumption. Based on men's expectations of women's body aesthetics and women's subconsciously internalized body aesthetic values, patriarchal culture is abstracted for commercialization and mass production. The aesthetic commodities produced in this way have a natural consumer market for men and a natural legitimacy for women, such as the eyeball economy that displays beautiful women's slender bodies and attractive faces [3]. Social media is one of the most important factors influencing an individual's psychological, emotional, physical, and mental health in modern society. As the media continues to catalyze and portray the ideal image of young women's beauty, young women as important users of social media are easily influenced by it, and under the discipline of the social media aesthetic standards, the constant pursuit of the perfect body image, the endless pursuit of perfection without self-satisfaction and recognition, will lead to self-doubt and does not meet the so-called aesthetic standards of the social media, leading to a sense of self-worth reduction and distortion of mental health. Distortion is harmful to mental health [4]. In the extensive use of social media, many branded goods producers and advertisers will push the current hot female stars, female models, and female netizens to the public foreground, playing the role of body demonstration, misleading many young women in the current mainstream aesthetics is exactly the same, advocating that in order to become a beautiful ideal woman and gain favor to improve the sense of self-worth must meet the general public aesthetics, so as to promote the advancement and development of the market of women in the body consumption. Numerous young women can be pressured to fail to live up to the expectations they have established by the singular aesthetic standards promoted on social media, and this pressure can easily produce an underestimation of their sense of self-worth, reinforcing symptoms of low self-esteem and depression [5]. Comparatively, in Western culture, those with a beautiful image will have an easier time tasting and gaining a voice in life because beauty is valued in society and filters have to be hung on those who have an ideal image of beauty, being smarter, stronger, healthier, and nobler. To be part of the beauty elite, one must possess a carefully managed set of markers, including white, smooth skin, a lean body, and rich, fashionable clothing. The social environment and public opinion continue to reinforce this idea that adapting to the patterns created by beauty standards will give women a higher status in society as well as women own value [6]. Following the rise of digital technology-based beauty applications, posting beauty-less original photos to social media seems to be the act of the brave. The majority of beauty users are women, and in order to show a perfect and beautiful image of themselves, nowadays “no selfie without beauty” and “two minutes to take a picture, two hours to make a picture” have become new social media trend, immersing themselves in the “beauty world” and neglecting the original value of their bodies. Nowadays,

“no face, no selfie” and “two minutes for a photo, two hours to edit it” has become a new social media trends, and immersed in the “beauty world”, the pursuit of an idealized image ignores the original value of the body, and the original beauty of the body, the health of the body, and the diversified aesthetic perception are increasingly forgotten [7].

The studies and theories mentioned above help to provide some background information in advance. However, there are still some research gaps. There are a lot of studies on social media platforms discussing the aesthetics of women's images, but there are still a lot of limitations in the way of delivering diversified aesthetics, and there are fewer studies on the way that social media continues to catalyze the homogenization of the aesthetics of young women's images in China, thus affecting women's sense of self-worth and proposing strategies to solve the problem. This study will be devoted to analyzing the obstacles to the transmission of diversified aesthetics in social media and the impact on women's sense of self-worth by conducting a questionnaire survey, so as to analyze the impact of the “perfect” image of women promoted on social media platforms on the sense of self-worth of young women in China, and propose strategies to solve the problem, so as to help more women to stop pursuing idealized aesthetic standards and establish a healthy and beautiful image. This will help more women stop pursuing idealized aesthetic standards, establish a healthy and beautiful image, increase their sense of self-worth, break down restrictive aesthetic frameworks, promote diversified aesthetics, and convey the message of women's strength.

### **3 Methodology**

In order to better obtain valid and reliable research data, this paper adopts an online questionnaire survey method in the study of the impact of social media on women's self-worth under the catalyst of homogenization of Chinese women's image and analyzes whether the phenomenon of aesthetic homogenization on social media has an impact on young women's sense of self-worth and proposes a corresponding solution strategy. Through the analysis of the questionnaire data draw the corresponding conclusions, so as to enhance the feasibility and operability of the thesis.

The questionnaire was designed using the Xiaohongshu platform, and the dissemination method of issuing the questionnaire in the form of posting on Xiaohongshu was adopted, and the questionnaire issuance cycle was 7 days. Through the above dissemination methods 80 questionnaires, were screened out of 76 valid questionnaires, and the criteria for determining invalid questionnaires, were the following two ways, on the one hand, all the answers to choose one, on the other hand, the answers show obvious regularity.

