

The Influencing Factors of Adolescents' Celebrity Worship Behaviors

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Abstract:

In recent years, with the development of global entertainment industries, celebrity worship has become a hot trend among adolescents and young adults. The number of research on teenagers' celebrity worship is increasing, revealing the complexity of this phenomenon. This literature review aims to discuss the behaviors that exist under celebrity worship and analyze the reasons behind those behaviors. Through reviewing studies from Google Scholar, we selected 16 related research. This review shows that overconsumption, appearance anxiety, and conformity are commonly seen in celebrity worship. Social, personality and peer-related factors contributed to these behaviors. Overall, this review underscores the importance of understanding these factors to gain a holistic perspective on why teenagers might engage in idolizing celebrities to the extent that they do. Furthermore, it suggests that future research should concentrate on exploring the long-term implications of celebrity worship on adolescent development. Additionally, it advocates for the development of effective intervention strategies that could help mitigate any negative consequences associated with excessive celebrity worship. By doing so, future studies can contribute to the creation of supportive frameworks that guide teenagers towards a more balanced and healthy engagement with celebrity culture.

Keywords: Celebrity worship; social interaction; adolescents; consumption behaviors.

1. Introduction

Celebrity worship is a social phenomenon manifested by individuals' admiration for public figures. This process involves not just psychological activity or admiration for celebrities; instead, it often occurs with other substantial acts, such as consumer behav-

iors. Celebrity worship is usually accompanied by strong emotional involvement, behavior, and social interaction, which can affect individual cognition, attitude, and social relations.

Celebrity worship has long been one of the most common activities among teenagers and young adults. They gather together as many clusters and,

to a certain extent, represent a celebrity's commercial value. According to McCutcheon et al., the population of celebrity worshippers has experienced an unprecedented increase since 2001 [1]. Nowadays, with the development of social media, various kinds of apps have emerged as a result of the growing population of celebrity worshippers. Among these is Weibo, a platform where celebrities share their daily lives. The official data of Weibo shows that there are 1.3 hundred million users aged between 16 and 22 who actively use Weibo every month by the end of September 2023, reflecting the prevalence of celebrity worship among young people [2].

The factors that lead to the behavior of celebrity worship vary. The imitation of the celebrity worship behaviors of people around them, as well as the personalities or works of celebrities, may fulfill the emotional needs of teenagers.

This article will start by presenting several behaviors that teenage fans might show in the process of celebrity worship, including those that may pose a potential threat to their physical and mental health. It will then analyze the causes of these behaviors from sociocultural, psychological, and social aspects. Finally, based on the factors mentioned above, this article will put forward prevention and solutions for teenagers' misbehaviors in celebrity worship and shed light on future research.

2. Method

In order to discuss the factors that may contribute to celebrity worship and the behaviors that may exist among celebrity worshippers, we used Google Scholar as a data base to search for relevant topics. The keywords for searching the leading factors to this behavior are listed below: "celebrity worship," "teenager," "sociocultural," and "personality." The key words of searching the behaviors of this behavior are listed below: celebrity worship, behavior, overconsumption, conformity, appearance anxiety, and social media. Since this article will be mainly discussing celebrity worshippers under the bigger content of the social media era, we will only focus on articles that were published after 1999. This is because, as Taprial et al. mentioned, the concept of social media is created after people can share links, emails, and photos to distant messengers, which is after the creation of the application "Peer to Peer" [3]. Therefore, the papers written prior to this year are not applicable to our literature review. When reading the articles, we will give priority to papers that have research with elaborative steps to support their conclusions. In this way, the claims made in the papers can be verified and credible. We will also choose passages published by well-known magazines such as Journal of

Studies in Social Sciences and Humanities and International Journal of Eating Disorders. These magazines cover various topics of psychology and sociology, so it is easy to find applicable theories that can explain the phenomenon of zealous celebrity worship among young people.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Celebrity Worship Behaviors

In this part, we will present several behaviors that exist under celebrity worship. As we have mentioned in the introduction, celebrity worship involves not just a psychological activity or admiration for celebrities; instead, it often occurs with other substantial acts, including consumption behaviors, appearance anxiety, and conformity.

3.1.1 Consumption behaviors

Consumption behavior exists among most individuals in the fan population. Some common consumer behaviors under celebrity worship include buying products endorsed by celebrities and buying albums and records of singers or idol groups.

