

Rnac on the Influence of Social Media Content on Teenager Behaviors in the Internet Era

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Abstract. Human beings invented the Internet in the late 20th century, which made communication between people faster as well as easier. With the evolution of the Internet, social media has gradually begun to develop since the 21st century. Today, social media has evolved and has a significant impact on the human race. The majority of users are teenagers. As the future of the world, the development of teenagers is especially important. Therefore, this thesis analyzes the influence of content on social media on teenagers' behavior. The thesis adopts the literature research method to analyze the influence of three common contents of social media on teenagers, which are memes, trending videos, and pranks. Finally, the author discusses and analyzes the effects of these three types of content on adolescent behavior and the multifaceted results of these effects. This study finds that social media affects adolescents' behavior, and the three most significant categories of content are memes, trending videos, and pranks.

Keywords: Social media; teenagers; teenager behaviors.

1. Introduction

With the development of technology, more and more people are exposed to social media, which includes the youth population. As of January 2024, there are 535 million Internet users worldwide, which is 66.2% of world population, while the total number of social media users attained 504 million, accounting for 62.3% of the global population [1]. According to Pew Poll Research Center, as of May 4, 2022, more than 97% of American teens use the Internet online daily. This is undoubtedly an unprecedented information age, up from the 92% share in 2014 [2]. There is a diversity of media information on social media, such as short videos, posts, Blogs, and various types of information. This is certainly a great source of information for adolescents and adolescents are influenced by the content on social media [3]. As a result, their behavior is also influenced by social media to a greater or lesser extent. So, what content on social media affects adolescents' behavior? How exactly will it influence?

2. Research Question Raising

Social media has been a clichéd topic for people. Ever since the world entered the internet age, people have never stopped developing and exploring the online world. In the past, people used to write letters to get in touch with each other, but at the expense of time, it took days or even weeks to deliver a letter. Ray Tomlinson invented email in 1971 [4], which made it much easier for people to communicate with each other. And with the advancement of technology, a product between chatting and sharing content was created: social media. Social media is an online platform that enables people to engage with a wide and specific audience in an opportunistic and selective manner, either synchronously or asynchronously, and to gain value from the perceived contact with others [5]. People can upload and view statements, videos, and images as well as other mediums for the dissemination of information. Most of the people who use social media are teenagers [3]. Teens now use social media on a regular basis, and the majority of them do so to stay in touch with their peers [6]. However, social media can have some negative effects on adolescents, such as making them violent and misleading them to access inappropriate information on a regular basis [3]. Also, social media can make people become inattentive because people usually use them during work,

which indirectly leads to a decrease in productivity [3]. People in adolescence are the ones who have less self-control which stands for going to avoid doing behaviors that are not suitable [7]. This supports the idea that teenagers are more impacted by social media because they lack control over what they view and how long they view it for. Although social media can also facilitate communication and the exchange of inspiration between people, the offensive language in it undermines this function [8]. So, since social media has such a strong influence on teenagers, does it affect their daily behavior? Where does it manifest itself specifically? The impact of social media on teenagers' behavior can be generally divided into two categories: positive and negative. This paper aims to answer the following three questions:

- (1) What content on social media are adolescents primarily influenced by?
- (2) Why are adolescents influenced by these contents?
- (3) How do these influences manifest themselves in their behavior?

3. Social Media Content that Affects Teenagers

The content of social media directly affects the adolescents who view social media. Based on the questionnaire survey conducted by Ruta-Canayong2 in 2019, we can tell that the top three rankings of adolescents' interest in social media content are memes, trending videos, and pranks [3]. Therefore, we can infer that the contents that adolescents mainly view are largely consistent with these three categories and therefore are mainly influenced by these three types of contents.



Figure 1. Common memes on social media

3.1. Internet Memes

An idea, concept, or belief that circulates via the Internet as hyperlinks, videos, photos, or phrases that can be shared with specific intent or that can adapt and change is known as an internet meme [9]. Memes can be found everywhere on social media, such as Balltze, an Akita dog from Hong Kong, aka cheems (Example 1) and a black and white cat (Example 2) in Fig. 1, which appear in various memes and videos and are used to represent the protagonist of a story or to convey a certain message or emotion. Memes are usually representative and can generally express a person's emotion or opinion about something. As shown in the picture, this is a very common meme based on cheems, which is usually the protagonist of such memes. This has further inspired the creation of memes because in a way memes have become templated. The spread of memes is most common among teenagers and is becoming part of their conversation. This is because they can indirectly convey information by using memes, and if the other person is familiar with the meme, it may resonate with them, thus facilitating the conversation. It is because of the fun nature of memes and the spread of the memes that they have become more widely known.