The main group of participants was young women, defined by the United Nations as those between the ages of 15 and 24. The main group was the 19 to 24-year-old college student group, accounting for 51.25%, of which 41.25% were college students or older. The largest proportion of females in the sample was 80%, while the proportion of males was 20%.

## **4 Results**

### **4.1 Main social media software platforms and frequency of use**

The results of the questionnaire survey show that when asked what are the main platforms of social media to be used. WeChat, Xiaohongshu, and TikTok are used more often, WeChat, as the most widely used communication tool in China, is also an important social and information service platform in modern life, accounting for 87.50%. It is followed by Xiaohongshu Book with 67.5% and TikTok with 60.00%. Xiaohongshu is a mobile application with women as the main audience, a community platform focusing on young

women, allowing many female users to fully display and express their views, it has a typical feminist environment and a high degree of freedom of women's discourse, and therefore builds a media environment of female body carnival [8]. When using the TikTok platform, for example, when brushing the video there are a lot of videos of the so-called face value bloggers wearing a variety of tights to show the body to display a variety of talents, many users will have to comment that this is the ideal body, it will invariably cause their own pressure, and then compared to their own, it will be more anxious, and their own appearance and body will be dissatisfied.

#### **4.2 Women's image continues to be “scrutinized” in social media.**

In China, “white, young, and thin” is still the aesthetic standard for women's image advocated by many people, and the propaganda on women's image has been shown in various media since ancient times and has never stopped, constantly reinforcing the monolithic aesthetic standard of “white, young and thin,” especially on television. In particular, the television media, interspersed with various advertisements for skin care products and body care products on different channels and at different times, constantly inculcates the idea that women who fail to meet the public's aesthetic standards will be disrespected and lose their self-confidence [9]. In today's era of prevalent visual culture, although many of the public have a tolerant mindset to view the emergence of diversified aesthetics, 53.75% of the participants in the survey questionnaire believe that the aesthetic standards of young Chinese women on social media are too homogenized. Participants were asked who shapes the aesthetic standard of women's image on social media mainly felt to be the media environment and the overall influence of social culture accounted for 81.25%, male users and media platform algorithms for 63.75%, not to be ignored fashion industry accounted for 36.25%. The standardized aesthetics are not satisfied with the overall vision, but rather “fragmented” in the form of disassembled into separate parts. When asked what aspects of Chinese women's aesthetics that have been catalyzed by social media to become more homogenized, 86.25% of the survey participants identified body image standards, such as thinness, height, and curvature. Facial features such as big eyes, high nose, melon face, etc. accounted for 70% of the participants, and skin color such as fair, amber, etc. accounted for 61.25% of the participants. In addition, 42.50% of the participants thought that women's image was reflected in their style of dress, such as feminine, sexy, sweet, and so on. The female image is scrutinized in a fragmented form. When the female image is broken down into separate individuals, if one individual is not valued within the restrictive aesthetic framework, it will be refined and replaced by high-tech means [10]. From the questionnaire, it can be found that Chinese women still do not have the right to control and speak about aesthetics in modern society [2].

#### **4.3 “Aesthetic Kidnapping” on the Gaze of the Other**

From a historical perspective, China's patriarchal culture and ideology permeate people's consciousness, women's status is low, catering to men's aesthetics to gain more attention and please them is historical inertia, and the mainstream aesthetics is also aesthetics from a male perspective. The term “Other Gaze” was first coined by film critic Laura Mulvey, and is used in visual art and literature to present and represent women from a masculine and heteronormative perspective, with women existing as sexual objects for the pleasure of the male viewer. According to Foucault, the “gaze” is a mechanism of power that confers self-identified subjectivity on the gaze and monitors women's behavior and thoughts [10]. The percentage of questionnaire participants who believed that the image of women presented on social media is gazed at by others and is very noticeable is 42.50%. However, 41.25% of the

