The Impact of Violent Social Media Content on Human Behaviour

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Abstract: As social media has become the primary platform for information dissemination and social interaction, how violent content affects individual behavior has prompted profound reflections in academia. Research focuses on how violent content on social media influences individuals psychologically, behaviorally, and socially. Scholars examine the impact of violent content on users' emotions and cognition, exploring how these effects translate into actual behavior. Studies also investigate the dissemination mechanisms of violent information, including the pathways, speed, and user engagement in content spread. Employing multifaceted analysis methods such as surveys and data analysis, researchers aim to comprehensively understand the direct and indirect influences of violent content on individual behavior. Findings indicate that social media's violent content has broad effects on individuals, including negative emotional experiences, cognitive changes, and potential tension and conflicts in social relationships. Additionally, the research reveals diverse reactions to violent content among different user groups, further enriching understanding of the issue. The study's conclusions underscore the urgency of developing effective intervention strategies to mitigate the negative impact social media's violent content may have on individual behavior.

Keywords: Violence, social media, social, psychological, online, social platforms

1.   Introduction

The research on the impact of violent content on behavior in social media is rooted in the widespread use of social media in daily life and the growing concern about its potential influence. This background reflects society's increasing awareness of the potential risks associated with social media use, driving scientific research to delve into the phenomenon of social media violence and its effects [1].

The research focuses on how violent content on social media influences individuals psychologically, behaviorally, and socially. Scholars examine the impact of violent content on users' emotions and cognition, exploring how these effects translate into actual behavior. The study also investigates the dissemination mechanisms of violent information, including pathways, speed, and user engagement. Research methods include surveys and data analysis. Through quantitative and qualitative approaches, researchers seek to understand the direct and indirect influences of violent content on individual behavior. Survey design particularly emphasizes the short-term and long-term effects of violent content on user behavior, revealing potential changes and trends.

Findings indicate that social media's violent content has broad effects on individuals, including negative emotional experiences, cognitive changes, and potential tension and conflicts in social relationships. The research also reveals diverse reactions to violent content among different user groups, further enriching understanding of the issue. The study's conclusions emphasize the urgency of developing effective intervention strategies to mitigate the negative impact social media's violent content may have on individual behavior.

This paper aims to deeply explore the influence of social media violence on behavior, conducting a systematic analysis within the TRA theoretical framework, and analyzing its profound effects on psychological, behavioral, and social levels. In this regard, key measures such as enhancing user media literacy, platform content moderation, and fostering a positive social media culture are considered essential to ensure that social media connects people without harming their mental health and social relationships.

2. Background

The research focuses on the prevalent role of social media in contemporary digital times, where platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and domestic ones like TikTok, Xiaohongshu, Bilibili, and Weibo have connected billions of users globally, becoming an indispensable part of daily life. The rapid development of social media has not only changed the way people communicate but also profoundly impacted social culture, business models, and political engagement. Through these platforms, individuals can share their lives, perspectives, and experiences, enabling global social interaction. Simultaneously, as a crucial channel for information dissemination, social media allows users to access real-time news, trends, and diverse viewpoints. In the business realm, companies utilize social media for brand promotion, product marketing, and establishing closer connections with consumers. Thus, social media is not just a technological tool but a vital medium for shaping and defining individuals and society as a whole [2].

The escalating issue of social media violence is garnering widespread concern. With the surge in digital communication, verbal and visual violence on social media platforms is becoming increasingly rampant. Malicious comments, insults, and threatening language pose daily challenges for users. This form of violence not only infringes on individuals' privacy rights but also has profound potential impacts on psychological and behavioral levels. Victims may experience anxiety, depression, and even an increase in aggressive behavior. Social media violence disrupts what should be positive interactive platforms, weakening individuals' social trust and self-esteem [3]. Therefore, in-depth research on the impact of social media violence on individual behavior is particularly urgent, aiming to implement effective measures to protect users' mental health and social experiences.

Craig A. Anderson and Brad J. Bushman at *Effects of Violent Video Games on Aggressive Behavior, Aggressive Cognition, Aggressive Affect, Physiological Arousal, and Prosocial Behavior: A Meta-Analytic Review of the Scientific Literature.* The research in this article delves into the multifaceted effects of violent media on individual behavior by synthesizing the results of multiple experiments [4]. The study provides an important reference to the effects that arise from the psychological aspects of social media violence.

