

Research on the Media Disciplinary Mechanism of "Original Camera Beauties" under Consumerism

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Abstract

"Original Camera beauties" refer to individuals who appear exceptionally attractive in Apple's original camera live photos but are co-constructed by the media and consumerism into symbols of high physical attractiveness, privileged status, and fashion trends. This study specifically analyzes how media, under the influence of consumerism, discipline "original camera beauties" into a dominant aesthetic standard and how ordinary women accept and practice this standard. The study finds that the disciplinary mechanism manifests itself through four interrelated mechanisms: cognitive mechanism, anxiety mechanism, surveillance mechanism, and self-objectification mechanism. The entire process exhibits a dual nature of opportunism and virtual satisfaction.

Keywords

Consumerism; Media Discipline; Original Camera; Appearance Anxiety.

1. Introduction

In today's consumer society, aesthetic standards have become increasingly symbolized, and a woman's appearance is only valued when it aligns with societal expectations. "Beauty is capital," and the body is widely recognized as both a personal resource and a social symbol. With the deep integration of media into society, people's bodies are re-presented in social media images. Social images present and reproduce the power structure and social structure of social relations. This forces people to manipulate their bodies on social media as a signifier of social status^[1]. Therefore, this study combines the phenomenon of the internet to analyze how ordinary women are disciplined to become "original camera beauties".

2. Cognitive Mechanism: The Media's Symbolic Construction of "Original Camera Beauties"

Foucault pointed out that the operation of power is hidden behind what is natural and gentle^[2]. The media's symbolic construction of "original camera beauties" is based on the visual characteristics of actual photos and popular practices, shaping their connotative characteristics of "high value, rarity, and high class," which makes the aesthetic perception of "original camera beauties" easily accepted by the public.

2.1. Construction Background: Based on the Characteristics of Live Photos

Live photos provide a technological foundation for the construction of the "Original Camera Beauties" symbol through their combination of motion and stillness, non-real-time editing, and "casual, lightweight" characteristics. First, the fusion of "dynamic and static images" combines the instantaneous nature of traditional photography with the expressive space of micro-dynamic narrative. Second, users can select their favorite frame as the cover after shooting, which reduces the rate of wasted shots. Third, compared with traditional videos, live photos

have the advantages of simple operation, convenient storage, and no need for editing, making them easy to spread on social media platforms and spark imitation trends.

The disadvantages of live photo imaging provide conditions for the scarcity of "Original Camera Beauties." The hardware performance limitations, lack of professional features, poor low-light performance, and limited depth-of-field control of the Apple original camera result in issues such as facial distortion^[3], yellowish skin tones, and enlarged pores in live photos. Only a small number of individuals with superior bone structure and skin texture can pass the beauty test of the original camera.

2.2. Discourse Production Mechanism: The Binding of Aesthetics and Identity

In a consumer society, the construction of symbolic meanings that distinguish identities is cautious and subtle, and people's pursuit of personalized status and prestige is based on symbols^[1]. The discourse of constructing the identity symbol of "Original Camera Beauties" is precisely through rejecting the intervention of digital beauty technology and brand symbol value, creating an aesthetic distinction from ordinary people, and completing the construction of a superior identity that is authentic, confident, relaxed, and rare.

2.2.1. Anti-industrial narrative of aesthetic standards

Through the construction of an opposing framework of original cameras and filters, nature and industry, the discourse established the unique originality of the identity symbol of "Original Camera Beauties." From 2015 to 2018, it was a period of rapid development for facial recognition and dynamic sticker beautification apps. According to data from QuestMobile, in 2017, the user base for photo services such as Meitu, B612, and Faceu remained at over 300 million. Editing live photos into static images was seen as a form of "anti-editing," showcasing naturalness and aligning with young people's pursuit of uniqueness.

2.2.2. Symbolic Value Endowed by the Apple Brand

Live photos represent a secondary value assignment for the Apple brand. As a smartphone designer and manufacturer, Apple explicitly targets the upper-middle class market, adopting a high-pricing strategy without discounts to establish a premium product image in consumers' minds, endowing its products with social value. As a technology unique to Apple phones, live photos actually showcase the threshold for photography, transforming technical characteristics into hidden economic ostentation. "Original Camera Beauties" have become a contemporary form of ostentatious consumption, making image production an important practice for maintaining the symbolic order.

3. Anxiety Mechanism: Physical Discipline Under Cognitive Bias

Under the influence of visual culture, body anxiety has become a divisive phenomenon released in the process of "aestheticization of everyday life," colonized by instrumental rationality and visual culture. The internet, which is filled with displays of physical appearance and the inevitability of being filmed, forces people to unconsciously compare themselves to others and hope to have the same refined roles they see in social performances.

