

The Role of Social Media in Influencing Juvenile Delinquent Behavior

Yuyin Cai^{1,a,*}

¹*OEICIS, Shenzhen Oriental English College, Shenzhen, China*

a. yuyancai1120@163.com

**corresponding author*

Abstract: This research project examines the influence of social media on juvenile criminal behaviour. The popularisation and rapid development of the Internet and social media have had a significant impact on the lifestyles, social patterns and psychological states of adolescents. This research project examines the potential influence of social media on adolescent behaviour from a multi-disciplinary perspective, encompassing the fields of psychology, sociology and communication. The research methodology involved a comprehensive literature review and a case study, which were used to collate and analyse a substantial corpus of data and information pertaining to the relationship between social media use and juvenile delinquency. It is possible that social media may precipitate juvenile delinquency, whilst simultaneously offering a forum for the exchange of information, emotional support and social interaction. The dissemination of misinformation, the occurrence of cyberbullying, and the prevalence of privacy breaches on social media may have a deleterious effect on juveniles, thereby increasing their susceptibility to engage in delinquent activities. Furthermore, this paper puts forth recommendations for the effective governance of social media platforms in a business context, with the objective of preventing and reducing juvenile delinquency.

Keywords: Social media, Juveniles, Crime.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background and Research Topics

The current era is characterised by the pervasive influence of social media, which has permeated all facets of society, particularly affecting the younger generation in a significant manner. The 54th edition of the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) Statistical Report on Internet Development in China reveals that the number of Internet users in China has reached nearly 1.1 billion (1,099.67 million), with an Internet penetration rate of 78.0% [1]. Among the newly registered Internet users, 49.0% are teenagers aged 10-19. Globally, 95% of teenagers are active on social media, with an average daily usage of over three hours. These statistics not only illustrate the prevalence of social media among teenagers, but also underscore its role as a significant conduit for the dissemination of information and social interaction. As the psychologist Erik Erikson observed, adolescence represents a crucial phase in the formation of an individual's sense of identity. The accelerated evolution of social media has not only transformed the manner in which adolescents

conduct their lives but has also exerted a pervasive influence on their psychological growth, social conduct, and even proclivity for criminality. It is therefore evident that further study of the relationship between social media and juvenile delinquency is warranted. It is evident that social media plays an indispensable role in this process. In recent years, a number of juvenile delinquency cases have been directly or indirectly related to social media. These include cases of psychological trauma caused by cyberbullying and criminal behaviour induced by undesirable content. These phenomena have caused widespread concern in all walks of life. Therefore, an in-depth study of the influence mechanism of social media on juvenile delinquency is of great significance for the prevention of juvenile delinquency and the protection of the healthy development of young people.

1.2. Purpose and Significance of the Study

The role of social media in contemporary society is of considerable importance, particularly in the context of its impact on adolescents. This study examines the influence of social media on the psychology and behaviour of adolescents, as well as the relationship between them. By analysing the content on social media that may have a negative effect and the processes that lead to its creation, it becomes evident that social media may play a role in juvenile delinquency. The findings provide evidence to support the assertion that business decisions should be made with the objective of reinforcing online regulation and enhancing the purity of the online environment.

1.3. Research Methods and Approaches

The objective of this study is to examine the impact of social media on the prevalence of juvenile delinquency. The study employs a review of the literature and a case study to elucidate the role and influence of social media in juvenile delinquency. A comparative and synthetic analysis of the cases in question will facilitate a deeper understanding of the ways in which social media facilitates the dissemination of criminal information, stimulates criminal motivation, and exacerbates criminal behaviour among the youth population.

1.4. The Research Framework of the Latter

The present study will investigate the impact of social media on juvenile delinquency by analysing instances of content that may incite anti-social conduct on three distinct social media platforms. The objective is to demonstrate how young people may be vulnerable to misinformation on social media, which could ultimately result in a deviation from the established norms of acceptable behaviour and an engagement in criminal activities. This study will examine the background, triggers, and eventual consequences of these cases in order to gain a deeper understanding of the role of social media in this process. Furthermore, the paper will present a series of practical recommendations for commercial platforms with the objective of assisting them in taking effective measures to prevent and minimise the spread of undesirable information.