Figure 2. One of the most viewed videos by YouTube influencer Mr. Beast

3.2. Trending Videos

Trending videos usually refer to videos that spread as quickly as they went viral. Content that provokes more arousal (either positive or negative) is shared more than content that provokes less arousal, and positive posts are shared more than negative ones [10]. According to the authors, high arousal content is defined as content that elicits mood swings, such as sadness, happiness, and anger [10]. At the same time, many trending videos are often memetic, such as the video with cheems as the main character, which people like to watch largely because cheems represent a kind of comedy effect. This causes people to share the video with their friends, who will share it with their friends' friends, making the video spread extremely fast. Meanwhile, some trending videos usually contain contents created by social media influencers (known as internet celebrities), such as the various challenge videos of YouTube influencer Mr. Beast (Fig. 2). Internet celebrities are defined as everyday Internet users who accumulate a significant number of followers on social media and spend most of their time interacting with them in the digital space while monetizing their followers [11]. Because influencers are usually well known by many social media users, their videos have a higher click-through rate and spread rapidly.

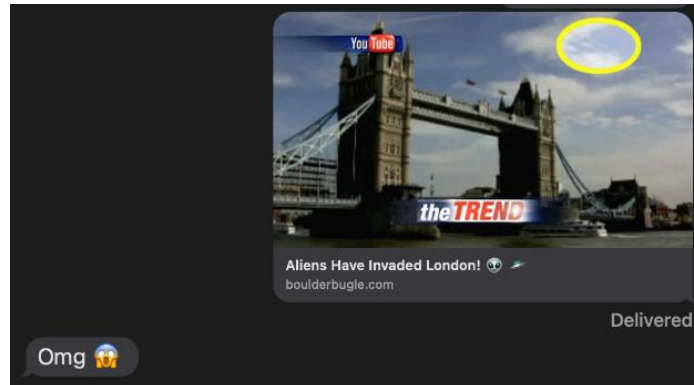


Figure 3. User-interactive pranks: Rick Roll (MV of Never Gonna Give You Up by Rick Astley)

3.3. Pranks

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the term prank is defined as "a trick that is intended to be funny but not to cause harm or damage" [12]. America's Funniest Home Videos, launched in 1990, is ABC's longest-running primetime entertainment program featuring low-budget pranks and shows featuring pranks [13]. On social media, pranks are often presented as videos. The content of prank videos usually consists of misleading words, tricking others to make onlookers feel funny, and sudden

events or scares. Most of the time, the content is hilarious. However, some of the pranks show reflections on events and human nature, such as "Beauty kills a trusting heart" [3]. For adolescents, playing pranks can make them feel happy, powerful, and get reactions from others [14]. For today's teenagers, pranks can be offensive and uncomfortable for others, and watching pranks on social media becomes a fun alternative because watching videos is almost costless. However, we cannot completely deny that they do not imitate such behavior. People gloat when they watch pranks, and this is one of the darker sides of the culture of participation [13]. Teenagers are excited to see the puzzled and surprised expressions when others are being pranked, which contributes to the popularity of prank videos among teenagers because it satisfies their needs. Meanwhile, a specific prank video can include interactions with the user, such as clicking on an unknown link but finding a jump to a specific video which can also be counted as a prank video. People will share the link, causing the prank video to spread quickly. A well-known example is the Rick Roll (Never Gonna Give You Up by Rick Astley) music video on YouTube (Fig. 3). Typically, the description of the link containing the results of a Rick Roll video is misleading, exaggerated, and surprising, such as the news that a steadily updated anime is about to end, or that a big event has suddenly occurred. People will click on the link because of the catchy headline (Fig. 3), only to find out that the content of the link is just a Rick Roll video, which will make people feel cheated. People use the same tactics to trick others, which has contributed to the spread of pranks.

4. The Influence of Social Media Content on Adolescent Behavior

4.1. Meme

As a general rule, meme does not have a negative impact on adolescents. Most memes convey positive messages, such as spoof meanings, funny content, and an expression of positive emotions. People are more likely to spread positive feelings offline as well as online [15]. From this we can learn that memes containing positive emotions are more likely to be spread, and the positive emotions in them can influence adolescents. Emotions that are positive extend perception, focus, motivation, reasoning, and social cognition [16]. These are crucial for adolescents' development and behavior, especially in reasoning. The definition of reasoning is "the process of thinking about something in order to make a decision" [17]. Reasoning skills are crucial in daily and academic life and it directly affect the decisions teenagers make at a given time, from what to eat for their next meal to their scores on the scientific reasoning portion of the ACT (American College Test), it is clear how important reasoning skills are to adolescents. If teens have better reasoning skills, they will be able to react better to logical events, which can help them avoid making mistakes in a variety of occasions.



