

The Research on the Influence of the Younger Age Trend of Chinese Media Bloggers on Public Opinion

-- Case Study of Douyin and Bilibili

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Abstract: In recent years, Douyin and other social media platforms continue to develop, and short video has become a way of entertainment for the masses. Many underage bloggers are growing among the massive users of short video content production. Based on this phenomenon, this paper explores the influence of underage social media bloggers on public opinion, fills the gap in current research, and leads minors to use social media platforms reasonably. In this paper, 20 short videos and 200 comments from 4 video makers (2 of them are juveniles and others are adults) have been selected, analyzed, and compared. These videos have similar popularity and content. According to data, underage bloggers received more positive comments than adults and got most of the comments on age. The results show that teenagers are using social media and short videos to empower themselves and create a new image of Generation Z in public opinion. They also help to spread knowledge across different circles, creating new topics of public agenda and culture. However, people should also pay attention to possible negative impacts on minors' values, ordinary life, and psychological health when they face temptation and malice on the Internet. The government, social media platforms, schools, parents, and minors themselves should make a concerted effort to prevent and deal with these risks and offer teenagers safe cyberspace to show themselves and make progress.

Keywords: Chinese media bloggers, underage, younger age trend, empowerment

1. Introduction

With the popularity of cell phones and other intelligent terminals, the short video industry has been developing rapidly. The massive short video contents show the trend of social under-aging.

According to the United Nations report, 1/3 of global Internet users are teenagers; on average, one new child uses Internet devices every half second [1]. The number of Internet users in China was 1.032 billion, with an Internet penetration rate of 73.0% [2]. Among them, the number of underage netizens has reached 183 million, with an Internet penetration rate of 94.9%, much higher than that of adults. The Internet penetration rate of primary school students reached 92.1% [2]. This means that the rate of underage Internet use in China is increasing.

The number of short video users in China has reached 8.8 billion, accounting for 87.8% of all Internet users [2]. Take Douyin's short videos as examples, in May 2020, Zhong Meimei, a junior high school student in Hegang City, Heilongjiang Province, accidentally became popular because of a series of videos imitating his teacher on the Douyin platform. At the beginning of the video explosion, most netizens praised his ability to perform. However, some still thought that Zhong Meimei's performance did not respect his teachers. Subsequent parody videos were dropped in large numbers and public opinion fermented again, triggering public concern about underage video bloggers. There is a heated debate between the public's position that "the children's creativity should be protected" and the position that "students should study well". Therefore, this article will use public opinion (i.e., the comments under the creators' works) on the videos of bloggers on the two short video platforms Douyin and Bilibili as research samples to explore the different views on public opinion. The study also summarizes the impact of early social media exposure on various subjects.

In addition, this paper also tries to refute the stereotype of minors by analyzing comments on underage bloggers' videos on social media and guide children to use social platforms wisely, learn media literacy, and build up positive values.

2. Literature Review

The trend of young age in social media is that the creator of self-media and the viewers are becoming younger than before. According to Fu's study, *Effects of Affinity Motivation on Social Media Use Behavior in Adolescents* by Fu from Xinan University, with the trend of popularization and bloom of Internet technology in China, the social media platforms such as QQ, Weibo, WeChat, Zhihu, Douban, etc., are getting involved in the lives of teenagers in waves [3]. The specific condition of growing up together with the Internet and social media made them, the younger generation, or in other words, Generation Z, bury themselves in social media rather than traditional socializing. The socialization evolution of teenagers has gradually extended from the real world to virtual space. Social media has become a place where teenagers feel they belong in cyberspace. Except that, more and more teenagers complete their mindset, thought construction, habit formation, and personality cultivation in this virtual space [3]. As Fu said above, there is a considerable difference which the new media and Internet SNS had done to Generation Z. Fu did research by the mean of a questionnaire with in-depth interviews to analyze the effects of affinity motivation on social media use behavior in adolescents. The group is between 14 to 28 years old, in order to show the difference between Generation Z and Generation Y, the age above 25 can be seen as the control group. They defined two variables, affinity motivation and social media use behavior in the research, and affinity motivation is qualified in 4 dimensions: social interaction needs, personal integration needs, social support needs, and self-protection needs. And Fu found the correlation between the two variables. Adolescents commonly have strong affinity motivation, among which the need for personal integration is the strongest; thus, social media has been used for an extended period in a daily routine [3]. In terms of demographics, adolescent social media users are younger. The relationship between affinity motivation and social media user behavior shows that adolescents' affinity motivation is significantly positively correlated with the years and duration of social media use; adolescents' personal integration needs, and self-protection needs are all related to their use of

social media. The social interaction needs of adolescents have a significant positive correlation with entertainment and relaxation behavior, interpersonal communication, and maintenance behavior on the use of social media. Recreational relaxation and self-presentation were significantly positively correlated. Fu has done complete and objective research on the younger social media trend; however, she only mentioned a few advantages of social media regarding its effect on adolescents. Fu's study lacks dialectic and critical thinking, so the possibilities of younger social media bloggers are not fully considered.