2. The Impact of Social Media on Adolescent Psychology

2.1. Social Anxiety and Crisis of Self-identity

The presence of distorted information about others on social media can impede individuals' capacity to perceive and evaluate themselves objectively and accurately. A notable negative correlation was observed between the inclination to engage in upward social comparison on social media and the clarity of one's self-concept. Furthermore, upward social comparison was identified as a mediator in the relationship between social media use and self-concept clarity. Furthermore, a significant negative relationship has been identified between upward social comparison on social media and self-esteem,

as evidenced by several studies. This finding is consistent with the notion that self-esteem, a key component of core self-evaluation, is negatively influenced by such comparisons. The impact of upward social comparison on social media is not only direct, affecting self-evaluation; it is also cumulative, influencing an individual's self-esteem, mood and life satisfaction. Social anxiety is defined as an emotional state characterised by feelings of discomfort, worry and nervousness in social situations, which may result in the avoidance of social interactions. The existing literature suggests that upward social comparisons on social media can influence social anxiety not only directly, but also indirectly through the mediating role of body satisfaction. As the distinction between online and offline interactions becomes increasingly blurred, social anxiety has shifted from the offline to the online domain. Online social anxiety can be defined as the negative interpersonal interactions, such as tension and anxiety, that individuals experience in social media interaction situations. It has been demonstrated that upward social comparison on social media positively predicts online social anxiety and plays a full mediating role between passive social media use and online anxiety [2].

2.2. Cyberbullying

A review of the literature reveals that there is currently no consensus among scholars on a uniform definition of cyberbullying. In general, cyberbullying can be defined as aggressive online behaviour that possesses several key characteristics. These include the initiation of the behaviour by an individual or group, the intention to cause harm to others, the repetition of the aggressive behaviour over time, and the presence of a power imbalance between the perpetrator and the victim. Cyberbullying manifests itself in a variety of forms, including verbal harassment, the dissemination of rumours, and ostracism. Some studies have indicated that the retrievability and anonymity afforded by social media platforms may be associated with an increased prevalence of cyberbullying among adolescents. The retrieval of information and the anonymity afforded by social media platforms provide bullies with greater opportunities to identify and target potential victims. In the context of social media, the presence of suitable targets and the lack of effective regulation were identified as mediators in the relationship between availability and cyberbullying. The availability of suitable targets provides the bully with an opportunity to commit a criminal act, while the absence of effective regulation reduces the likelihood of the bullying behaviour being detected and stopped. The retrievability and anonymity of social media platforms exert an indirect influence on adolescent cyberbullying behaviour, affecting the availability of suitable targets and the absence of effective regulation [3].

3. Inappropriate Content Induction in Social Media

3.1. Dissemination of Violent and Pornographic Content

In alignment with Walter Lippmann's conceptualisation of the "mimetic environment," the proportion of the "virtual environment" is on the rise as a consequence of the relentless advancement of social media. This environment may be classified as an indirect environment. This can be defined as a symbolic reality. As a result, the proliferation of pornographic content on social media will lead to misperceptions about the real world, which in turn will give rise to significant inaccuracies in the perceptions held by the general public about society [4].

In the contemporary era, the advent of social media has resulted in a diversification of the methods employed to produce and disseminate pornographic material online. Concurrently, the reach and impact of such material have also increased. Those engaged in illicit activities have begun to utilise the live broadcast function of microblogging platforms with the intention of acquiring gifts from their audience. It has been observed that some microblogging users have been transferring their audiences to the WeChat "welfare group", where they send obscene videos to group members in exchange for

WeChat red envelopes. This is done with the intention of generating profit. Moreover, the phenomenon of the "Internet + pornography trade" is also prevalent on social media. The virtual nature of the WeChat platform presents a significant challenge for public security authorities in terms of preventing and combating this phenomenon. To illustrate, in December 2015 the Guangdong police dismantled an Internet pornography-related criminal gang that had been exploiting WeChat groups as a platform for organising and introducing prostitution activities. The year 2016 is regarded as the inaugural year of webcasting, due to the proliferation of live broadcasting software and platforms. By December 2016, the number of webcasting users had reached 344 million, representing 47.1% of the total number of Internet users. Of these users, 19.8% engaged with live chat shows. Concurrently, the live reality show is witnessing a surge in popularity, which has given rise to a plethora of live broadcasting innovations. In order to attract attention and boost viewership, numerous news anchors have resorted to incorporating pornographic and obscene content into their live broadcasts. The absence of regulatory oversight on social media platforms has enabled the emergence of platforms dedicated to live pornographic performances. Such platforms are designed in such a way that the playback function is not readily apparent, necessitating that users search for specific anchor accounts in order to gain access to the pornographic content. Consequently, the aforementioned platforms do not display any obscene or pornographic material on their homepages. Some anchors have adopted alternative platforms, such as WeChat, to circumvent account blocking and retain the ability to receive gifts from their audiences. The gifts are then exchanged for pornographic activities, which are conducted on the alternative platform and subsequently monetised. The principal page of the platform does not contain any material of an obscene or pornographic nature. The dissemination of obscene and pornographic material has a deleterious impact on the cultural landscape of the digital age. Such content is antithetical to the tenets of social morality, engendering a shift in cognitive patterns and habits that influence perceptions of the world, values, and the very essence of existence. Furthermore, it has the potential to erode the foundations of public order and morals, as well as traditional cultural norms.

