

Research on Female Images and Female Predicaments in Social Media

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ABSTRACT

With the rapid development of social media, the images and identities of women are facing unprecedented challenges and changes. This paper explores how social media shapes female images and the resulting female predicaments. By analyzing the female roles, body images, and social expectations presented in social media, it reveals the multiple pressures and distress experienced by modern women in the digital age. The research results show that although social media provides a platform for women to express themselves, it also intensifies the scrutiny and evaluation of their appearance and behavior.

KEYWORDS

social media; female image; female predicament; body image; social expectation

With the development of Internet technology, social media has become an indispensable part of people's daily lives. In this virtual space, the forms of expression and significance of female images have undergone profound changes. Traditional gender roles are re-defined on social media. Women are not only expected to show their multi-faceted nature but also face multiple pressures from society, culture, and commerce. These factors jointly influence their performance on social media and their psychological states. This paper aims to explore female images in social media and the female predicaments they bring, providing a new perspective for understanding the social status and challenges of contemporary women.

1 Female Images in Social Media

1.1 Diversified Female Roles

Social media provides women with a broad stage, enabling them to present themselves in a variety of different roles. In today's society, professional women can use social media to share their work achievements, challenges they face, and coping strategies, etc. For example, a female entrepreneur can share her entrepreneurial journey, which can not only inspire other women to pursue their career dreams but also demonstrate the abilities and wisdom of women in the workplace. Housewives are no longer confined to the traditional role of silent dedication. They can share household tips, parenting experience, or family-cooking recipes on social media, making the role of housewife radiate new vitality on social media. Social activists can spread the ideas they advocate through social media, such as information about feminist movements, environmental protection, and community public welfare activities, attracting more like-minded people to participate. This diversified role-showing breaks the single-definition of female roles in traditional

society, allowing women to freely switch and show between different roles, enabling women to have more abundant resources and greater freedom in exploring self-identity. They are no longer bound by a single social expectation. They can discover their own values and potentials in multiple roles according to their interests, abilities, and values, thus getting to know themselves more comprehensively.

1.2 Shaping of Body Images

The visual culture on social media has a profound impact on the shaping of female body images. In the social media environment, visual content dominates, and a large number of female images are shared and spread. Many women tend to show their idealized figures and beauty by sharing their photos. These ideal body images often include features such as slender figures, firm skin, and perfect facial feature proportions. However, these seemingly perfect images are often processed by filter and photo-editing software and other technical means, and there is a large gap between them and the real body images in reality, which is an unrealistic standard. When women browse these beautified images, they will often unconsciously compare themselves with these idealized images. Most women find it difficult to meet such standards, which easily leads to their inferiority complex, making them feel that they are not good or beautiful enough. This inferiority complex may then trigger anxiety. They may pay excessive attention to their body defects and try various methods to change their bodies, such as excessive dieting, excessive exercise, or seeking plastic surgery. These behaviors may not only damage their physical health but also have long-term negative impacts on women's mental health, making them trapped in dissatisfaction and worry about their own body images^[1].

2 The Influence of Social Media on Women's Psychology

2.1 Comparison of Self-worth

On the open and information-rich platform of social media, women are very likely to fall into the comparison of self-worth. Social media presents a virtual space where everyone seems to be showing their wonderful lives and excellent achievements. When women browse others' updates, whether it is the perfect figures, glamorous career achievements, or happy family lives shown by others, they will all become potential objects of comparison. And these comparison standards are often set by others, not based on the uniqueness of each woman. For example, seeing other women frequently posting pictures of global travel may make some women who cannot travel for various reasons feel that their lives are not exciting enough; seeing the news of others' continuous promotions in the workplace may make some women who are facing difficulties in the workplace have self-doubts. This continuous psychological process of comparison with others will bring great pressure to women because it is difficult for them to achieve the "perfection" shown by others in all aspects. Over time, this pressure will gradually erode women's sense of self-worth, making them begin to question their abilities, charm, and the meaning of life. This denial of self-worth then has a negative impact on mental health and may lead to emotional problems such as anxiety and depression.