participants believed that it was influential and not very noticeable. The French Marxist philosopher Althusser emphasized that “our consciousness is not generated by ourselves, but given to us by culture.” That is to say, culture influences the perception and feelings about the world. Stepping into modern society, women's consciousness has awakened, and women need to get rid of the constraints of inequality. However, under the influence of long-term patriarchal culture, the deep-rooted consciousness penetrates into people's deep consciousness, which further forms the state of “collective unconsciousness” [11]. Asked whether the effects of the Other Gaze are felt in terms of the need for one's appearance or image to conform to a particular standard in order to gain recognition or a sense of self-worth, 45% of the participants felt it sometimes, and 41.25% of the participants felt that it could be felt often. In the questionnaire, participants were asked what the main negative effects of the Other Gaze on women's sense of self-worth were, increasing appearance anxiety at 75%, limiting women's self-expression at 63.75%, reinforcing the influence of gender stereotypes at 53.75%, and weakening women's self-confidence at 72.50%. Under the influence of the Other Gaze, women tend to ignore the subjectivity of the female self in aesthetics, ignore their own unique personality as well as their own style, lose their independent concept of female aesthetics, and in the constant erosion of the aesthetic standards stipulated by the society and the social media in the aesthetic consciousness of women, they constantly self-denied, and thus constantly show the body that has been regimented to the male to cater to the mainstream aesthetics of the general public [3]. In the questionnaire survey, the respondents were asked about the main negative impacts of the Other Gaze on women's sense of self-esteem, increasing appearance anxiety by 75%, restricting women's self-expression by 63.75%, reinforcing the influence of gender stereotypes by 53.75%, and weakening women's self-confidence by 72.50%.

#### **4.4 Influence Marketing Exploits Women's Sense of Self-esteem**

The survey results show that 61.25% of respondents feel there is a gap between their actual and ideal image, 22.50% perceive a significant gap, and 16.25% see no gap. The rise of digital beauty technology and facial modification apps like B612 allows users, especially women, to enhance their photos according to social beauty standards. This trend reflects the homogenization of aesthetics on social media, where platforms often promote overly perfected images. Individuals who conform to these idealized standards are often given more attention in today's visual culture. Social media platforms, through personalized content algorithms, further push beauty norms, often emphasizing the “white, young, and skinny” ideal.

Survey results indicate that social and cultural biases against women are the primary driving factors 81.25% behind this trend, followed by the commercial interests of media platforms 60%, and users' own entrenched aesthetic preferences 41.25%. The rapid flow of information on the internet forces advertisers to use eye-catching content to maximize profits, often leading to the degradation of women's images [11]. Female celebrities and models are frequently used in advertisements to reinforce current beauty standards, emphasizing slim figures and whiteness. These advertisements suggest that beauty is tied to success in relationships and careers, often portraying women as weak or emotionally vulnerable to stimulate consumption. The survey also highlights that 71.25% of respondents feel that these portrayals reinforce gender stereotypes, 81.25% believe they limit the diversity of women's roles, and 42.50% think they diminish society's overall understanding of women's value.

When asked in the questionnaire that the image of women presented in social media is often overly glamorized or idealized 76.25% of the participants felt that it is true, and when asked again how much they think this overly glamorized or idealized image of women affects their sense of self-value 45% of the participants felt it was very large and large 30% of the



participants felt that it was average 21.25% of the participants felt that it was average. Media and advertising and marketing tend to portray a distorted value by exaggerating the role of appearance in success and happiness. This value leads women to be overly concerned about their appearance and to view beauty as the key to recognition and success. However, this perception ignores the intrinsic value of women, who may feel inferior and insecure because their appearance does not meet the advertised “ideal standard,” which in turn reduces their sense of self-worth. Women have been taught that their value depends on the standard of a beautiful image and that looking different from mere mortals may make them feel happier and more appreciated [6]. The emergence of platforms on social media reveals that self-presentation is associated with aesthetic standards of self-worth identity, and many women compete to pursue the aesthetic frameworks developed by social media platforms because this behavior brings about what society believes to be a more confident life [4].

## 5 Discussion

The use of social media platforms such as Xiaohongshu and TikTok, especially among Chinese users, is unshakeable. Social media platforms not only provide the latest news, knowledge, and entertainment, but also subtly influence the user's perception and ideas. For example, the “face bloggers” on the TikTok platform are all in line with the current mainstream aesthetics, and many times watching many bloggers display their perfect body image will subconsciously make them feel anxious when comparing themselves to the screen in front of them, which can easily mislead, especially to the underage female users who are not yet mature enough, and convey distorted aesthetics, thus leading to a sense of self-worth and lack of recognition. The lack of recognition leads to an underestimation of self-worth. To enhance the visual effect, a single aesthetic content is pushed, increasing the platform users' affirmation and support of this single aesthetic. Nowadays, social media platforms convey a diversity of information and are not confined to communication and interaction, which can subconsciously influence cognitive perceptions and a single standard of aesthetics. It is necessary to strengthen the ability of users to rationally look at the problem, give up a single aesthetic concept, and tolerate diversified aesthetics. At the same time, social media platforms need to take on the responsibility to reduce the recommendation of negative information that affects people's positive perceptions, and the beauty of women's image is not limited to the standard of “white, young, and thin”, but rather to break away from the restrictive aesthetic framework and pursue different and diversified beauty.

