

The Impact of Social Media Use on Adolescents' Celebrity Worship

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Abstract:

Social media has emerged as the primary means by which adolescents communicate, express themselves, and get information in recent years. Adolescents are increasingly worshipping celebrities at the same time. The aim of this study is to determine how adolescents' celebrity worship and social media use are related. A questionnaire survey was conducted to collect data from 157 Chinese adolescents aged 14 to 24. The study measured the participants' use of social media and degree of celebrity worship using the Celebrity Worship Scale (CWS) and the Social Media Use Integration Scale (SMUIS). The results show that adolescents' use of social media and their admiration for celebrities are strongly positively correlated. Additionally, the study discovered that older adolescents were less likely to adore celebrities and that male adolescents used social media more than female adolescents. Understanding how social media influences adolescents' social cognition and behavior patterns is greatly aided by this study. It provides insights for parents, educators, and policymakers to help guide adolescents to use social media healthily and cultivate a rational attitude towards celebrity worship.

Keywords: Social media use; celebrity worship, social cognition; adolescents.

1. Introduction

1.1 Adolescents and Social Media

Social media has become an essential part of adolescents' everyday life due to the quick advancement of Internet technology. Studies show that sharing data, information, and opinions, along with enjoyment, are the main reasons why adolescents use social media. On average, students use social media for one to three hours per day [1].

Social media offers adolescents a broad platform

for information acquisition and social interaction. It lowers the threshold for knowledge acquisition and broadens the channels for interpersonal communication among adolescents. One study reveals that adolescents use social media to chat, be entertained, follow diverse content, share content such as photos and videos, play games, and be a member of social groups [2]. Furthermore, social media has positive implications for adolescents, facilitating the improvement of their communication capabilities, aiding them in obtaining information, developing their skills in using technology, and instructing them on how to

effectively employ the latest technology [3].

By contrast, social media may exert adverse effects on adolescents. According to a report from the World Health Organization, the proportion of adolescents experiencing social media usage problems has escalated from 7% in 2018 to 11% in 2022. Scholars contend that social media primarily influences three elements of adolescents' development: a sense of belonging, social psychological well-being, identity development, and the process. Their impact on adolescents' social interactions is dual-sided: on one hand, they make it more convenient for adolescents to establish and participate in online groups and communities. On the other hand, they may also lead to alienation and exclusion of adolescents [4]. Adolescents who use social media excessively may experience mental health issues. Researchers claim that people with poor academic achievement, limited health literacy, and little parental supervision are more likely to have social media usage issues [5]. Adolescents with improper social media usage leads to increased depressive symptoms and a decline in life satisfaction after a year. Furthermore, over time, problematic social media use predicts a rise in upward social comparison and cybervictimization [6].

1.2 Celebrity Worship

Celebrity worship constitutes a form of participation bordering on obsession, where adolescents idolize their beloved celebrities to the point of worship. Scholars contend that in the minds of fans, celebrities attain a status typically reserved for deities, and the behaviors of fans often imitate religious rituals [7]. Furthermore, some academics describe "worship" as the act of demonstrating love, devotion, and commitment to a media character both during and after media engagement or consumption. It commences with the development of intense devotional sentiments towards the figure and is characterized by staunch loyalty to the figure and a willingness to devote one's time, money, and personal freedom to venerate the figure [8].

Celebrity worship is a ubiquitous phenomenon during the psychological development of adolescents and serves as a crucial means for their self-confirmation. The behaviors of adolescents are highly influenced by others or the environment. Adolescents will search for examples they deem attractive, thereby attaining higher self-esteem. One of the objects that adolescents find appealing and that can enhance their self-esteem is celebrities [9]. This behavior is a manifestation of human psychological needs and spiritual sustenance, revealing the pursuits and ideals of adolescents. Additionally, the desire to be accepted by peer groups, to conform to peers, and to observe and learn from peers are the motivations for adolescents' celebrity worship, while the Internet act as catalysts for this phenomenon [10]. The rise of online platforms has furnished

new channels and approaches for adolescents' celebrity worship, facilitating more intimate and frequent interaction between celebrities and fans.

Adolescents' celebrity worship presents characteristics such as diversity, individuality, and networking. Scholarly research has revealed that "external," "internal," "wealth," and "athlete" are the four latent celebrity traits that appeal to adolescents [11]. Nevertheless, adolescents' celebrity worship also entails certain issues and potential risks. Celebrity worship among adolescents has been linked to both beneficial and negative effects on their mental health, according to research. [12]. The formation of this phenomenon is associated with the problematic use of social media. Scholars have discovered that improper internet usage, unrealistic daydreaming, and the aspiration for fame can deepen the psychological state of celebrity worship among adolescents [13].