In recent years, with the rapid development of Korean Pop culture, some new forms of consumption have emerged: those entertainment companies that sell albums often claim to randomly select a very small number of album buyers to attend the idol group's offline meet-and-greets. This marketing ploy has allowed these idol groups to continue to set new sales records for their albums. At the same time, it has allowed these companies to see the huge potential spending power of fans. As a result, they started creating specific products for the huge fan base to maximize their consumption potential [4].

According to Reeves et al., compulsive consumption is highly related to celebrity worship, indicating that people who engage in celebrity worship may be more likely to buy things they do not need [5]. In this way, they will not only spend more money but also have higher chances to experience lower self-concept clarity and lower levels of well-being.

3.1.2 Appearance anxiety

Appearance anxiety is a phenomenon in which people feel anxious about their appearances (regarding themselves as not beautiful enough) or about how others judge their appearances [6]. Among all teenagers that engaged in Caner et al. 2022 research, 44.2% percent of the teenagers followed influencers; among them, 67.7% of participants reported that they were influenced by influencers [7]. According to this result, we can infer that with more celebrities now sharing their pictures on social media platforms,

more fans will follow them, copying their make-up and outfits, making them think that only people who look like celebrities can be considered as beautiful. Furthermore, the previous research also suggests that adolescents who are social media addicts and report being influenced by these influencers have higher levels of social appearance anxiety. To be specific, according to Monro and Huon, the idealized pictures shown in the media can negatively affect mental health by increasing their sense of appearance anxiety [8]. Therefore, we can infer that teenagers may compare their appearance with the idealized pictures of their appearance on social media, which will probably decrease their self-esteem. Research by Sahin et al. strengthens this claim, suggesting that teenagers with lower self-esteem will be more likely to suffer appearance anxiety and vice versa [9].

3.1.3 Conformity

Conformity refers to an individual's tendency to think, judge, and behave like most other people under the influence of other's behavior. The main reason for conformity is people want to gain accurate information or be accepted by others. Conformity behavior is also common in teenagers who are celebrity worshippers. Nowadays, People seem to believe that being a fan means spending money on idols to show support for their careers. This not only breaks the rule of the market that celebrities should gain money based on the quality of their works instead of the fan population but also encourages more teenagers to buy products under other fans' influence. For instance, artists groups in South Korea often put random photocards in their albums. As a result, the fans may exchange or sell cards with each other, making the price of some cards very high. Usually, when more people want to buy a specific photocard, its price will continue to rise. Therefore, if a teenage fan often follows other's behaviors, such as buying cards, he or she is likely to buy products at a very high price level. In doing so, individuals can probably gain affection from members of groups to which they belong. According to Dewanti, we can determine that teenagers can be easily affected by conformity, and it is obvious that self-confidence plays a significant role in determining to what extent teenagers are influenced by conformity [10]. These behaviors, however, are not independent of each other. The ideal images on social media may trigger appearance anxiety in teens, which will then decrease their self-esteem and self-confidence. Those who lack self-confidence will be particularly susceptible to conformity, making them follow most people in the fan groups. As a result, they may overconsume some products endorsed by celebrities and idols.

3.2 Factors Contribute to Celebrity Worship

In this part, the article will summarize some factors that may explain why teenagers may have the behaviors of celebrity worship mentioned previously in the passage. There are many factors, but they can be divided into social and psychological factors in general.

3.2.1 Social Factors

When it comes to social factors, we often talk about the influence of cultural backgrounds and the influence of social media. People from different countries or cultural background can have different attitudes towards celebrity worship. Often, people's celebrity worship decisions are influenced by the development of the entertainment industry in their area or country. According to McCutcheon et al., people of different races in America tend to show different attitudes toward celebrity worship [11]. Among all the US college students, African-American students showed the most positive attitude towards their favorite celebrities, while white students showed the least positive attitude towards them. Asian and Spanish students are ranked between them, showing less extreme attitudes toward celebrities than both African-American students and white students. This indicates that the cost of celebrity worship, the development of entertainment industries, and the population of the fan community may vary between countries. Thus, the fan community population will probably show an overall growth during these periods, encouraging teenagers to become part of the celebrity worshippers.

