

SCMP.COM

South China Morning Post

Why social media and selfies are filling Hong Kong's young women with self-doubt

PUBLISHED : Wednesday, 08 August, 2018, 8:15am

UPDATED : Wednesday, 08 August, 2018, 8:55am

News › Hong Kong › Education

Zoe Law zoe.law@scmp.com

Dissatisfied with their physical appearance, many women are altering photos to make themselves look better online, survey finds

Young women are more likely to feel dissatisfied with their body based on the influence of friends and social media rather than health, compared with those aged between 25 and 34, a survey has found.

About 10 per cent of women in the 16 to 24 age group attributed their negative feelings to social media, while 31 per cent said it was due to friends and 28 per cent pointed to health. For older women, only 5 per cent cited social media, 18 per cent said friends and 40 per cent named health as an issue.

These findings from a survey of 1,010 women done earlier this year – half in the younger group and half in the older one – underscored how social media could lead to “constant comparison with others and self-doubt”, think tank MWYO said on Tuesday.

The group was started by Lau Ming-wai, son of tycoon Joseph Lau Luen-hung and an adviser to the government on youth issues.



Describing the project's objective in a 27-page report, complete with snazzy photos and graphics, the group said it wanted to raise awareness on the need for better media literacy education for a generation who were social media natives.

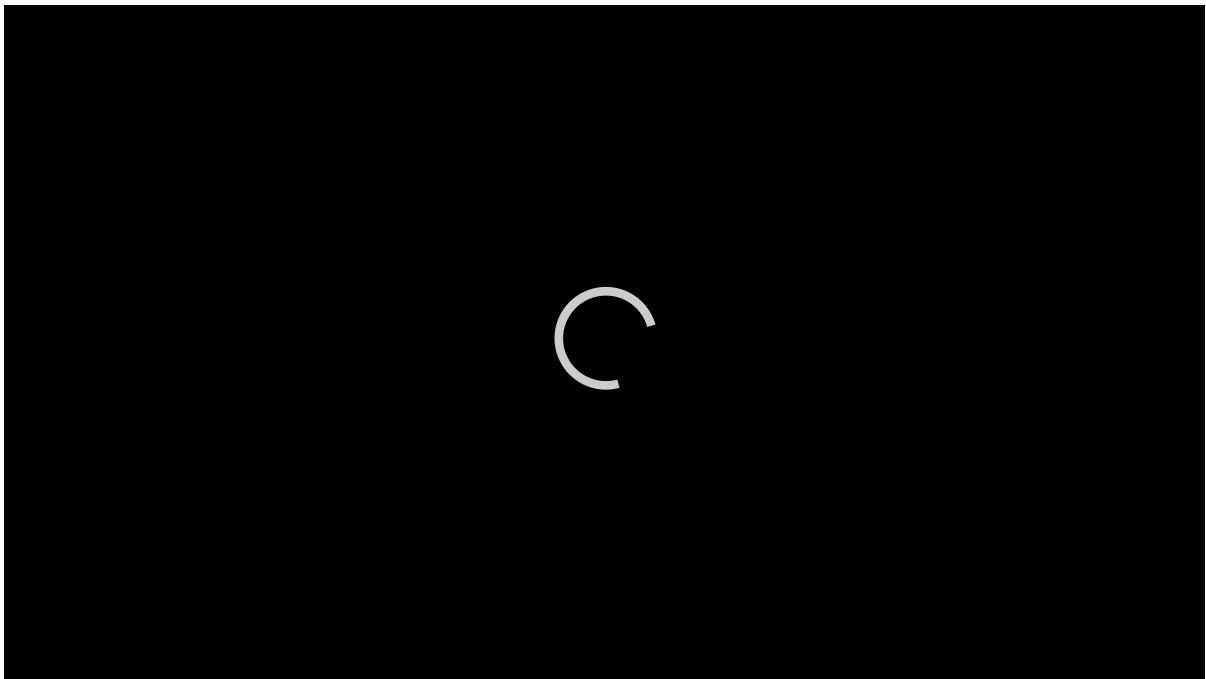
It cited a recent study that found "beauty sickness" was a problem in Hong Kong, with women who were "saturated" with media messages more likely to be unhappy with their bodies, leading to low self-esteem.

One in four youngsters 'would share sexy photos online to be popular' [1]

Lau, vice-chairman of the Youth Development Commission, said: "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 their individual self-regulation to counter its power."

The survey found 63 per cent of women were not satisfied with their physical appearance. So when younger ones uploaded selfies to social media, they ended up adding filters and even altered photos to make themselves look better.



Lead researcher Cindy Lau Si-wing said using editing tools ironically could "implicitly enlarge flaws" the girls wanted to hide because of the constant reminder they got when altering images.

"Once we asked girls at focus groups if they edited photos and how, the discussion would turn into an extended and detailed discussion of how they could be skinnier, have better skin, have bigger eyes and we could notice the mood shifting as they then seemed less confident," Lau, the group's research and programme director, said.

"One girl said editing caused her to scrutinise herself much more."

Why Hong Kong schools should follow France's lead and ban mobile phones [2]

A 19-year-old Instagram user, who identified herself as Tina, admitted looking at models on social media made her "feel insecure and not content" with her looks even though she was aware the pictures might not be completely real.

“Sometimes it works positively as a motivation. I follow them to keep up with the trends, fashion and make-up. I would get motivated to go to the gym and achieve the body I see on social media. But sometimes it makes me feel bad about myself but only for a bit,” the student, who uses Instagram every day, said.

“Then I snap out of it because when I look at my own Instagram, I only show the best side of me and look a lot better in comparison to reality so I know it’s the same for most people and it’s just their best side I’m viewing.”

On infographics

Six ways Hong Kong needs to get smart

[Tap to launch this visual explainer](#)

Clinical psychologist Andrew Adler said he had seen several female adolescents who were “extremely dissatisfied with many parts of their bodies” because of constant comparisons with images on social media, even when they knew their health was important.

Educators and parents could play an important role in helping young women become “less dependent on social media to judge themselves” and to focus less on physical appearance, he said.

“These adults can educate young females about the realities of social media and the frequent use of altered images. Also, adults can act as positive role models, discussing how they have learned to appreciate and value other qualities such as being a good friend and developing satisfying personal interests.”

Topics: Hong Kong youth

Source URL: <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/education/article/2158701/why-social-media-and-selfies-are-filling-hong-kongs-young>

Links

[1] <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/health-environment/article/2156363/nearly-half-hong-kong-youngsters-feel-despair-if>

[2] <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/2158423/combat-screen-addiction-hong-kong-schools-should-ban-mobile-phones>