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IMRAN JALAL



More men are flaunting their hot bods for the camera and sharing their topless photos online

First to the gym, then to posing and flexing... for the camera. Gym rats today are not coy about sharing photos of their muscle-bound bodies online – on Facebook, blogsite Tumblr and photo-sharing app Instagram. A quick scan of those platforms turns up at least seven guys who regularly post photos of their physiques.

Personal trainer Jake Cheng, who has more than 500 online photographs of his body, is one of them.

The 21-year-old, who spends six days a week at the gym, regularly uploads topless photos of himself to serve as a motivation for those who want to work out, he says.

But Mr Cheng, who is 1.8m tall and weighs 70kg, is aware of detractors who deem his posts as sheer vanity.

He says: "Obviously there are people who question my motives, as most of my photos are topless. I just tell them that this is part of what I do for my profession. My body is the fruit of my labour."

He is not the only man who is becoming more conscious of his appearance and grooming.

Latest figures from market research firm Euromonitor last month report that the market for men's grooming products here has risen by 5 per cent from last year to \$68 million.

Dermatologists and plastic surgeons that Urban spoke to say they have seen an increase of as much as 40 per cent in the number of male clients asking for aesthetic treatments since 2006 – considered the year the metrosexual movement took flight. Doctors estimate the year-on-year increase to be as much as 30 per cent.

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At the men's grooming specialist store, WhatHeWants, sales of its ab toning gels have grown by 10 per cent month-on-month, says its general manager Tan Seng Hwee.

Dr Joshua Kua, a consultant psychiatrist at Raffles Counselling Centre, notes how studies from as early as 2000 have shown that men are more dissatisfied with their physical appearances these days, compared to men in the 1970s.

He believes that the trend to flaunt is gaining more traction as technology is now aiding this phenomenon.

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Dr Joshua Kua, a consultant psychiatrist at Raffles Counselling Centre

"The availability of technology allows people to show off to a large audience, sometimes aided by the cloud of anonymity," he says.

The media's equating of masculinity with muscularity is another factor, says Dr Kua. "This can make a lot of men insecure about their bodies, while those who have the right physiques become obsessed with showing them off," he says.

Working out for that six-pack and ripped body can give rise to more than just sweat and muscle burn.

A research, released in May in the Personality And Individual Differences journal by the Western Illinois University, suggests that Facebook appeals to one's most narcissistic side.

It also finds Facebook users who frequently update their Facebook status, tag themselves in photos and have large numbers of virtual friends, are more likely to exhibit narcissistic traits.

Ms Cecelia Telkes, senior associate consultant of image consultancy Imageworks Asia, says those who flaunt their bodies should be careful of the public impressions they may be creating.

"Many human resource managers conduct Google searches on potential employees or staff the company wants to promote. So it is wise to ensure that your social

media reputation and image do not destroy your professional image and career," she says.

One 24-year-old business graduate, who did not want to be named, agrees. He used to post topless pictures of himself on his Tumblr page to chart his physical progress at the gym.

But he took it down recently as he is now preparing to enter the workforce.

"Employers trawl the Internet for any information about you. I do not want them to think I am superficial based on what I post online," he says.

But freelance fitness model Jason Chee says the topless snaps he posts show only one aspect of his personality.

The 24-year-old set up a fanpage on Facebook in March and now has more than 12,000 followers.

His own Facebook page contains more than 1,000 topless photos of him at various events and gigs he has worked at.

He is also taking part in the Manhunt pageant for a second time this year and was scouted by a Thai fitness photographer to shoot for magazine covers in Thailand and Italy (see Page 15).

"If you are able to work with a known photographer and stand on a stage to bare your body, you need good public relations skills and courage too," he says.

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