

Unraveling Female Stereotypes: The Power and Influence of Social Media

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ABSTRACT

In the current day, social media profoundly influences societal norms and individual self-perception. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok influence communication, values, and self-expression. They also frequently reinforce conventional gender norms and unattainable beauty standards. Through influencers who promote idealized lives and enhance social comparison, jealousy, and self-objectification, this study looks at how social media affects women's self-image and social expectations. Utilizing multiple studies, including longitudinal surveys and cross-sectional analyses in Republic of Korea and China, the research identifies the psychological and societal effects of exposure to influencer content. Findings indicate that frequent viewing of influencer posts correlates with heightened jealousy, decreased self-esteem, and self-objectification among women. The study highlights the need for strategies to counteract these stereotypes and foster a more inclusive representation of women in social media. Limitations include sample diversity and reliance on self-reported data. Future research should explore alternative methods to mitigate the negative impact of social media on women's self-perception.

KEYWORDS

Social media; Female stereotype; Gender role

1 Introduction

Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok have been increasingly popular in recent years, and this has had a profound impact on how people communicate, form ideas, and view themselves and other people. Social media has become a crucial factor in shaping public discourse, influencing social values, and shaping individual identities. However, social media plays a crucial role in enhancing connection and self-expression, while also perpetuating and amplifying long-held stereotypes, especially about gender roles and beauty standards. These platforms often fuel unrealistic expectations of success and happiness, restrict individual freedom and reinforce traditional social expectations, thereby exacerbating gender inequality in society.

The content presented on social media often glamorizes certain ideals, such as flawless beauty, luxurious lifestyles, and extremely feminine behavior, as portrayed by influencers - people who wield significant influence over the perceptions and aspirations of their followers. Through carefully curated images and videos, influencers create the illusion of a perfect life that serves as a benchmark for their followers, especially women, who may feel pressured to live up to these unrealistic standards. This has led to a phenomenon where social comparisons, self-objectification and negative self-perceptions have become commonplace, affecting women's mental health, self-esteem and social status. The significance of this study is to reveal the influence of social media on gender stereotypes and to explore how these stereotypes can be challenged through a more inclusive and diverse media that promotes women's self-expression and the expansion of their rights in the digital space.

2 Literature review

In today's digital society, social media has become an essential part of the fabric of the world. It has the capacity to influence how individuals engage with one another, communicate, and create opinions. The influence of platforms like Facebook, Instagram and TikTok has permeated every aspect of people daily lives. Social media is used by people to create social networks, express themselves, and learn about the world. Such media largely shape people's values and also have a significant impact on how individuals perceive themselves and others. When social media promotes idealized beauty and lifestyle shapes, it fosters unrealistic expectations of success and happiness [1]. Such expectations perpetuate long-standing stereotypes and reinforce traditional gender roles and social expectations, thereby limiting individual freedom and self-expression and exacerbating gender inequality in society ^[1].

First, social media influences women through influencers. These influencers show off their life and attract fans by showcasing things that others wish they had but do not, such as beauty, high-end fashion items, or exotic travel experiences. These actions effectively influence the dreams and lifestyles of young people. When they do not get the life

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they want, negative feelings can arise for these influencers. Meanwhile, influencers' posts primarily reflect classic feminine, such as beauty and fashion, in more self-empowering ways. Posts that overemphasize women's beauty reinforce negative assumptions about femininity. Through heavily gendered content and practices that present them as successful women who "have it all," influencers increase their visibility and build their personal brands. However, this is an unrealistic fantasy that gives women a false sense of empowerment, makes them envious of things that do not exist, and causes them to see themselves and the world in an inappropriate way ^[2].