Since the trend toward younger social media users is becoming increasingly significant in recent years, the impact of using social media on minors has aroused great public discussion, and it has become one of the most popular research topics. Coyne's research has shown that time spent on social media is associated with behavioral, social, and mental health outcomes [4]. The earliest relevant research in China appeared in 2015, in which Du et al. stated that social media made minors more dependent on virtual knowledge acquisition and reduced their ability to learn from subjective thinking and real-life experience. Besides that, overusing social media platforms will aggravate the circumstance of fragmented thinking and ruin their sense of history [5]. In recent years, minors have received mixed reviews on social media use by children. Deborah found that using social media can improve teenagers' happiness and self-esteem, give them a platform to communicate with same-aged people, and help introverted juveniles learn how to socialize with others. But using social media has also been linked to an increased risk of depression and cyberbullying. Especially for adolescent girls, feedback on social media may raise their concerns about body figures [6]. Just as Deng et al. expressed in their paper: owing to minors do not have the integral ability to defend themselves, their using social media will expose their private information, which will put them in a situation with a high risk of danger and worries their guardians [7].

Nowadays, in addition to the heavy use of social media, more and more juveniles have become live streamers on social media, starting their own channels by live streaming or updating videos. Although the mainstream opinion in China is against and criticizes this phenomenon, some papers and research have conducted a more in-depth and positive analysis. On the one hand, Liu believes that there is a legal basis for minors to do live streaming, and their rights as live-streamers, including property and privacy rights, should all be guaranteed [8]. On the other hand, by analyzing 200 comments on two videos of a Chinese underage uploader, Zhang found that among the audience, character-oriented "onlookers" accounted for the majority. In contrast, the video content-oriented "scrutiny" accounted for a minority, only 1/3. What's more, the comments on his videos contain both encouragement and concern. Using new media technology, juvenile video creators can break the traditional adult-controlled discourse, realize self-empowerment and enhance their expression. Their audience also gains the opportunity to set up a group identity by viewing and commenting on uploaded videos [9].

The opinions of the literature about adolescents and social media so far lack criticism. Up to now, most articles have focused on social media's impacts on minors' future development and mental health, while few studies take public opinion as a topic. Also, they did not consider the rise of underage bloggers and other positive effects of social media. Therefore, in this paper, underage video uploaders are taken as examples to explore the influence of the younger age trend of social media on public opinion. The result of this research will play an essential role in guiding juveniles to use social media reasonably and explore different perspectives for future research.

3. Methodology

To conclude, this paper selected two video bloggers on each of the most widely used social media video software in China, Douyin and Bilibili, which attract users of all ages. Two adult bloggers are

ABV Chebide from Bilibili and Zheng Lifenerer from Douyin. Two underage bloggers are Conservative Car Fan Liu from Bilibili and Zhong Meimei from Douyin.

To control the variables, the two bloggers of Bilibili have similar followers, both around 300,000. Their top five videos were selected. Zhong Meimei from Douyin has 3.806 million followers, while Zheng Lifener has 11.758 million followers on Douyin (as of August 19, 2022). In order to compensate for the enormous difference in fan volume and avoid the data inequality brought by these two bloggers, the authors selected five videos with close number of views for both respectively. To compare the public opinion of adult and underage bloggers from two different video platforms, the authors selected 20 videos and the top ten comments under these videos for analysis. With a total of 200 comments as samples, this paper compares the influence of bloggers' age on comments and then analyzes the impact on public opinion.

According to the statistical results, among 200 comments, there were 87.5% of them with positive emotional tendency and 7% with negative emotional trends (neutral comments were not included in the analysis). Regarding comment content, only 44 of 100 comments that two underage bloggers got discussed the video content, while the remaining 56 comments did not focus on the video content itself. On the contrary, among the 100 comments of the sample of adult bloggers, as many as 89 comments were related to the video content, and only 11 comments focus on other topics. Of the 50 comments of the two underage bloggers, 38 comments from Conservative Car Fan Liu focused on his age, while only 20 comments from Zhong Meimei discussed his age. Overall, the comments concerning these two underage bloggers accounted for 58% of their total comments. The chi-square test results also show that the age of the blogger and the video comments are strongly correlated with the video content.

