

The Impact of Social Media on Teenagers' Communication and Imitation: A Study Based on Different Family Backgrounds

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Abstract. The issue of juvenile delinquency has been continuously threatening the legitimate rights and interests of teenagers. There is a huge number of criminal behaviors that are related to the adolescent. With the development of the Internet, juvenile criminal behaviors have been widely spread through social media, which will significantly increase the rate of juvenile delinquency. Moreover, the differentiation among families' income would also intensify the conflict in society. This study aims to research how the social media could influence a teenager's crime behavior. Also, the family background would be an intermediate variable in order to determine the relationship between family condition, social media addiction and juvenile delinquency. The result shows that the different ways to limit the students contacting with the Internet and parents' profession, relation, incomes tend to impact the level of students getting in touch with harmful content. The most effective ways to relieve this problem is to let the government, school, social media, and parents work together to prevent the over-exposure of Internet of the student in multi-dimension.

Keywords: Juvenile delinquency, social media, family background, crime

1. Introduction

As of 2024, social media had more than five billion global users, which is equal to more than 62% of the world population. In some families, children may be introduced to social media around the age of 6. There is no denying that the Internet provides us with a large amount of convenience and advance, but it also brings many social issues such as addiction and crime. In most regions, the popularizing rate of social media among juveniles and minors has reached over 90%, and the popularity of minor Internet users has reached about 40% among Internet users. Through social media, violent behavior can spread very easily, as live or video footage can quickly be distributed.

However, though the minor and juvenile are the majority victims of Internet issues, there is actually no effective way to prevent them getting in touch with harmful content. Through social media, the exposure rate of criminal content experience a obviously increment. It is very easy for the children to contact with this content by advertisement or the report on the Internet. If parents lack energy to strictly supervise their children, they may learn and ensue to spread this information.

In a normal family, parents are always the most important teachers in a child's life. They spend most of their time with their parents. So parents' income level, ways of parenting, and even internal relationships would be significant factors that could deeply impact the children. If the parents demonstrate a prominently ethical quality, their children will also be more elegant as well. By contrast, if the parents are rude or even once commit the crime, their children will also be easier to become a convict.

2. Literature review

There are plenty of references indicating that family plays a significant role as the platform on which the juvenile socializes. Its configuration, function and relation could directly impact a juvenile's behavior development [1-3]. First, if children are only addicted to social media and they spend a very long time on the screen, it will not directly lead to a high rate of irrational behavior. In fact, it is the ignorance and indifference of parents to their children and their failure to teach them to build the ability to judge the content on the Internet that will cause the children to break the law. For example, Wissink found that strict parental control of online content directly reduced the possibility of hacking, virus spreading, and other cyber-offenses among adolescents [3,4]. Thus, it is obvious that parents' supervising level could apparently influence adolescents' behavior. As pointed out by Vishwakarma and Awasthi in the Indian case, "when parents fail to monitor online content, adolescents are highly likely to copy the violent scripts from the Internet into real life", which once again proves that the level of parental supervision directly determines whether children will imitate illegal behaviors on social media [5].

Second, family structure itself plays a vital role. Teenagers in single-parent, step-parent, or grandparent-only families often lack daily supervision [1]. The lack of one side in the family structure means the lack of supervision of the children. In addition, children in these kinds of family are more likely to make friends on social media due to the reason that they can not get a full companion through their parents. Also, they usually lack a sense of belonging in the family, so they have little courage to prevent ransom behavior, which will make them gradually think this behavior as a reasonable act and stimulate their learning mechanism.

Third, the way parents themselves use mobile phones or social media sets an example for their children. When parents scroll through their phones during meals and ignore their children, teenagers come to see a constant online presence as normal and offline rules as dispensable, which means that they may simulate such behavior into addiction [6]. Studies in both China and the United States have found that this "parental phubbing" predicts higher levels of adolescent social media addiction, which in turn leads to more online delinquency [7].

Finally, the family income also plays an important role. Poor families often end up in places with more crime and violence [8]. Parents there work long hours and have no energy left to watch what their kids do online. A U.S. county study shows that when parent poverty rises just 1 %, teen violence goes up 0.53 %; the effect is biggest where drugs and joblessness are high [6]. Interviews in Pakistan say the same: 37.8 % of delinquent teens said poverty made them offend, and those without daily parental watch were most likely to do it [9].

In a word, social media is not a direct cause of adolescent crime; the family background plays as a catalyst of crime spread on social platform. While that violent content is distributed on the Internet, the family background decides whether or not it is easy for minors to get to know and simulate these behaviors.