Social media mostly influences people's preferences by showing them specific content under big data computing. People who previously were not interested in celebrity worship may start to be aware of it under social media influence. This passage will divide social media into two types: private social media and public social media. Private social media refers to applications that only provide a small range of "friends." People can only chat with people who have "friended" each other on those apps. An example of this is WeChat. Public social media refers to applications that people can contact with everyone else who registered the same app. Some examples of this are TikTok, Instagram, and Xiaohongshu (China). On public social media, for instance, people may get to know some K-pop artists through their posts or hear some K-pop music while watching the videos. Private social media, on the other hand, shows users what their "friends" are doing. People may see their friends posting K-pop dancing videos, going to concerts, or buying new albums. These two kinds of social media, by allowing people to view both popular current popular content and the news of friends around them, can shape how people think. This is because

most people have both two types of social media, so when a thing becomes popular in a large part of society, a person's behavior and thinking will probably be affected.

3.2.2 Personality Factors

Despite social factors playing a big role in celebrity worship decisions, a person's psychological status will also influence one's view towards celebrity worship [12]. Some personality traits can be predictors of celebrity worship decisions. For instance, people who need a sense of belongingness may be more likely to engage in celebrity worship. This is because the fan communities provide their members with a strong sense of belonging as they share the same interests with each other. In addition to this, with the development of entertainment industries, some companies are now creating boyfriend or girlfriend-like idols, a type of celebrity that provides emotional value to their fans. A study by Giles focuses on the phenomenon of parasocial interaction between media users and celebrities they follow online [13]. The result of the study indicates that people who lack social interactions with others in real life tend to seek compensation online, building parasocial interaction with celebrities. Thus, it is likely that they may engage in celebrity worship.

To be more specific, we can take a look at the Big Five Personality Theory. It classifies people's personality traits into five dimensions: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. According to Maltby et al., we can determine that people who engage in celebrity worship due to strong personal factors are positively related to openness and conscientiousness, respectively [14]. These people are willing to try new things and adjust to him or herself while not having a stable mood (consistently feeling anxious, depressive, pessimistic, or self-doubt). Therefore, they may choose celebrity worship—a popular and rapidly developed hobby—as their way to gain short-term happiness. However, after a brief period of happiness, they may become emotionally unstable due to the feeling of a gap brought by reality. This is how celebrity worship may shape teenagers' personalities.

3.2.3 Peer Relationship Factor

Whether a teenager engages in celebrity worship may be partially due to whether this activity is popular among their friends. If a teenager is in a group where everyone likes a certain celebrity figure and fandom, he or she is likely to be affected, too. This could be explained by You's research [15]. In You's paper, he concludes that some teenagers who want to be similar to and be involved in their peer group may show actions and thoughts that correspond to the group's values [15]. In this way, a

teenager can establish group identity, and the collective identity among the group will also increase. In Reysen et al.'s study, researchers point out that collective identity is positively related to the sense of happiness and well-being [16]. In other words, teenagers can gain happiness from engaging in celebrity worship with groups of friends who share the same hobby.

Why is that so important? Most teenagers have been facing peer pressure since forty years ago, and this problem seems to worsen over time. As Brown mentioned in his study, one-third of teenagers think peer pressure is one of the most difficult challenges they must face during their adolescence [17]. Moreover, peer pressure among girls seems to be stronger than that among boys. Perhaps in order to fight against the pressure brought by peers, many young people choose some ways to get along with their peers that can bring them happiness, among which chasing stars with peers is one way to get happiness.

4. Conclusion

Teenagers, in their quest for fleeting moments of joy and fulfillment, often find themselves drawn to the glamorous world of celebrities. They may idolize these public figures, hoping to emulate their lifestyles and achievements, which can provide them with a temporary sense of happiness. However, this pursuit of celebrity worship can lead to emotional instability when the stark contrast between the idealized lives of their idols and the realities of their own existence becomes apparent. The unrealistic expectations that teenagers set for themselves, fueled by the seemingly perfect lives of celebrities, can create a significant gap that may be difficult to bridge.

Moreover, the impact of celebrity worship on a teenager's personality development cannot be underestimated. As they immerse themselves in the lives of their idols, they may start to shape their own identities based on the traits and values they perceive in these celebrities. This can lead to a distorted sense of self and may hinder the development of their own unique personality traits. The constant comparison with the seemingly flawless personas of celebrities can erode their self-esteem and self-worth, further contributing to emotional instability.

In conclusion, while idolizing celebrities may offer teenagers a brief respite from the challenges of adolescence, it can also lead to emotional turmoil and hinder their personal growth. The influence of peer popularity plays a significant role in determining whether a teenager will engage in this behavior, highlighting the importance of fostering a supportive and realistic social environment for their healthy development.

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