Sonia Livingstone and Ellen Hesper at *Gradations in Digital Inclusion: Children, Young People and the Digital Divide.* The different levels of digital inclusion are explored in the study, which looks at the impact of social media on the younger generation [5]. The study provides insights into the role of social media in shaping the behavior and perceptions of young people, particularly in response to violent content [6].

3. Method

The implementation of the method section introduces theoretical foundations and specific implementation processes, which can be presented in chapters in social media violence research that revolves around the idea that violent content on social media may shape individuals' attitudes toward violent behavior. By presenting violent behavior in front of users, social media has the potential to influence individuals' perspectives, leading them to develop positive or negative attitudes toward violence. This attitude, to some extent, determines whether individuals will adopt corresponding behaviors. The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) emphasizes the predictive roles of attitudes and subjective norms on individual behavior, applicable to explaining the impact of violent content on human behavior on social media. Social media shapes users' attitudes towards violence by displaying violent scenarios. If social media frequently presents positively depicted violent content, individuals may form a positive attitude toward violent behavior, potentially increasing their tendency to engage in similar actions. Additionally, social norms on social media can also influence individual behavior. When there is widespread tolerance or glorification of violence on social media platforms, individuals may be influenced by these social norms, affecting their attitudes and behavior toward violence. Therefore, the TRA theory provides a framework to better understand the impact of violent content on human behavior on social media by analyzing individual attitudes and social norms.

In analyzing the impact of social media violence content on human behavior within the TRA theory, it is crucial to deeply understand the roles of attitudes and subjective norms in this context. Firstly, researchers need to clearly define the research question, ensuring it encompasses the impact of violent content on individual behavior on social media. Subsequently, relevant variables need to be selected, primarily including individuals' attitudes toward violence and the social norms they experience in the social media environment. This can be achieved through data collection methods such as constructing survey questionnaires or conducting in-depth interviews. When implementing the TRA theory, sample selection is crucial. Ensuring a representative sample covering different ages, cultures, and social backgrounds is essential to ensure the universality of research results. Following this, data on individuals' attitudes towards violence on social media and their perceived social norms can be collected through on-site or online surveys. After data collection, appropriate statistical analysis methods, such as regression analysis, can be employed to explore the impact of individuals' attitudes and social norms on their behavior. This step helps quantify the relative contributions of these factors in shaping behavior. Finally, researchers need to interpret the analysis results, clarifying how individuals' attitudes and social norms influence their behavior on social media. Additionally, by summarizing research findings, relevant policies, and educational recommendations can be proposed to mitigate potential negative impacts and promote positive behavior. Applying the TRA theory to analyze the impact of social media violence on human behavior requires a systematic and in-depth implementation process, covering problem definition, variable selection, sample selection, data collection, analysis methods, results interpretation, and ultimately, conclusions and recommendations.

To mitigate the impact of social media violence on individual behavior, a comprehensive approach is needed, incorporating strategies from platform management, and user education to psychological support. Firstly, social media platforms should strengthen regulatory mechanisms, enhance filtering and review systems, actively remove posts and comments containing violent content, and establish more effective complaint-handling mechanisms. This includes promptly responding to user reports and increasing penalties for violative users to maintain a healthy online environment. Secondly, user education is crucial, and social media platforms should conduct extensive and targeted educational activities to enhance users' ability to recognize verbal and visual violence, emphasizing positive and respectful online communication attitudes [7]. Thirdly, psychological support is a key component; platforms can provide online psychological counseling services, establish support groups, and help

users better cope with the psychological impact of violent content. Additionally, social media platforms can collaborate with professional organizations to launch campaigns and advocacy activities focused on mental health, encouraging users to pay more attention to and prioritize their psychological well-being. Through a comprehensive approach, social media platforms can establish a strong defense line in terms of regulation, education, and support, thereby minimizing the negative impact of social media violence on individual behavior to the greatest extent possible.