Example 1

Example 2

Figure 4. Comparison of contents between YouTube influencers surthany hejeij and TVFilthyFrank

4.2. Trending Videos

Depending on the video category, trending videos cover many types of videos, so they differ in their content and the point they are trying to convey. For example, a challenge video is intended to be mostly entertaining, and partly also covers thought-provoking ideas, such as whether friendship still exists under extreme circumstances. And some trending videos in the science category are insight-growing. Because teenagers can learn something they don't know from them, which drives them to watch such videos. At the same time, influencers in trending videos also plays an influence on teenagers' behavior. Some influencers will promote specific products or embed advertisements in their videos. And nowadays, personal experience and personal advice have become the most important information to help users in purchasing goods [18, 19]. At the same time, teenagers also have a certain nature of admiration for Internet celebrities, which undoubtedly increases the likelihood of teenagers purchasing goods and the number of teenagers' additional consumption. For teenagers, they should learn to manage money. This is an opportunity to exercise teenagers' self-control, but it also increases the risk of teenagers spending money indiscriminately. Adolescents mimic the language, attire, and lifestyle choices of the influencers they watch in trending videos [20]. Mimicking the behavior of an Internet celebrity has the potential to have positive or bad effects, depending on the appropriateness of the Internet celebrity's demeanor. Adolescents may be inclined to emulate good behavior if a webstar is committed to helping people in need, such as YouTube influencer surthany hejeij (Fig. 4, Example 1). The content of the video of this Internet celebrity is roughly comparing other Internet celebrities wasting food with her doing something more meaningful with the same ingredients, such as distributing the prepared food to people in need. This may cause teens to emulate and link to their motivation for social service, as well as influence teens to go in a positive direction. However, not all trending videos contain positive content; most of the videos of YouTube's former Internet celebrity TVFilthyFrank feature pranks on passersby, such as scaring passersby on the street in pink tights or twitching in an elevator (Fig. 4, Example 2). Not all adolescents imitate this type of behavior, as they usually have difficulty overcoming the psychological barrier to do so. But it sends a negative message because Filthy Frank is actually disturbing the peace and could potentially cause people to panic. Some teenagers may imitate this type of behavior, such as making insulting remarks to passersby because it seems funny to them.

4.3. Pranks

Pranks may be an opportunity to have fun by causing misfortune to others [13]. Adolescents enjoy pranks because it makes them feel happy and powerful as well as getting reactions from others [14]. When watching prank videos, some of the more outgoing and active adolescents will mimic what

they do in the prank videos because they enjoy the feeling of messing with others. Some adolescents may also videotape the whole process and edit and post the process online like the prank video creators did. This is a positive feedback loop because the more these teens screw over, the more videos are uploaded. As views increase, teens are incentivized by the view data to create more pranks in exchange for more views. In the process, they have become accustomed to pranking others, which is not a good thing for the person being pranked because pranking usually causes a person to show nervous verbal responses (screaming, crying, gasping, and facial fear) as well as physical responses (arm movements, body movements, and attempts to escape) [13]. This can lead to a harmed relationship between the prankster and the pranked, especially if the prank takes place between friends or classmates who have only recently met.

5. Conclusion

The conclusion of this study is that social media affects adolescents' behavior, and the three most significant categories of content are memes, trending videos, and pranks. Memes causes adolescents to show more positive emotions, and positive emotions promote the development of various abilities, the most important of which is reasoning. Trending videos can have both positive and negative effects on adolescents' behavior. Positive influence is mainly reflected in imitating positive behaviors of influencers such as helping others. However, negative impacts are mainly seen in imitating the negative behaviors of influencers, such as swearing and dressing strangely. Meanwhile, trending videos may also cause teenagers to over-consume their money. Pranks can cause adolescents to carry out pranks in real life and deteriorate their relationships with those around them. Due to limited research time and resources, this paper did not use the more persuasive method of survey research. If the results of the survey could have been used to support the findings of this study, it would have made the findings more reliable and persuasive. At the same time, the author chose to use literature from authors in different countries, some of which focused on local adolescents and did not study adolescents around the world as a whole, which may have affected the conclusions of this study. Finally, the author could have focused the study on adolescents in a specific country or region, which would have resulted in more specific and localized findings and would have paved the way for similar studies to be conducted in that region. The author calls on all sectors of society to continue to pay close at the impact of social media on adolescent behavior, and to introduce relevant policies and protective measures for teenagers to prevent negative content on social media from having a negative impact on adolescent behavior. At the same time, parents should monitor their children's browsing of social media to avoid gore, pornography, and violent contents, which may affect the healthy physical and mental development of adolescents.

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