

# *The Effect of Women's E-literacy on Appearance Anxiety in the Information Age*

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**Abstract:** In the information age, the development of social media has brought convenience to people's lives, but it has also had some negative impacts on people's mental health. Especially for women, society's emphasis on appearance and the popularity of electronic media have made women's appearance anxiety increasingly serious. This paper aims to explore the alleviating effect of women's electronic literacy on their appearance anxiety in the information age and provide strategies for improving electronic literacy by strengthening electronic literacy education. This paper argues that the lack of electronic literacy, such as online disinformation and women's weak information screening ability, leads to women's appearance anxiety. Based on this, this paper suggests that the cultivation of women's information ability should be strengthened, and the e-literacy of the whole society should be improved by improving the education system. At the same time, all components of society, such as online platforms, should enhance their sense of social responsibility on the Internet and build a fresh and upward network environment.

**Keywords:** Information age, women, electronic literacy, appearance anxiety, mental health

## 1. Introduction

With the advent of the information age, the popularity of media and the development of social networks, people's lifestyles and social interaction methods have undergone tremendous changes. However, at the same time, the information age has also brought some negative impacts on women's mental health. The popularity of new media has made women's appearance anxiety increasingly serious. Research shows that comparisons about appearance on social media can exacerbate body image concerns in women [1]. Using social media can lead to appearance anxiety, which can lead to psychological problems such as depression, self-deprecation, and psychological disorders [2]. Most previous studies have focused on the effects of social media on women's psychology, but relatively few studies have been conducted on the effects of e-literacy on women's appearance anxiety. However, with the continuous development of the information age, the impact of women's e-literacy on their lives and psychology cannot be ignored, including the ability to use social media and the ability to screen information. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the impact of women's e-literacy on their appearance anxiety in the information age, and propose corresponding countermeasures.

## **2. Characteristics of Women's Electronic Literacy in the Information Age**

### **2.1. The Concept and Connotation of Electronic Literacy**

Electronic literacy refers to an individual's ability to use information technology and digital tools in the information society, including the ability to acquire, evaluate, organize, create and communicate information. Specifically, electronic literacy covers basic computer and network operating skills, information search and evaluation capabilities, digital content creation and editing capabilities, information security and privacy protection awareness, and the ability to understand and use digital technologies and tools.

The importance of electronic literacy lies in the fact that information technology has become an indispensable part of contemporary society, affecting all aspects of people's study, work, and life. Having good electronic literacy can help individuals better adapt to the development of the information society, use digital tools and technologies more effectively, improve work efficiency, strengthen information security awareness, and promote the development of individuals and society.

In short, electronic literacy is an important ability in modern society. It covers the comprehensive understanding and application of information technology and digital tools. It is a key ability for individuals to adapt to the information society, improve work efficiency and protect information security.

### **2.2. Characteristics**

In today's information age, most women are proficient in using various digital devices and network platforms, which can prove that women have certain electronic literacy. However, the continuous development of information technology has put people's level of e-literacy to the test. For example, when confronted with the abundance of well-retouched photos and complex information in social media and cyberspace, a lack of e-literacy often makes it difficult for women to identify the authenticity of images and videos. This also reflects one of the problems of women's e-literacy, which is the weak ability to discriminate information. The reason for this is not only the information nature of social media, but also the information awareness of women themselves.

## **3. Analysis of the Impact and Role of e-Literacy**

### **3.1. The Impact of Social Media on Women's Appearance Anxiety**

Appearance anxiety mainly refers to the negative emotions of being unconfident, dissatisfied and disapproving of one's appearance, body shape and other body images due to the influence of social aesthetic standards and social media context, thus falling into a state of anxiety [3]. As the French philosopher Michel Foucault discussed: "In short, people have 'transformed the peasants' and made them have a 'soldier' look." In Foucault's discourse system, the body is structured by knowledge and power. In cyberspace, things are manipulated, shaped and disciplined, which is the so-called "docile body" [4].

In Lowenthal's words, modern society has achieved a transformation from "production of idols" to "consumption of idols" [5]. To gain "recognition" from society, women have to conduct rigorous self-examination. Their body cognition under the influence of symbolic value causes them to overemphasize the proportion of appearance in their self-worth.

In today's information age, the widespread use of social media has made more people more accessible. Under the visibility space, people are in it and realize that their behavior is being watched by all kinds of eyes, so they can actively regulate their behavior. As a result, women have increased

their discussions about appearance and body, thereby subtly increasing the proportion of women's appearance in their self-worth.