4.   Results

Mental health impact: For adolescents in this day and age, the simultaneous coexistence of a variety of ideas, values, and modes of behavior, as well as the unprecedented complexity and variability of the domestic and international environments, coupled with the incomplete establishment of new norms in keeping with social change, will inevitably have an impact on adolescents' ideology, behavior, psychological state, cultural life, and so on. If they are not guided promptly, adolescents who seek novelty and change may engage in deviant behavior. In a risky social environment, young people are faced with a series of insecurity factors such as employment, which makes them more prone to deviation in their daily behavior. They may give vent to their inner emotions online and consciously become the perpetrators and disseminators of cyber violence [7]. Campuses, especially university campuses, are at the forefront of various currents of thought. However, the campus environment is not immune to some undesirable factors, such as the idea of power and wealth in primary and secondary schools, the concept of gold-digging in love in universities, and sexual bribery in the process of promotion or job-seeking, etc., which greatly test the discernment and self-control of young people. For example, in the process of love, if college students have poor self-control and are affected by these negative factors, and if they cannot receive correct education and guidance, then they will easily show the development trend of aberration and degradation in their consciousness, especially driven by the curiosity and adventurousness of adolescence, and they may even embark on the road of law-breaking and crime because of their gender relations. This, coupled with certain oversights in the management of some schools, not only allows students with a transgressive mindset to take advantage of the situation but also allows some unhealthy things to grow and spread within the school, becoming the cause of juvenile delinquency and crime [8].

Factors such as people's curiosity and entertainment mentality, and the psychology of choice may also be the socio-psychological basis for Internet participation. The Internet is different from the traditional media, and people have different psychological characteristics in the reception and use of information from the traditional audience, and these characteristics will affect the Internet behavior of the Internet users. Firstly, moral concepts become the rationalization reason for online moral judgment. At present, the phenomenon of moral slippage and moral loss is becoming more and more prominent, and cyber violence is the refraction of people's moral judgment and moral militia on the Internet [9]. Due to the deep cultural roots of moral discourse in the hearts of the Chinese people, it is particularly easily awakened and identified, leading many netizens to engage in moral judgments based on a sense of justice and righteousness. However, this moral judgment often results in causing unethical harm to the individuals involved. Some profit-driven online media, pursuing commercial interests, sensationalize events such as extramarital affairs, second-generation rich individuals, and official privileges. When netizens see these labeled keywords, they tend to think reflexively, and their comments towards powerful groups often carry a tone of resentment. This forms a mindset that associates wealth and fame with immorality, and power and status with injustice. Members of less privileged groups may not invest energy in distinguishing the authenticity of events or information. They tend to automatically assume that if someone of a specific identity has done something, it is inherently immoral. They may rush to criticize without a thorough understanding, and the opinions of unfamiliar netizens often lean towards a one-sided trend. In many cases, individuals may prefer to

change their pre-existing opinions to align with the consensus of their group or society. In the online environment, the behavior of netizens exhibits a phenomenon similar to conformity observed in real-life individuals. When facing a specific event that generates dissatisfaction or disagreement towards the event or involved parties, despite each netizen having the possibility to express their opinion, their behavior tends to seek group conformity. Amid intense online debates, if the voices of criticism prevail, an individual whose opinion contradicts the majority is quickly drowned out by the backlash. Conversely, if one's viewpoint aligns with the majority, irrational ideas gather together easily, creating a resonating effect. Subsequent individuals are inclined to follow the behavior of those who came before them, and as the insults and irrational emotions intensify, it fosters a loop of collective behavior. The consequences of conformity-driven behavior contribute to the distortion of the facts of an event, leading to an increasingly skewed narrative that incites indignation among later participants, perpetuating a cycle of irrationality [10].

5. Discussion

The potential changes in individual behavior resulting from social media violence encompass various aspects, with a notable increase in aggressive behavior being a significant concern. Under the influence of violent content, individuals may be more prone to exhibit anger, hostility, and a noticeable rise in verbally and behaviorally aggressive tendencies. Furthermore, social media violence may trigger social avoidance behavior, as individuals, in an attempt to avoid negative experiences, might choose to reduce online social interactions or even completely withdraw from certain social platforms. This avoidance behavior can lead to a sense of social isolation, impacting the formation and maintenance of individuals' social networks. Therefore, a profound understanding of these potential changes is crucial for implementing preventive and intervention measures to ensure that the impact of social media on individual behavior tends toward positivity and health.

Research indicates that short-term and long-term exposure to social media violence has cumulative effects on individual behavior. Short-term exposure may trigger emotional fluctuations and temporary behavioral changes, such as increased irritability or emotional vulnerability. Over time, long-term exposure may manifest more profound effects. Individuals might gradually adapt to violent content, developing a desensitized attitude towards aggressive language, and even actively participating in it. Moreover, long-term exposure to aggressive content may lead to social avoidance, resulting in prolonged feelings of social isolation. This cumulative effect emphasizes that the impact of social media violence on behavior is a progressive process, underscoring the urgency of prevention and intervention. In-depth research on short-term and long-term effects helps provide a more comprehensive understanding of the enduring impact of social media violence on individual behavior and aids in formulating more targeted intervention strategies.