2.2 Group Identity and Sense of Isolation

Social media indeed provides women with the opportunity to seek group identity. On this platform, women can find groups with common interests, experiences, or identity recognition, such

as groups of professional women, single-mother groups, or makeup-lover groups. In these groups, they can share their stories, experiences, and feelings, thus obtaining a sense of belonging and identity. However, at the same time, social media may also become a breeding ground for the sense of isolation. In the process of seeking social recognition, women face many risks. Cyber-bullying is one of the serious problems. Malicious attacks, insults, or rumor-spreading behaviors will cause great harm to women's psychology. Negative comments cannot be ignored either. Even some seemingly insignificant criticisms or unfriendly remarks, magnified in the network environment, may make women feel depressed and uneasy. When women encounter these cyber-bullying or negative comments, they may feel that they are excluded in this seemingly inclusive network world, thus deepening their psychological burden. This sense of isolation runs counter to the original intention of seeking group identity, making women's psychological experiences in social media complex and contradictory, further affecting their mental health and social confidence^[2-3].

3 Commercial Culture and Female Images

3.1 The Influence of Advertising Propagation

In today's business environment, social media has become an important platform for many brands to promote their products. When many brands use social media for advertising propagation, they tend to strengthen a certain specific female image. This specific female image often conforms to the idealized image in the general social perception, such as having a perfect figure, delicate face, and fashionable dress. Brands closely link products with this idealized female image through carefully planned advertising content. For example, in cosmetics advertisements, the female protagonists always have flawless skin, big eyes, and high-bridged noses; in clothing advertisements, models show slender figures and elegant temperaments. This advertising propagation method largely causes great appearance pressure on women. After seeing these advertisements, women will often unconsciously compare themselves with the female images in the advertisements, thus becoming dissatisfied with their own appearance. Moreover, this advertising promotion also deeply affects women's consumption psychology. On the one hand, women may buy related products in pursuit of the perfect image shown in the advertisements, hoping to improve their appearance by using these products to reach or approach the ideal image in the advertisements. On the other hand, this consumption behavior may be more out of psychological compensation for their lack of confidence in their appearance rather than the actual needs of the products. This makes women easily be induced by advertisements when consuming and fall into a cycle of excessive consumption for appearance^[4].

3.2 The Rise of Internet Celebrities

With the vigorous development of social media, Internet celebrities have emerged and risen rapidly. These Internet celebrities play an important and non-negligible role in shaping female images. Internet celebrities attract a large number of fans' attention by sharing their lifestyles, appearance features, and fashion outfits on social media. The images they show are often regarded as models for many women to imitate. However, most of the lifestyles and appearance standards shown by Internet celebrities are not real. When Internet celebrities show their lives, they often go through careful planning, beautification, and packaging. For example, they will choose specific shooting scenes, use various filters and photo-editing tools to create a seemingly perfect life scene and appearance image. After seeing the content shown by these Internet celebrities, ordinary women will feel that there is a huge gap between themselves and the celebrities. This sense of gap

will make ordinary women feel more pressured.

4 Coping Strategies and Prospects

4.1 Improving Media Literacy

In today's era of widespread influence of social media, improving women's media literacy is the key to dealing with its negative impacts. Media literacy includes the abilities to understand, analyze, evaluate, and create media content. By improving media literacy, women can have a deeper understanding of social media information. Since social media content is complex and often contains purpose-packaged information, through education and publicity activities, women can learn to identify the intentions behind the information, such as identifying the marketing means behind advertisements that beautify female appearances. Critical thinking is an important part of improving media literacy. It enables women to rationally analyze social media content, think deeply about the sources, authenticity, and rationality, and question the commercial interests or the needs of stereotype behind specific female image standards, so as to stay sober in the information flood, avoid the pressure brought by blindly accepting false information, and maintain mental health and self-cognition^[5].

4.2 Establishing a Positive Social Network

Encouraging women to establish a supportive social network is an effective strategy to deal with the negative impacts of social media. Women in social media are prone to fall into comparison and bear pressure, which affects their psychology and self-identification. However, a positive social network can break this predicament. A supportive social network focuses on women sharing real stories and experiences among themselves. They no longer only show the beautiful side but frankly share difficulties, setbacks, and ordinary lives, such as experiences of gender discrimination in job-hunting and overcoming body-shape anxiety. This sharing makes women realize that everyone has problems and imperfections, and their own predicaments are not unique, thus reducing the pressure of comparison, rationally viewing their own lives and images, and also enhancing self-identification. It enables women to discover that their own values are more derived from unique experiences, emotions, and the ability to cope with difficulties, creating a healthy and positive self-image for women in social media^[6].

5 Conclusion

Social media, as a new-emerging communication tool, has played an important role in the construction of female images and the formation of female predicaments. Although it provides women with opportunities to express themselves and realize their self-values, it also comes with many challenges. In the future, we need to pay more attention to the real experiences of women in social media and strive to create a more inclusive and positive digital environment to support the all-round development of women.

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