3.1. Lens Imaging Aesthetics Create Anxiety

Life requires multi-sensory coordination, such as facial expressions and body posture. However, through the optical properties of lenses, focal length compression causes the face to appear wider, forcing aesthetic standards to shift toward smaller faces, higher noses, larger eyes, and smoother facial features that appear more photogenic. The popularity of social media formats like OOTD (Outfit of the Day), PLOG (Photo Blog), and VLOG (Video Blog), along with the pressure to appear on camera in online meetings and courses, has made everyday life increasingly intertwined with the lens. Research has shown that selfies and video calls on social

media can trigger visual scrutiny, leading to body dissatisfaction, self-objectification, and reduced self-esteem, all of which contribute to anxiety^[4].

3.2. Anxiety about upward social comparison

Social comparison is a common psychological phenomenon. When celebrities and influencers' physical appearance is evaluated in public discourse, women who come into contact with information about others who are superior to them in certain aspects will unconsciously compare themselves with others in an upward direction^[5]. This upward comparison manifests itself in two ways: one is habitual physical appearance comparison. Social media accounts use high-standard appearance evaluation topics such as "divine beauty" and "comparisons of female celebrities' unedited photos" to subtly instill a comparison inertia in women, leading to anticipatory anxiety about failing in comparison. The second is similarity reference comparison. Women tend to compare themselves with "non-professional" models they consider similar or related to them^[6], such as beauty bloggers and amateur internet celebrities, which may lead to misjudging the achievability of becoming an "Original Camera Beauty", resulting in feelings of inferiority, anxiety, or depression, which are particularly evident among adolescents and young women.

3.3. Anxiety about displaying social identity

Consumerism links fashion with social charm, transforming the body into a visual cultural symbol and making the worship of physical appearance fashionable. The media tempts ordinary women to become "Original Camera Beauties" by spreading content about the high promotion fees, expensive gifts, and social dividends enjoyed by beauty bloggers. Ordinary women attempt to represent their self-identity through imitation and consumption, such as dressing elegantly in cafes, attending art exhibitions, enjoying afternoon tea, and staying in high-end hotels—spaces with symbolic value—to take photos, using the accumulation of landscape symbols to construct an imaginary class identity. Returning to reality, ordinary daily life and appearance reduce women's sense of belonging to real life, while excessive obsession with digital identities leads to identity confusion and intense anxiety.

4. Surveillance Mechanism: The Gaze and Being Gazed Upon

Disciplinary society theory emphasizes that power in modern society is controlled invisibly through institutionalized means. Ordinary women have accepted the social behavior of "Original Camera Beauties" and consciously manage and optimize their social image.

4.1. Beauty apps drive beauty monitoring

It is difficult for ordinary women to become "Original Camera Beauties," and beauty technology is needed to achieve this. In 2020, the IntoLive app ushered in an era of real-time photo beautification with its ability to convert videos into real-time photo formats. This allows ordinary women to temporarily become "Original Camera Beauties" at the image level. During the beauty editing process, quantitative adjustments to facial features or pre-selected makeup styles intensify ordinary women's dissatisfaction with their appearance, aligning their gender-based rationality toward self-capitalization and driving beauty monitoring.

4.2. Monitoring EXIF Parameters

After the fact that live photos can be edited became widely known, the authenticity of the original camera's native metadata came under scrutiny. People discovered that when original photos were downloaded from Weibo, the photos that had been beautified did not have EXIF (exchangeable image file) parameters, so EXIF parameters were regarded as a sign of authenticity for "Original Camera Beauties." Weibo has become a panoramic open-view building, where people are in a state of watching and being watched, and there is a conscious

and continuous state of visibility on the part of those being watched, even if the surveillance is actually intermittent^[2]. Ordinary women are both monitors, scrutinizing others for EXIF information and falling into beauty comparison anxiety if others have it, and the monitored, worrying about the risk of their self-posted content being scrutinized by others. The hidden fear of being exposed and the self-defense leading to false accusations result in a constant self-discipline that turns them into “prisoners” of the camera-ready aesthetic.