For Chae's study, he used two waves one month apart of longitudinal panel surveys of 1,064 young Republic of Korea women between the ages of 20 and 39 ^[2]. The study examined the following factors: the extent to which participants were exposed to social media influencers; the material they were interested in (lifestyle versus informational postings); the frequency with which they made social comparisons; and their feelings of envy. The survey's findings demonstrated that regular exposure to influencers' social media posts—particularly those featuring lifestyle content—increased social comparison and heightened influencer jealousy. According to the study, women who use social media are more likely to feel jealous. The limitations of this research is the sample for this study was selected from online groups that participants voluntarily joined, and it was insufficiently large. A single item was used to evaluate some elements, such as exposure to influencers' social media and comparison with them, making them susceptible to measurement mistakes. Third, the distinction between active and passive social media use was not made in this study. However, it mostly represents passive use because the frequency of viewing influencers' content was used to gauge exposure to their social media accounts.

Also, from their teenage years, women already have their self-esteem influenced by the templates of ideal looks promoted on social media. Steinsbekk have a study followed a longitudinal design, interviewing 725 children at ages 10, 12, and 14 years to assess their social media use and appearance self-esteem ^[3]. Social media use was categorized into "self-oriented" (posting updates or photos) and "other-oriented" (liking or commenting on others' posts). The Self-Description Questionnaire I and the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents were used to gauge the degree of self-esteem related to appearance. The Random Intercept Cross-Lagged Panel Model (RI-CLPM) was utilized to distinguish between effects that occur within and between individuals. According to the study, more usage of other-oriented social media was associated with lower appearance self-esteem among girls between the ages of 10 and 12 and between the ages of 12 and 14. However, the study did not account for time-varying factors like bullying, did not explore passive social media use, and relied on preliminary measures of self- and other-oriented social media behaviors. Such experimental limitations may lead to uncontrolled confounding variables as bullying affects students' psychological states. Passive use of social media is also psychologically different from active Posting. These variables will affect the internal and external validity of the research and have an impact on the experiment.

There has a study in China conducted by Pan shows social media has led to women's dissatisfaction with their bodies and appearance ^[4]. This cross-sectional survey involved 7,015 adult female TikTok users in China. Participants' self-objectification, propensity for social comparison, frequency of viewing social media influencers, and plans to alter their looks were all measured by the study. Participants also provided demographic information such as age, BMI, marital status, education level, and employment status. The data were analyzed using hierarchical linear regression, mediation models explore the relationships among the variables. The study found that viewing social media influencers was positively associated with intentions to change appearance. This relationship was mediated by self-objectification, indicating that women who frequently viewed influencers were more likely to objectify themselves, leading to a stronger desire to change their appearance. In summary, the negative impact of idealized influencer content on individual body image cannot be ignored. Influencers on social media tend to cater to existing appearance norms rather than promoting acceptance and respect for realistic body images. However, the limitations of this study is the cross-sectional design prevents causal conclusions, and the self-reported data may suffer from recall bias or social desirability bias. The measurement of intentions to change appearance focused solely on social media influences, potentially omitting other contributing factors like pre-existing body satisfaction.

Also, under the influence of Internet celebrities, women choose to objectify themselves because of their jealousy and desire to achieve their dreams. Women will use flattering tactics, using beauty software to portray themselves as an ideal female image, a beauty that meets social standards. In China, Yang make the study employed a case study with 351 Chinese female WeChat users, predominantly young and well-educated, to explore the relationship between self-presentation tactics, self-objectification, and extroversion ^[5]. Data was gathered through an online survey platform using snowball sampling. Participants' self-presentation tactics were measured across four categories (ingratiation, supplication, self-promotion, exemplification), while self-objectification was assessed by comparing the importance placed on appearance-based versus competence-based body attributes. Multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the influence of WeChat usage, self-objectification, and extroversion on self-presentation tactics, with the findings showing that self-objectification and extroversion significantly impacted ingratiation, supplication, and exemplification, but not self-promotion. Limitations of the study is that only include Chinese woman for research sample and reliance on Goffman's dramaturgical theory without fully integrating its concepts into the research framework.