Social media violence has far-reaching negative impacts on individual social relationships. Firstly, intimate relationships may be severely damaged, as the spread of violent content can trigger conflicts and distrust within these relationships, potentially leading to estrangement. Prolonged exposure to aggressive language may create a distance between individuals and their intimate partners, family, and friends. Secondly, social media violence may lead to social isolation as individuals choose to distance themselves from potential violent content for self-protection. This social isolation may hinder the establishment of new social relationships, making it more challenging for individuals to integrate into social networks. Therefore, understanding the negative impact of social media violence on individual social relationships is crucial, emphasizing the urgency of adopting effective measures to mitigate this trend and maintain healthy social interactions and relationships.

Violent content poses significant challenges to the formation and maintenance of social networks. Firstly, aggressive language may make individuals feel insecure on social media, reducing their willingness to engage positively. Individuals may choose to avoid social platforms out of fear of being

attacked, thereby weakening the formation of social networks. Secondly, the spread of violent content may lead to internal conflicts within social networks, disrupting previously harmonious relationships. Disharmony in relationships with friends and family may quickly spread throughout the entire network, causing fractures and divisions. Additionally, social media violence may hurt trust within the network, making individuals approach social interactions with caution and hindering the formation of stable social relationships. Therefore, understanding and addressing the challenges of social media violence on social networks require comprehensive measures, including platform regulation, user education, and psychological support, to ensure the healthy formation and stable maintenance of social networks [8]. Research indicates that violent content on social media has profound and complex effects on human behavior. Firstly, at the psychological level, individuals may undergo emotional fluctuations, including anger, anxiety, and depression. This reflects the significant role of violent content in triggering negative emotions. Secondly, in terms of behavior, social media violence is associated with an increase in individual aggression and conflict. This suggests that exposure to violent information may lead to behavioral imitation or arousal. Finally, at the social level, studies suggest that social media violence may lead to tension in interpersonal relationships and even trigger adverse social behaviors such as cyberbullying. These findings emphasize that social media violence is not only a tool for information dissemination but also has a significant impact on individuals' mental health, behavior patterns, and social interactions [11]. They offer insights into the practices of education, family, and social policies to pay more attention to how to reduce the negative impact of violent content on users. Additionally, these research results remind social media platforms and regulatory agencies of the need to strengthen the review and management of violent content to mitigate its potential harm.

Intensely focusing on the issue of social media violence on human behavior is crucial because it not only affects individual mental health and social interactions but also triggers profound changes in societal culture on a larger scale. Future research should concentrate more on gaining an in-depth understanding of the specific mechanisms through which different forms of violence affect human behavior, enabling the development of more targeted intervention measures. Furthermore, it is necessary to address the regulatory mechanisms of social media platforms, exploring more innovative and effective means to prevent and mitigate the spread of violent content. Interdisciplinary research is also a crucial direction for future studies, combining expertise from fields such as sociology, psychology, and computer science to comprehensively understand the impact of violence on individuals and society [12].

6. Conclusion

Overall, social media violence has profound and comprehensive effects on individual behavior. At the psychological level, individuals may face negative emotions such as anxiety and depression, with prolonged exposure potentially leading to psychological trauma. Behaviorally, an increase in aggressive behavior and social avoidance becomes a possible reaction, negatively impacting individual social relationships. Social media violence may also influence individuals' values and societal views, triggering a sense of distrust in society. Addressing this issue requires comprehensive strategies, including platform regulation, user education, and mental health support. Through these efforts, can provide individuals with a safer, more positive social media environment, mitigating the potential impact of violence on individual behavior and promoting the healthy development of online social spaces.

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Future research should focus more on understanding the differences in violent content across various social media platforms and their impact mechanisms. Further, longitudinal studies will help comprehend the long-term effects of violent influence and the interaction of social media violence with other factors such as individual differences and family environments. Simultaneously, research needs to develop more effective intervention strategies, including enhancing users' media literacy, improving platform content moderation mechanisms, and strengthening education efforts in families and schools, to alleviate the negative impact of social media violence on human behavior. The future development of this research field will contribute to establishing a healthier and safer digital social environment.

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