Currently, most research in academia on adolescents' celebrity worship focuses on its impact on adolescents' mental health. By conducting surveys on adolescents' attitudes towards celebrity worship, this study is to investigate the association between adolescents' social media use and celebrity worship as well as the psychological drivers and primary manifestations of celebrity worship. Social media has emerged as the primary platform for adolescents to interact with celebrities and other followers in the current era of rapid Internet development. Consequently, research on how social media affects adolescents' devotion to celebrities is required. In light of this, this study proposes and validates the following hypotheses using a quantitative research method:

- (1) Adolescents' degree of celebrity worship is correlated with how they utilize social media.
- (2) Adolescents' use of social media and their degree of celebrity worship are positively correlated.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

In order to measure the variables, questionnaire survey is adopted to obtain quantitative data. There are several advantages to using questionnaires. First, questionnaires can be distributed to a large number of participants, allowing research to reach a wider audience. Secondly, the use of questionnaires, especially online questionnaires, can collect the necessary data in a short time. In addition, questionnaires are mostly closed-ended and often produce quantitative data, which facilitates analysis using statistical software.

"Adolescents' degree of celebrity worship is correlated with how they utilize social media" and "Adolescents' use of social media and their degree of celebrity worship are

positively correlated” are the study’s hypotheses, as previously stated.

2.2 Participants

157 people participated in this study, including 79 females and 78 males. Every participant was older than 14; two were 24 years of age or older, 130 were between the ages of 18 and 24, and 25 were between the ages of 14 and 17. China’s Medium- and Long-Term Youth Development Plan (2016-2025) defines young people as those between the ages of 14 and 35. However, according to the WHO, young people are individuals who are 15 to 24 years old. This study integrates the two and suggests that adolescents aged 14 to 24 serve as the research object. Data for participants outside of this age range are therefore deemed invalid. Furthermore, the study uses Weibo as its primary research platform. As a result, this study does not include participants who do not utilize Weibo.

2.3 Measures

To gauge the participants’ levels of celebrity worship and social media use, the researcher developed a questionnaire. The 31 questions in the questionnaire are mostly broken down into 3 sections. In the first portion, participants were asked about their age, gender, degree of education, and how often they used social media. To determine how often they utilized social media, participants were asked if they used Weibo and how many days a week they usually used it. The second and third parts choose the authoritative scale with good reliability and validity, as confirmed by many studies.

The use of social media by participants was examined in the second section of the survey. Ten components make up the “Social Media Use Integration Scale” (SMUIS), from which the questions were chosen [14]. The survey employed a Likert-type scale, with five responses—from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”—ranging from 1 to 5. Using phrases like “Using Weibo is part of my everyday routine,” the scale gauged how much social media was incorporated into participants’ daily life. The scale

also assessed participants’ emotional attachment to social media, as evidenced by items like “I am agitated when I am unable to access Weibo.”

Using data from the “Celebrity Worship Scale” (CWS), the final section of the survey examined the participants’ level of celebrity worship [15]. The Likert-type rating scale is also used to answer the 16 items on this measure. Celebrity worship habits and psychology were measured by the scale, which included items like “It’s a lot of joy to learn about my favorite celebrity’s life.”

2.4 Procedure

A random sampling technique was used in this study, an online questionnaire was created using the Wenjuanxing website, and participants were given access to the questionnaires via WeChat, a popular social media platform in China. The distribution of the questionnaires was broadened by depending on the participants’ interpersonal connections. The participants of this survey came from different regions of China and received a small amount of money as an incentive to participate in the survey after completing the questionnaire. The survey lasted for two weeks, and a total of 157 questionnaires were sent out. 149 valid questionnaires were retrieved, representing an effective rate of 94.90%, after the questionnaires were rigorously vetted in accordance with the survey objects and the study’s scope. Invalid and incomplete questionnaires were eliminated. After the survey, the researcher used the collected data for statistical analysis on the computer program SPSS.

3. Results

3.1 Descriptive Statistics

According to the questionnaire’s results, the participants’ ages ranged from 14 to 17 for 16.8% and 18 to 24 for 83.2%. Descriptive data for two variables: celebrity worship and social media use, are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Social Media Use and Celebrity Worship

Variables	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Social media use	149	1.20	4.60	3.10	0.82
Celebrity worship	149	1.00	4.94	3.20	0.85

3.2 Correlation Analysis

Table 2 presents a correlation matrix that illustrates the associations among social media use scores, celebrity worship scores, gender, and age. Celebrity worship and

social media use are significantly positively correlated. The significance index is less than 0.001, and the Pearson index is 0.66. According to the data, the degree of celebrity worship increases with the intensity of social media use.