The evidence presented above demonstrates that the proliferation of pornographic content has a significant adverse effect on young people. The pervasive presence of pornographic material, often characterised by its explicit and vulgar content, has had a significant impact on the sexual concepts and values of young people. Those who are exposed to pornographic content over an extended period of time are more susceptible to issues such as premature puberty and sexual criminality. Furthermore, pornographic content may serve as a catalyst for criminal activities such as internet fraud and extortion, thereby endangering the property and personal safety of young people.

3.2. The Dissemination of Criminal Practices and Techniques

In the hidden realm of social media, the dissemination of criminal techniques is occurring with minimal attention and has become a novel phenomenon in juvenile delinquency that should not be underestimated. A review of the literature on adolescent online behaviour reveals that a significant proportion of adolescents surveyed (more than one-third) have encountered discussions or instructional videos about criminal techniques on social media. Such activities encompass not only conventional methods of theft and fraud but also more sophisticated and challenging-to-detect cybercrimes, including hacking and identity theft.

A case study illustrates how a cohort of juvenile delinquents employed social media platforms to disseminate techniques for circumventing bank account passwords, thereby facilitating a series of remote thefts. The perpetrators acquired the requisite knowledge to circumvent the security measures in place at financial institutions through the utilisation of instructional videos disseminated on social media platforms. They subsequently proceeded to perpetrate fraud against a multitude of victims, resulting in the misappropriation of funds. This incident demonstrates the significant influence that

social media exerts in the dissemination of criminal information, while simultaneously issuing a cautionary note regarding the necessity for enhanced supervision and guidance of online conduct among the younger demographic. Conversely, some film narration short videos have introduced the contents of foreign television films for narration, depicting in detail the intentional injuries and violent acts depicted in the film plots, including the specific ways and means of carrying out these acts. Such videos may unwittingly function as "instructional videos" on criminal methods, resonating with adolescents who are already engaged with social media. Adolescents tend to identify with individuals on social media platforms, often emulating their behaviours. Some adolescents unquestioningly emulate the "gangster brothers" or "big sisters" who engage in bullying behaviour in movies and TV dramas. This subsequently leads to the formation of gangs and the perpetration of bullying against those perceived as weak. The affordances of social media provide an opportunity for such imitation to occur. The utilisation of social media and video-sharing platforms enables adolescents to emulate violent conduct depicted in videos or images and disseminate them to other users of the same platforms. This behaviour among teenagers increases as a result of imitation. The dissemination of criminal methodologies and techniques is characterised by a rapid and widespread propagation, akin to a viral phenomenon. Once a criminal technique is identified as being highly effective, it rapidly disseminates among the youth population. This pattern of dissemination not only serves to exacerbate the serious situation of juvenile delinquency, but also presents a significant challenge to the maintenance of social security.

3.3. Infiltration of Extreme Ideas and Values

The advent of social media has the potential to facilitate a shift in the individual's role from that of a passive recipient of power to an active agent capable of disseminating influence. This phenomenon presents a challenge to the conventional modes of power transmission. In traditional forms of communication, the recipient occupies a position of lesser power and influence than the sender. Nevertheless, social media can be regarded as an accurate reflection of Foucault's conceptualisation of power. In Foucault's analysis, power is not concentrated in a single entity, individual, or location. It is not a commodity or fortune that can be appropriated by a single individual or entity. The exercise and enactment of power occurs within the context of a networked organization. Individuals do not merely aspire to navigate the complex network of power; they are always in a position to simultaneously experience this power and utilise it. The dissemination of extremist terrorist ideology via social media represents a more expedient method of propagation, given the rapid and pervasive nature of social media. The "many to many" mechanism of communication inherent in social media lends itself to a decentralised approach, whereby each user acts as both a receptor and a carrier of information. This enables individuals to aspire to circulate within the intricate structure of the power network, while simultaneously receiving and applying this power. Each user becomes a node in the network communication, a unity of power receptors and carriers, which enables the rapid dissemination of extreme terrorist ideologies among users across the globe. This facilitates the propagation of terrorist activities across a broader geographical area and at a faster pace. Concurrently, news media outlets disseminate audio and video messages espousing terrorist ideology, thereby facilitating the terrorists' ability to propagate these messages on a more expansive scale, which is precisely what the terrorists seek to achieve. These ideological teachings exert a powerful influence on the minds of individuals, encouraging and financing those, particularly young people, who become "Internet jihadists" and join terrorist organisations, thereby enabling them to engage in a range of terrorist activities. As young people's need for a sense of security and their psychological emptiness intensify, their reliance on organisations increases, leading to an acceptance of extremist terrorist ideologies. Moreover, social media platforms are employed by terrorist organisations for the dissemination of information, including audio and video content pertaining to terrorist activities.

