

## News Release

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### **Hong Kong needs to teach young girls the harms of editing selfies and using filters**

*Body image issues can drive girls to use beautifying apps, which can lower life satisfaction, reported MWYO.*

Hong Kong (August 2018) – Editing selfies can lower life satisfaction and happiness for young girls, and this includes acts as simple as adding filters, according to a MWYO study examining the relationship between selfie behaviours on social media and female wellbeing. Data shows that a female who puts her real face forward (#nofilter) is likely to experience a higher life satisfaction than someone who posts an enhanced image of herself on social media.

Girls reportedly edit selfies for likes and comments, and to feel good about themselves. Driven partly by body image issues and the desire for validation, editing is negatively correlated with happiness. Although girls experience an artificial boost in self-esteem, their overall life satisfaction is lower. In contrast, girls who post candid shots are happier. To them, posting selfies or wefies (group selfies) is another way of utilizing digital media and social platforms to preserve memories and connect with friends. This study is one of the first to distinguish between social media behaviours and their implications on wellbeing.

Most girls have taken and posted selfies. On average, girls take 4.2 selfies before they arrive at a good one for posting, the study found. Half of the girls (50%) edit their photos before posting, among which 54% use editing functions to improve their physical appearance. Most girls see nothing wrong with photo-editing “as long as it does not look too different from the original self”. Also, “filters do not count as editing”. Filters are so readily available and easy to use in apps like Snapchat, Snow and Meitu that, in young girls’ mind, altered reality is reality.

The study examines body dissatisfaction as an underlying factor for editing. Only 37% of Hong Kong females are satisfied with their physical appearance. The majority thinks that they are too fat, including 76% of females who actually have a normal BMI. Respondents with a higher BMI take more selfies than average (7.4) before they would post any. However, older females are generally more comfortable with their bodies, as they are less susceptible to negative comparison on social media. Male and peer evaluation are significant factors affecting body image.

The city-wide representative survey of 1,010 Hong Kong females interviewed 505 females aged 16-24 and 505 females aged 25-34. The survey was commissioned by MWYO to Consumer Search Group and conducted from February to June 2018 as a triangular study. It is part of MWYO's campaign, "Me, My Selfie and I", to raise awareness on social media's influence on youth wellbeing and promote media literacy education in Hong Kong. A related documentary is being filmed and will be released in 2019.

"Hong Kong needs better media literacy education policies and infrastructure", said Ming Wai Lau, director of MWYO and Vice-Chairman of the Youth Development Commission. "Other countries like the UK have established media studies as a formal subject and supported its development with resources. Social media is omnipresent, and its effect on young people is profound. We cannot leave it to youth's individual self-regulation to counter its power."

## **About MWYO**

MWYO is an independent youth-oriented think tank in Hong Kong.

Established in 2015, MWYO's mission is to listen to Hong Kong's youth and channel their views authentically into the public policy making process.

It conducts innovative and robust research, with actionable policy suggestions, to support Hong Kong's youth development.

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