In Chinese society, the “white, young and thin” aesthetic standard remains unshaken. Prior to the advent of social media, this monolithic standard was spread through various mediums, especially through television advertisements. It is easy to see the images of female celebrities and models in advertisements for skin care products, body care products, and other products that women love to use on television, which is in line with the dominant, monolithic aesthetic that suggests that women must conform to the ideal image presented in the media, resulting in a lack of confidence and a lack of acceptance for women. The findings suggest that although women's status is gradually improving, their control over their body image is not. The social environment, male aesthetics, and commercial interest drive influence the aesthetic sense of women's image, which has not been completely removed from the restrictive aesthetic framework. So there is a need for more and more diverse beauty to be displayed in the public eye, providing a stage where one can freely express oneself. In addition, the social environment, fashion and beauty advertisements, and many media environments need to advocate the concept of diversified aesthetics and promote the display of personal style and self-expression in a way that allows women to show a diversified image with more confidence.

Women's image is profoundly influenced by the gaze of the Other, a phenomenon that cannot be ignored in the context of Chinese society, history, and culture. Patriarchy has gained a firm foothold in Chinese society and under the influence of Confucianism, women's sense of self-worth depends on the gaze of others, and patriarchal culture has stereotyped women's roles and images. Many women use social media platforms in order to present a perfect and ideal image to gain social acceptance and further increase their sense of self-worth. In the process of pursuing the perfect image of beauty, they lose their individuality to conform to the image of women in the gaze of others and gain a sense of self-worth, falling more and more into the trap of a sense of self-worth that comes from a perfect body image. Strategies are needed to counteract this effect by strengthening the concept of "equality between men and women" among men, and by helping women to break free from the ideological constraints of historical and cultural influences, to be more courageous in conveying the message of women's strength and not succumbing to the inherent prejudices, and to improve the social environment as a whole.

The majority of women in the survey results believe that there is a gap between themselves and their ideal image. The use of beauty software such as B612 is extremely widespread, making it easy to create the ideal image and conform to the prevailing aesthetics on social media. Only showing an overly beautified and groomed perfect image follows fashion trends, limiting the diversity of women's images. Commercial advertisements promote products and stimulate consumption points by demeaning and degrading them, linking the ideal image of female perfection to a woman's sense of self-worth and ignoring her strengths and inner potential. The social environment needs to reflect on this phenomenon, and the government and legal authorities need to formulate and refine relevant laws to promote diversified aesthetics and encourage women's sense of self-worth that is not confined to external expression.

## **6 Conclusion**

On the road to transmitting women's power, social media platforms serve as the main "gatekeepers" to expand women's voices, guide the media space about women's image aesthetic standards not to be catalyzed into homogenization, improve women's image aesthetic concepts, diversify the acceptance of the beauty of women's image greatly, and promote the concept of a healthy and beautiful image.

Nowadays, the aesthetic standards are more in favor of the other than the diversified aesthetics of women, and the balance of aesthetic standards has not yet been maintained. In terms of education, the concept of "equality between men and women" needs to be strengthened, and biological differences need to be balanced. From an early age, education is needed to help children clearly realize that although there are physical and logical differences between the sexes, each person has equal rights as an independent individual. All human beings have a value of existence, and women's beauty is diversified; they should not be bound by so-called standards, and should continue to explore their own value; the media should publicize more images of rich and diversified women and diversified images of both sexes, and the further development of this awareness will promote the diversification of women's aesthetics, break down the restrictive framework of aesthetics and respect the value of women's subjectivity.

In the contemporary social environment, the boundaries of advertising and marketing on sexism and anxiety trafficking for marketing are relatively blurred and need to be formulated by the government and relevant legal authorities to maintain network security and establish correct values. Using positive advertising and marketing methods to convey the correct aesthetic awareness and aesthetic concepts, self-worth and respect for each other's differences should be encouraged, rather than the pursuit of social media monolithic and idealized



aesthetic standards, to encourage healthy thinking and promote the image of a beautiful and healthy woman.

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