Furthermore, terrorist organisations employ cookies to identify potential recruits and utilise various forms of indoctrination to compel individuals to adhere to their ideology. For example, Ali Shukairi Amin, a 17-year-old male from Virginia in the United States, disseminated over 7,000 messages in support of the Islamic State on his Twitter account. These messages provided instructions to Islamic State supporters on the utilisation of cybercurrency for the purpose of concealing their support for the Islamic State. Moreover, he assisted members of the terrorist organisation in encrypting their online communications. Furthermore, he provided guidance to Reza Riknejad, aged 18, who aspired to travel to Syria to join ISIS. The process of joining ISIS was conducted exclusively via social media, particularly Facebook, with the assistance of other members of the terrorist organisation and through the viewing of video content [5].

4. Recommendations for the Governance of Social Media Platforms in a Business Context

4.1. Enhancing the Rigour of Content Audit and Regulation

In order to guarantee the healthy and positive evolution of social media platforms, it is of the utmost importance to implement a rigorous content review process. It is of the utmost importance that social media platforms develop and implement an effective and sophisticated content review system that is capable of monitoring and assessing user-generated content in real time. This mechanism enables platforms to promptly identify and remove content that contains violence, pornography, extreme ideas, and other harmful information, thereby effectively preventing the dissemination of such material among youth groups and protecting them from its adverse effects. Furthermore, enhancements to vetting technology are of paramount importance in ensuring the quality of content. The deployment of sophisticated technologies, such as artificial intelligence and big data analytics, can enhance the efficiency and precision of content review processes. Such technologies can assist platforms in the expedient identification of harmful information, the minimisation of potential oversights in the manual vetting process, and the assurance of platform content that is both healthy and positive. In this way, it can contribute to the creation of a safer online environment for young people, which may in turn lead to a reduction in juvenile delinquency.

4.2. Optimising Juvenile Protection Models

In order to mitigate the potential influence of social media on juvenile delinquency, it is imperative that commercial social media platforms implement a juvenile protection model. Such a model can effectively safeguard the physical and mental health of teenage users, and it would be prudent for platforms to provide an option for a protection mode designed specifically for teenagers. In this mode, the system will automatically impose restrictions on the access of teenage users to inappropriate content, including material of a violent, gory or pornographic nature. Concurrently, social media platforms should disseminate educational, popular science, and wholesome entertainment content proactively in order to foster constructive growth among younger users and cultivate their interests, as well as instill positive values. Furthermore, commercial media platforms must reinforce real-name authentication and age verification procedures in order to ensure that youth users are adequately safeguarded and effectively managed when utilising the platform. By implementing rigorous verification processes, online platforms can ascertain the veracity of users' identity and age information, thereby providing a secure online environment for young people. This serves two purposes: firstly, it mitigates the risk of teenagers being exposed to harmful information; secondly, it prevents and reduces juvenile delinquency to a certain extent, thereby ensuring that they mature in a healthy online environment.

4.3. Enhance User Education and Guidance

In order to mitigate the potential influence of social media on juvenile delinquency, commercial platforms may consider implementing additional measures to promote media literacy education. It would be beneficial for platforms to engage in close collaboration with educational institutions and social organisations with the objective of jointly organising a series of media literacy education activities for young people. Such activities can enhance young people's capacity to discern online information, heighten their awareness of self-protection, and facilitate a more judicious response to diverse online information. Such educational activities afford young people the chance to develop the abilities necessary to identify false information, harmful content and undesirable influences, thereby enhancing their capacity to safeguard themselves from such material. Furthermore, the platform should proactively encourage young people to cultivate positive values, commit to disseminating positive energy, and promote socialist core values and mainstream culture. Such endeavours can assist young people in developing a well-founded worldview, outlook on life and values, thereby enabling them to maintain a sense of direction and make prudent decisions in the context of a dynamic and evolving social milieu. In conclusion, in order to mitigate the influence of social media on juvenile delinquency, commercial platforms must adopt a multifaceted approach that encompasses both technical measures for content regulation and the provision of educational resources aimed at fostering discernment, self-protection awareness, and the establishment of positive values. This will contribute to the creation of a safer and more constructive online environment for young people, which will facilitate their healthy growth and development.