Table 2. Correlation Analysis of Main Variables

Variables	Gender	Age	Social media use	Celebrity worship
Gender	-			
Age	0.25**	-		
Social media use	-0.31**	-0.28**	-	
Celebrity worship	-0.04	-0.21*	0.66**	-

3.3 Regression Analysis

Adolescents' use of social media and their admiration for celebrities are correlated, according to the correlation analysis above. With social media use as the independent variable and celebrity worship as the dependent variable, this study uses a linear regression model (see Table 3). According to Table 3, the standard error for using social media for celebrity worship is 0.06 ($t = 10.66$, $p < 0.01$), but the unstandardized coefficient is 0.69. It demonstrates that adolescents' devotion to celebrities is significantly enhanced by social media use.

The study's findings will be impacted by the participants'

varying ages and genders. Therefore, gender and age are chosen as the control variables in this study, and hierarchical regression analysis is carried out in order to eliminate the influence of unimportant elements. Model 1 shows the influence of gender and age on adolescents' celebrity worship, with an R^2 of 0.04. With an R^2 of 0.47, Model 2 examines how social media use, age, and gender affect celebrity worship. The R^2 of Model 2 is much higher than that of Model 1 (ΔR^2 square = 0.43), suggesting that even after controlling for irrelevant variables, adolescents' usage of social media and their admiration for celebrities continue to be significantly correlated.

Table 3. Regression of Social Media Use on Celebrity Worship

Variables	B	SE	β	t	p
Social media use	0.69	0.07	0.66	10.66	< 0.001

4. Discussion

4.1 Current Situation of Celebrity Worship Among Adolescents

The results of this study show that the average score of the celebrity worship scale for Chinese adolescents aged 14 to 24 is slightly higher than the theoretical median value 3, which indicates that the celebrity worship degree of Chinese adolescents is moderately high on the whole, basically at the level of rational worship, but there are also a few cases of extreme worship. The results of the study also show a strong inverse relationship between age and celebrity worship, indicating that older adolescents are less likely to be enamored by celebrities. This aligns with the findings of earlier studies [16].

The reason is that at this age, adolescents tend to have a certain interest in romantic relationships and desire to establish a relationship with or be attractive to the opposite sex, so for adolescents who are unable to establish romantic relationships, celebrities become ideal emotional objects. With the growth of age, adolescents' psychology gradually matures, and their emotional sustenance for celebrities can be satisfied through social communication, so the degree of celebrity worship is weakened.

4.2 Social Media's Effect on Adolescents' Worship of Celebrities

The results show a robust correlation between adolescents' social media usage and celebrity worship, with the degree of celebrity worship rising as adolescents' social media use increases. This result indicates that the hypothesis of this study is valid, which is consistent with the results of Griffiths [17]. The reason for this phenomenon is that fans can establish an unprecedented direct relationship with celebrities through social media. When celebrities release information on social media platforms, they will have a para-social interaction relationship with some fans and form a sense of direct communication [17]. Social media allows the communication and connection between fans and celebrities to increase, and fans learn more life stories and details of celebrities through social media and get satisfaction, thus getting involved in a deeper level of celebrity worship. Adolescents' devotion to celebrities will therefore grow as a result.

In addition, this study's findings diverge from Crossman's [18]. According to Crossman's research, celebrity worship and social media show a less positive correlation [18]. Therefore, there are many other elements that might impact celebrity worship, and social media use is not a good sign of it.

The possible reasons for the difference in results are the different subjects and scopes of the two studies. While Crossman's study focuses on college students, this study focuses on 14- to 24-year-olds, with younger participants more likely to worship celebrities. In addition, Crossman chose Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram as social media platforms, while the participants in this study are all from China. Their commonly used social media is Weibo, which does not coincide with Crossman's research. The outcomes of the studies may also be impacted by variations in the features and workings of social media platforms.

5. Conclusion

According to the study's findings, adolescents' usage of social media contributes to their increased admiration for celebrities. This could be as a result of social media giving people a way to interact more directly with the celebrities they look up to, which increases their sense of involvement and community. However, there could be some drawbacks to this relationship as well, like excessive worship and irrational expectations.

Understanding how social media influences adolescents' social cognition and behavior patterns is greatly aided by this study. It gives parents, teachers, and legislators valuable information about how adolescents behave online so they may take appropriate action to help them use social media responsibly and develop a healthy perspective on celebrity worship. According to the report, more research should be done on how social media use affects adolescents' mental health and how educational initiatives might lessen the harm that social media use may cause. Furthermore, examining how adolescents from various cultural backgrounds utilize social media and idolize celebrities can help highlight the phenomenon's uniqueness and universality.

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