The toll this kind of social media takes on women is harmful. These harms reinforce social stereotypes about women. These stereotypes often reinforce unrealistic standards of beauty and narrow definitions of femininity. Women's frantic pursuit of looks that reinforce Eurocentric national characteristics, excluding all looks that do not conform to the popular aesthetic, affects women's self-esteem.

Moreover, women's positions in the workplace are being influenced by social media. Social media can reinforce traditional gender roles in professional settings. Women are often portrayed in stereotypical roles, such as caregivers, assistants, or individuals who focus primarily on appearance rather than professional competence. Some even portray women as housewives, making women irrelevant to the word work^[6].

Under these problems, how can people reduce the impact of social media stereotypes on women? Walsh examined whether mindfulness has a positive effect on the threat posed by stereotypes to female leadership^[7]. The study utilized two parts: a pilot study (Study 1) and an experimental study (Study 2). In Study 1, 53 undergraduate students rated gendered and neutral social media images to ensure they were perceived as intended. In Study 2, 144 women were randomly assigned to either a stereotype threat or control condition through a fictional Facebook timeline with gendered or neutral images. The women were then tested on leadership self-efficacy and leadership aspirations. State mindfulness was also measured to assess its moderating effect on stereotype threat. As a results, women exposed to gendered images (stereotype threat) had reduced leadership self-efficacy, which led to lower leadership aspirations. Surprisingly, state mindfulness strengthened this negative relationship, with women higher in mindfulness experiencing a greater decline in leadership self-efficacy and aspirations when exposed to stereotype threat. The research limitations include the use of a static Facebook timeline that may not fully reflect real-life social media interactions. Additionally, only gender-stereotypical and neutral ads were used, potentially limiting the realism of the participants' experiences. The study's findings on mindfulness were unexpected and warrant further investigation. Finally, the results may not generalize across all demographics, as the sample focused primarily on women from a specific age group. Further research evidence is needed to determine whether stereotypes can be reversed.

3 Discussion

The side that influencers present through social media has a profound impact on female stereotypes. Such as lifestyle, which will increase social comparison, more and more women will become jealous of these influencers, they are deceived by this false sense of female empowerment, thinking that women should submit to beauty and luxury. This greatly reinforces the female stereotype. However, this stereotype is difficult to change, even through mindfulness, it will only affect women's mindsets will not change their own stereotypes of women. This causes women to have negative feelings about their appearance and economic condition, and even go on the path of harming themselves to change their appearance^[8]. In the workplace, women will be persecuted by gender inequality, and they think that women's workplace is a scene of romantic relationships, thus doubting women's own work ability^[9]. The persecution of stereotypes created by social media is profound and difficult to change. As for the use of social media, it should become a method to change the stereotype, they can break the stereotype of women by promoting the image of female celebrity representatives, such as female president, or female pilots^[10].

4 Conclusion

This research delves into the tremendous effects of social media on women's self-perception and cultural norms. Specifically, it examines how sites like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok uphold conventional gender roles and unattainable beauty standards. When the ideal lifestyle is examined through the lens of social media influencers, it becomes clear how these portrayals encourage female users to engage in social comparison, jealousy, and self-objectification. Frequent exposure to popular content and social media can create negative emotions such as jealousy, which can lead to lower self-esteem among young women influenced by idealized online beauty standards. Moreover, women who regularly watch influencer content are more likely to objectify themselves and desire to change their appearance, reinforcing existing beauty norms and exacerbating body dissatisfaction.

To counteract these negative effects, the study recommends promoting diversity and authentic images of women on social media. Encouraging platforms to support content that breaks traditional gender roles and stereotypes can help foster a more inclusive and positive environment. This study is significant because they highlight the urgent need to change the image and perception of women in the digital space. By revealing the pervasive impact of social media on gender stereotypes and self-perception, this article calls for a more conscious effort by content creators and consumers to challenge and reshape narratives that define femininity and success. In order to better understand the complicated interaction between gender stereotypes, self-perception, and social media, future research should concentrate on

generating more robust techniques and varied sample groups. This will help to create a more equal and empowering digital environment for everyone.

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