3. Analysis

Take the United States as an example and divide the family through their family income into 3 stages. First, the low-income family that has a yearly salary under 60000 dollars. This part of the family is still bearing the pressure of basic living such as food and clothing. These juveniles tend to have a higher rate of crime and social media addiction. There may be two reasons causing this phenomenon. First, due to the lack of free money, these teenagers have very limited choice of the daily entertainment. Thus, the electronic device may be a top choice of them for recreation, since it has little cost unlike some advanced activities. Due to this, it is more easy for them to be exposed to criminal content. In addition, in these families, parents usually lack opportunity and time to discipline their children, which will cause a bigger probability of crime happening among the children. The situation may be different in the middle-income family (yearly salary between 60000 and 240000), because this part of the family are able to easily afford the basic cost of the daily life and have quite a lot of money could be used to satisfy spiritual needs. Unlike the low-income family, children in middle-income families have more choices of amusement, which means that they are less likely to become addicted to social media. Most parents in such families are teachers, professors or technical personnel, who have a higher educational level. This condition could extend to the next generation to provide them with better educational opportunities. Consequently, their independence and ability to concern the passive information could help to avoid being poisoned by criminal activities on social media. Also, there are some limitations, like the lack of time. Parents in the middle class tend to do the brain-work that takes a lot of time, so they may, in some cases, lack supervision on their children. After all, it could be inferred that children could gain more resistance of social media with the increment of family income and educational level. However, things may be quite different in a high-income family, whose yearly income is over 240000 dollars. Parents with such a level of income generally hold the management position in companies or have their own business. These families are completely free from basic life. They have a high demand for the quality of living. The same situation also appears among children. They have been exposed to a wide range of entertainment since they were born. In this case, it is impossible for them to be addicted to social media. On the other hand, the crime rate may present different results depending on the situations. Due to the pressure on children brought by the great success of their parents, students may more easily experience anxiety. In addition, some families may adopt an indulgence policy on their children because they think that they should offer their children the best conditions. Some families will, by contrast, use an extremely strict parenting method and have high expectations of their children to achieve the same achievements as themselves. In a word, these parents are more likely to use extreme ways of parenting and will make the children over-spoiled or over-pressured. Gradually, it would increase their motivation to exhibit irrational behavior.

In a word, looking at the family income, the crime rate will decrease as the economic status of families improves to a limited extent, but it does not show a direct proportion.

The domestic violence may also be a significant variable that impacts minors' criminal rate. In addition to the direct body attack, the lack of mental awareness, verbal attack, or cold violence could also be seen as domestic violence. Whatever the direct victim is, the child himself/herself or another family member, this behavior would cause a long-term influence. With perennial exposure to violent behavior, children may suffer from PTSD and mental depression. What is more, the domestic violence would also intensify children's observational learning, which will make them see violence as a reasonable way to solve issues in their relationships, even with their friends or strangers. In such a condition, when they are induced by some violent gang on the Internet, they may more easily participate in an actual crime.

Single-parent families also have a high probability of leading the minors to commit a crime. The main reason causing this situation may be the lack of accompaniment by the parents. In a normal family, father and mother always play different roles in accompanying their children, and this may form an intangible balance. For example, the father usually plays as an instrumental role, which children tend to ask him for practical help like how to repair a relationship with friends. While the mother by contrast plays an emotional expression role as a companion, which children ask her for emotional support like encouragement, instead of authentic help. In this case, the absence of a single part makes the balance break, causing the children to find no ways to solve one side of the problem that the absent part could help. In addition, a family that faces to divorce issues is always with lots of squabbles or even physical conflict, which will form the same situation as the domestic violence family. Also, single parents may lack the opportunity to supervise their kids. Consequently, these multi-dimensional issues will make the minor seem the social media as a compensation way for their wound, then they may contact many criminal organizations due to the lack of ability to judge.

Also, there are some special professions that parents do that will influence the condition of this issue. Take families where parents work as police as an example. This part of parents have a very high level of ability to prevent their children from direct violent behavior in the early stage. In addition, this special career is also in a quite safe community, therefore the crime rate would be generally lower than most regions, making the adolescent less unlikely to get in touch with violence. However, every coin has two sides, a parent who works as a police officer often takes a high-pressure education method. They tend to use their authority to restrict their children instead of in a rational way, which will cause adolescents' psychological inversion. Zhao pointed out that single-parent or blended families lack daily supervision [1]. However, in police families, even if both parents are present, children may challenge authority in the anonymous online world by attempting hacking or cyberbullying to prove their independence due to "being too strictly controlled."

To sum up, family income, violence, family shape and even a parent's profession all indirectly influence how social media pushes or fails to push adolescents' irrational behavior. Low income offers few offline joys, high income can bring harsh or lax rules, domestic violence plants hate, single homes break the balance, and police parents may exchange safety with overpressure. Each layer shows the same lesson: the family is the final filter between the screen and offence. When rules and love are steady, apps stay harmless; when they are missing or extreme, the same pixels turn into blueprints for crime.

4. Solution

Up to now, the government has seldom taken concrete measures to solve this problem. Current laws of the protection of minors have plenty of limitations. Some social media platforms have started to use specialized algorithms to diversify content distribution channels in order to decrease the exposure rate of harmful content to be pushed to minors. However, this measure does not have an effective impact on the issue, because the algorithm can not accurately identify the contents that contain indirect violent behavior, for example, some game advertisements. In a portion of companies, the government implements a content rating system for the media, which divides the information by age to prevent young getting in touch with content that is not suitable for their ages. On the other hand, this policy is completely dependent on individuals' ability of self control for the reason that most platforms just display a window to require the ages of visitors without any authentic verification. So this restriction is equal to nonexistence once the visitor does not honestly fulfill the requirement. To decrease this issue, there should be a multi-dimension solution, which the government, school, social media platform and parents should all contribute to. First, the

government should claim relevant laws that restrict social media from spreading this content. Violent behavior has no benefit to any individual. It is necessary to completely ban them on most platforms and offer special access to people, in some cases, truly need this part of information. Second, parents should take a course to learn how to correctly limit and persuade children, especially low SES families or low educational level families. Third, the school should enhance related courses about the law and addiction on the Internet to basically decrease the possibility on these issues.

5. Conclusion

In a word, it could be found that social media is not the direct influencer that impacts adolescents' crime behavior, it mostly depends on the family's condition, income, shape, or even profession and so on. Families with better financial condition or a more reasonable ways to discipline their children could obviously decrease the exposure of harmful content of adolescent. But the problem is still inevitable if only the parents make effort. The violent content have plenty of access to let the teenagers being contaminated. The only way to solve this issue is to let the government and parents work together, preventing this problem from the beginning.

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