5. Conclusion

This paper examines the potential influence of social media on adolescent mental health and assesses the extent to which the presence of inappropriate content on social media may contribute to the development of delinquent behaviours among adolescents. The aforementioned analyses lead to the conclusion that social media plays an extremely significant role in juvenile delinquency. It is incumbent upon social media platforms to assume the corresponding social responsibility in the process of commercial operation and implement a series of practical and effective measures to prevent juvenile delinquency. Such measures serve not only to safeguard the psychological well-being of adolescents, but also to contribute to the maintenance of social harmony and stability.

While this study has yielded valuable insights into the impact of social media on juvenile delinquency and the coping strategies employed by young people in response to the challenges they face, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of the research. In terms of data collection, this study primarily drew upon existing literature and a limited number of empirical surveys. This approach presented a challenge in terms of comprehensively covering all social media platforms and youth groups, which in turn limited the general applicability of the findings. It would be beneficial for future research to expand the scope of data collected, employ more sophisticated data analysis techniques and investigate the relationship between social media usage and juvenile delinquency in greater depth. This would serve to enhance the precision and credibility of the study.

In examining the psychological impact of social media on adolescents, this study placed significant emphasis on theoretical analysis and case studies, while limiting its scope to a relatively short-term tracking period and a lack of quantitative assessment. It is recommended that future research employ longitudinal research methods in the field of psychology, conduct continuous tracking surveys on adolescents, and incorporate psychometric tools to quantitatively assess the specific impact of social media use on adolescents' mental health. This will provide a scientific foundation for the development of more effective intervention strategies.

The study presents a number of potential coping strategies, but their efficacy still requires further validation through additional research. A further avenue for research would be to evaluate the actual effectiveness of different strategies by combining specific cases. For example, comparative experiments could be conducted to evaluate the actual effectiveness of media literacy education and family-school collaborative interventions in reducing juvenile delinquency behaviours. Furthermore, it would be advantageous for researchers to contemplate the implementation of a cost-benefit analysis model, which would assess the economic viability and feasibility of the various strategies under consideration. Such findings would provide a basis for decision-making for those responsible for formulating policy.

As social media technology continues to advance, new forms and methods of criminal activity continue to emerge, posing unprecedented challenges to the prevention of juvenile delinquency. It is recommended that future research should closely monitor the latest developments in social media technology, analyse its impact on juvenile delinquency and its mechanism of action in a timely manner, and propose targeted strategies. Furthermore, interdisciplinary collaboration should be enhanced, integrating the insights of sociology, jurisprudence, computer science and other disciplines to collectively address the issue of juvenile delinquency in the context of social media.

It is of the utmost importance to acknowledge the significant impact that social media has as a primary avenue for adolescents to engage in social interaction and to access information. It is recommended that future research should continue to elucidate the relationship between social media and juvenile delinquency, with a view to contributing to the construction of a healthy and safe environment for juvenile growth.

References

- [1] *The 54th Statistical Report on China's Internet Development Released. Media Forum (17), 121.*
- [2] Shuhui Huo, Fei Yin, Cong Zeng, Xi Jin, Mengtian Li & Jianqin Cao. (2024). *The effects of upward social comparison on individuals' cognition, emotion and behavior on social media (Review). Chinese Journal of Health Psychology (02), 193-198. doi:10.13342/j.cnki.cjhp.2024.02.007.*
- [3] Wei, Yuke. (2023). *The impact of social media availability on adolescent cyberbullying behavior - Based on an environmental criminology perspective. Science and Technology Communication (22), 107-111. doi:10.16607/j.cnki.1674-6708.2023.22.018.*
- [4] Zhang, W. L. (2020). *A Simple Adaptation of the "Mimetic Environment" Theory. Journalism and Culture (11), 16-17.*
- [5] He Gang. (2020). *The constructive character of knowledge from Foucault's view of power. Journal of Huaibei Normal University (Philosophy and Social Science Edition) (01), 116-120.*