## **3.2. Reason Analysis**

### **3.2.1. Algorithmic Tracking**

With the dissemination of emerging media such as Instagram, those "unreal" pictures that have been edited and modified are either born with good appearance or are carefully created through makeup, plastic surgery, and medical beauty methods. Outstanding Internet celebrities, perfect idols, etc. attract people with their outstanding appearance and quickly become popular. Social media is awash with edited images of perfect bodies and the adulation of appearance.

Once a link is clicked, the algorithm behind the scenes will continuously push relevant content to the user, resulting in the user's unconscious long-term exposure. Women who have been exposed to these images and values for a long time will continue to internalize them, forming Internet celebrity aesthetics such as "white and thin", "high skull" and "double eyelids".

### **3.2.2. Social Comparison**

Social comparison has a serious impact on women's appearance anxiety [5]. The negative effects of social media have generally been attributed to the process of social comparison. Social comparison has deepened the degree of women's appearance anxiety to some extent. When edited and modified images appear on social platforms such as WeChat, which are composed of strong connections and are more private, the gap between women and "companion" images will be even greater. They are engaging in a reciprocal process termed 'social surveillance' by Marwick, whereby individuals not only closely examine the content uploaded by others but also critically examine their own posts from other people's points of view. Such social surveillance is important because, in viewing the content generated by others, users come to 'formulate a view of what is normal, accepted, or unaccepted in the community', and modify their posts accordingly [6]. The result is that comparisons with Instagram 'peers' are most often upward in direction, resulting in dissatisfaction with one's own body and appearance.

From this point of view, whether it is more extensive or more private media with strong connection relationships, the popular culture it brings has impacted women's personal emotions and value systems. Among them, the cognition and experience of body and appearance It is also becoming increasingly rigid and programmed, so more and more women are showing morbid appearance anxiety and body anxiety.

### **3.2.3. Consumer Culture**

Generalized public aesthetic standards seem to broaden women's aesthetic horizons, but they essentially deprive women of their right to pursue their unique beauty and higher aesthetic forms. Consumer culture has produced stronger disciplines on women's appearance and body in the digital age. In consumer culture, just as the use value of commodities shifts to symbolic value, the practical value of women's bodies shifts to exchange value [7]. As the saying goes, the closer the body is to the public's aesthetic standards, the more it can be circulated as the most "selling" consumer symbol. All this ultimately points to one point - that is, the defects and imperfections of the body can be changed through plastic surgery, cosmetics, fitness and other means to show visually attractive appearance symbols. Therefore, the media continues to package more beautiful images, create better meanings for the body, guide women to transform their bodies in consumption by cultivating insatiable image needs, and further promote irrational body consumption driven by commercial

interests. The beauty industry is expected to reinvent itself around expanding products, channels and markets by the end of this decade. This shift is driven especially by the younger generation of consumers, whose definition of beauty is constantly changing.

### **3.3. The Alleviating Effect of Electronic Literacy on Women's Appearance Anxiety**

Electronic literacy refers to a person's ability to cope with and use electronic information in the information age. This includes skills in searching, evaluating, using and creating information.

#### **3.3.1. Alleviating Appearance Anxiety**

In modern society, electronic literacy has a potentially positive impact on alleviating appearance anxiety. First, individuals should improve their ability to discern information. As electronic literacy continues to improve, women can become more efficient at processing large amounts of information. They can accurately distinguish between authenticity and falsehood, such as identifying what is trustworthy and what may be misleading or false. Especially when it comes to understanding photo retouching and beautification techniques, women can identify bloggers who exaggerate product effects or over-beautify their images to attract traffic, so they can avoid being affected by such misleading content.

Secondly, women with high electronic literacy can effectively use online resources to find professional psychological counseling services and self-regulation methods. This not only helps them understand and recognize their appearance anxiety, but also can gradually change their excessive concern and dissatisfaction with their appearance through professional psychological knowledge and practice. This ability allows them to better manage their emotions and mental health.