4.3. Self-Monitoring Through Digital Forensics

When downloading live photos from non-Weibo social media platforms without EXIF parameters, the technical traces inherent in the images themselves become the basis for determining their authenticity. Digital forensic scrutiny refers to the assumption that images of people seen on social media have been filtered, leading to preconceived doubts about their authenticity and training the eyes to critically examine both self and others' images^[7], prompting detailed scrutiny. This has led ordinary women to refine their self-beautification techniques in photos to evade digital forensic scrutiny, giving rise to self-beautification technology monitoring. Beauty apps allow users to construct and shape a new self, which is a new variant of Foucault's self-technology emerging on the internet^[8]. Ordinary women find it difficult to achieve the ideal visual effect of “flawless face, small face, and large eyes” in the original camera. Therefore, perfection is equated with falsity, while moderately revealing flaws has become “authenticity” By precisely controlling beauty parameters and retaining skin imperfections, the mirrored self is connected to the real subject, reflecting the pursuit of avoiding scrutiny in self-technologies.

5. Self-objectification: The Performance of Self-commodification

Self-objectification refers to the internalization of observers' perceptions of one's own body. Image surveillance reinforces beauty standards, and the self-presentation on social media further enhances the level of self-objectification among women, intensifying sensitivity to appearance-related information and body image anxiety. This leads to a greater willingness to take risks to improve one's physique and appearance^[9], resulting in consumption aimed at bodily transformation.

5.1. Makeup that conceals individuality and weight management for the sake of thinness

Women who view appearance as an important factor in social interactions, regardless of whether they have a high or low self-perceived level of attractiveness, are more likely to use makeup to conceal flaws and enhance their outward appearance. The topic “Makeup recommendations for taking good photos” on Xiaohongshu has 7.78 million posts, and the makeup styles displayed on the search page are quite uniform: false eyelashes on both the upper and lower eyelids, under-eye bags, matte highlighter to brighten the nose and center of the face, contouring to create a more sculpted facial structure, and plumping the lips. This makeup style achieves “camera-ready beauty” by adjusting the visual flatness of the face and exaggerating the proportions of the facial features. However, this trend has faced criticism, being labeled as “assembly-line makeup” or “makeup that only looks good under photography lighting.” Some women argue that aligning with beauty standards through symbolic similarity is the easiest way to become beautiful, disregarding whether such makeup suits their individual facial features, and thus engaging in consumption.

The pursuit of thinness aligns with Foucault's concept of “knowledge-based” norms, which are not absolute truths but rather new evaluation systems co-constructed by society and the times. Appearing overweight on camera leads to the belief that only being thinner can make one look beautiful on screen, trapping some young women in weight anxiety. The Beijing Youth Daily

reported that most Chinese teenagers are dissatisfied with their weight, with 9.2% of them choosing to diet to lose weight. On the Xiaohongshu platform, the topic “The fastest and most effective methods for weight loss” has 4.8 million posts, with many outwardly attractive bloggers claiming that their secret to eating whatever they want without gaining weight is vomiting or using weight-loss medications. However, prolonged dieting and rapid weight loss can lead to eating disorders. According to Western epidemiological surveys, 90% to 95% of eating disorder patients are female, with onset typically occurring between the ages of 12 and 35.

5.2. Camera-oriented medical aesthetics

Women's pursuit of medical aesthetic surgery is the result of self-objectification and a willingness to engage in relatively extreme behaviors to alter their appearance^[10]. First, prolonged exposure to camera pressure leads people to turn to medical aesthetics. Research has found that extensive use of video calls has led to increased body image anxiety and a significant rise in demand for medical aesthetics, particularly for minimally invasive procedures targeting visible facial areas in camera shots, such as wrinkle-reducing injections and dermal fillers^[4]. Second, the internalization of the gap between camera-ready beauty and perceived self-worth reinforces the notion that women “need to change,” prompting them to make physical alterations in real life. Research confirms that the self-objectification of women resulting from frequent selfies and photo editing is a key factor driving higher tendencies toward cosmetic surgery^[11]. Third, the consumer society's glorification of standardized beauty has linked highly localized and standardized beauty standards to women's success, encouraging them to undergo cosmetic surgery to meet these standards. On-camera medical aesthetics primarily refers to injection-based procedures, non-invasive rejuvenation treatments, laser therapies, and thread lifting surgeries. These four categories fall under non-surgical medical aesthetics. Data indicates that by 2024, China's medical aesthetics market size will reach 312 billion yuan, with non-surgical procedures accounting for 65% of the market, becoming the primary growth driver.

6. Conclusion

Media discipline constructs “Original Camera Beauties” as consumer symbols through a four-pronged mechanism: the cognitive mechanism binds reality with high status, the anxiety mechanism uses comparison to create unease, the surveillance mechanism reinforces control with technological gaze, and self-objectification ultimately drives body consumption. At present, social media sharing and platform algorithm mechanisms work together to construct a false totality of consumption, while individual consumption behavior references the behavior of others, forming an aesthetic identification mechanism that continues to drive the development of original camera aesthetics and consumption.

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