Additionally, e-literacy can promote a healthier self-image among women on social media. By learning and applying digital literacy, women can use social media more effectively, such as learning to show up as their authentic selves rather than pursuing unrealistic beauty standards. Research suggests that showing more diverse female body images on social media may be a more effective way to promote body satisfaction and appreciation [8]. Exposure to diverse images increased appearance satisfaction and body appreciation [9]. Not only does this help boost an individual's self-esteem and confidence, but it also sets a positive role model for other women, thereby promoting healthier ideas of beauty and self-identity in society as a whole. In this way, e-literacy becomes a powerful tool for breaking down unrealistic beauty standards and easing social pressure on women's appearance.

#### **3.3.2. Build Healthy Self-Awareness**

Electronic literacy encompasses the ability to think critically and identify information. By improving electronic literacy, people can more effectively identify excessive packaging and polish online and understand the differences between real life and online life. Not only does this help them develop a healthier, more realistic self-image, it also promotes a deeper understanding of the authenticity of the information.

#### **3.3.3. Provide Social Support**

E-literacy enhances an individual's use of social media and online communities. These platforms can provide emotional support and a sense of belonging, helping women find groups with similar issues of appearance anxiety or join anti-appearance anxiety groups. In these groups, through communication and sharing, members can realize that their so-called "shortcomings" are common among the wider female group, thus helping to alleviate their appearance anxiety.

### **3.3.4. Self Expression and Development**

Electronic literacy also encompasses the ability to innovate and create. People can express themselves through blogging, making videos, etc., which not only helps to divert excessive attention to appearance, but also showcases their unique talents and strengths, thereby enhancing one's sense of self-worth and self-confidence. This form of expression is not only a path to self-improvement but also encourages others to recognize the unique value of each person.

From this point of view, the improvement of electronic literacy has a significant impact on alleviating women's appearance anxiety.

## **4. Strategies to Improve Women's Electronic Literacy in the Information Age**

Strengthening electronic literacy education is an important measure to improve women's informatization level and reduce appearance anxiety. Electronic literacy includes not only skills in using electronic devices and applications, but also the ability to understand and evaluate content communicated through electronic media and to make sound decisions in digital environments. Here are some ways to enhance e-literacy education.

### **4.1. Develop Relevant Policies and Standards**

Develop national electronic literacy education guidelines and clarify educational goals and content. Incorporate electronic literacy courses into school education as part of basic education. Research has proven that body image courses have been successfully implemented in school classrooms for adolescent groups, and body image courses can be accepted by adolescents [10]. Countries should actively introduce body image and other similar courses to improve the mental health of teenagers.

Provide professional e-literacy training to teachers so that they can effectively teach e-literacy-related courses. For example, designing electronic literacy courses suitable for students of different ages and ability levels. The course content should cover basic computer operation skills, network security knowledge, digital copyright laws and regulations, information evaluation and processing capabilities, etc.

Furthermore, Providing e-literacy refresher courses and online learning platforms for society can help women build a pathway to learning.

Through the comprehensive implementation of the above methods, women's electronic literacy can be effectively improved so that they can adapt to the rapidly developing information society and promote personal growth and the sustainable development of society as a whole.

### **4.2. Promote Social Responsibility**

Educate the public to identify different types of media content, including news, advertising, entertainment, etc., and to be able to critically analyze this content. Enhance the public's ability to identify media information and avoid being affected by false news and online rumors.

Media companies and Internet companies are encouraged to assume more social responsibilities and not only focus on commercial interests, but also strengthen supervision of behaviors such as exaggerating propaganda, publishing false information, and creating anxiety about appearance. This includes taking measures such as limiting traffic or banning such bloggers. Through such supervision, it can provide users with a healthier and safer media usage environment, while promoting the spread of positive and healthy content, protecting the interests of users and delivering positive energy.

## 5. Conclusion

Today, with the rapid development of information network media, the appearance anxiety of contemporary young women is no longer a microscopic individual psychological problem, but has become a broader social problem, which subtly affects the audience's aesthetics through its unique mechanism and value norms. Concepts shape women's value orientation. Based on free body performance and online editing, users and the media have jointly created a large number of iconic images that are difficult for ordinary people to achieve; based on the background of consumer culture and online business models, women are trapped in the cycle of social aesthetics--appearance anxiety--body consumption. Based on intelligent algorithms and platform positioning, women are trapped in a cage of appearance anxiety. Therefore, it is necessary to improve women's electronic literacy level and browse more positive body images by strengthening their ability to distinguish online information has a positive significance in alleviating their appearance anxiety. Therefore, e-literacy education for women should be strengthened, healthy ways of using electronic media should be promoted, and the use of social networks should be actively guided to improve women's mental health.

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