4. Results

The reason why only less than half of the comments from the underage bloggers discussed the content of the video itself is due to the huge difference between their underage status and the image presented in the video: quick thinking at a young age or imitating the teacher vividly. This contrast is more attractive to the audience than the video contents; from the video comments of Conservative Car Fan Liu, it can be seen that many people do not understand the knowledge of racing, and racing is not something that everyone can contact in their daily lives. That is why many people are only concerned about how Liu Jingxing (the blogger's actual name) speaks clearly at such a young age but ignore the video content. Since the identity of adult bloggers is commonplace and ABV Chebide rarely appears in the video, the "identity transparency" of these two bloggers is much more apparent than that of the two underage bloggers. Firstly, there is no surprise in the difference in identity and performance. Secondly, the rare appearances of ABV Chebide makes video contents the protagonist of everyone's discussion. Thirdly, Zheng Lifener's vivid and funny action of imitating something that happened in daily life makes the audience focus on "substituting themselves" instead of paying attention to every move of Zheng Lifener out of the situation.

Two underage bloggers make different videos. Conservative Car Fan Liu explains the racing knowledge to the audience like a professor, while Zhong Meimei imitates the teacher's demeanor with rich expressions and body language. As for the former, due to the audience's unfamiliarity with racing knowledge and the monotony of the blogger's body movements, the audience will naturally focus on the blogger's young age. Although the latter is also a minor, it is easier for the audience to be personally involved than the former since his video content contains performance and imitation components and arouses laughter. The audience will pay more attention to the situation or consider their own experience. Although there is also implicit praise for the young blogger who imitates the teacher perfectly, it is not as large as the former.

With the development of the Internet, the traditional structure of discourse has been gradually changing. Along with the increase in the number of underage bloggers and the improvement of video quality, the public opinion about underage people has also shown a positive trend. In the long run, this is a positive start - gradually focusing on the content of the video itself rather than the underage gimmick.

5. Discussion

Analysis of the data shows that underage bloggers receive slightly more positive comments than adult bloggers; their millions of views and over 10,000 comments also show viewers' approval of underage bloggers. This sense of approval comes not only from the attractiveness of the video content, but also from the expression ability and professionalism of the underage bloggers that exceed people's perception. Under the videos of Conservative Car Fan Liu and Zhong Meimei, about 30% of the comments directly addressed them as "Professor", "Teacher" and so on. These easily neglected underage groups use video and technology to break through the traditional discourse control of adults on social media, empower themselves, and win the power to speak for minors. At the same time, the socialization process of parents by the children is called "Reverse Socialization" [10]. Studies have shown that minors are significant facilitators of parental socialization and have significant impacts on their parents' behavior [11], which in turn affects the adult group as a whole and then all other audiences [12]. The emergence of underage bloggers also constantly updates and influences the viewers' opinions and attitudes, breaking through the stereotypes of adults towards minors and "educating" the audience, especially the adult viewers, with their excellent performance, transforming public opinion, revolutionizing traditional concepts, and shaping a new image of Generation Z minors.

On the other hand, the emergence of underage bloggers has promoted the spread of knowledge and culture across different groups. Many viewers are attracted by the age label of the bloggers and watch the videos, eventually entering and understanding a new field of knowledge. For example, under the video of Conservative Car Fan Liu, there were comments such as "Help, I can't believe I listened to it". Liu was originally a car section video uploader. The audience of this section is generally car fans or people in the field. However, through the "diversion" of underage bloggers such as Liu, the audience gradually broke the limitation of groups and gained knowledge in new subjects. At the same time, these underage bloggers interacted with the audience through videos. They created a lot of new "stems" in the interaction, making cultural innovation at the level of popular entertainment. The popularity of underage bloggers such as Zhong Meimei has received widespread attention and discussion and was once the focus of debate in the press and social media. This has also set a new agenda for the public and attracted more attention to the underage group.

However, in addition to the positive aspects, possible adverse effects should also be concerned. Compared to adult bloggers, only 44% of comments on underage bloggers' videos are about the content of their videos, with more viewers focusing on the age of the blogger rather than the specific content of the video. After the label "underage blogger" has received great attention and discussion, it is likely that the underage gimmick will be used to attract traffic without paying attention to the content and quality of the video, which will lead minors to build up incorrect values and have a fundamentally negative impact on their long-term development and ideology. In addition, the attention, income, and fame these underage bloggers gain by posting videos are likely to have a positive effect on their peers, causing more and more minors who are eager to express themselves and gain a voice to join the ranks of "video bloggers". Although through planning and producing videos, children can exercise their writing and expression skills, further promote the shift of public opinion and traditional concepts, and grasp more Internet voice, objectively speaking, minors are still in the growth stage. Their thinking and various qualities are not perfect and mature. There is a

possibility that underage bloggers may become addicted to social networks, ignore their studies, and put the cart before the horse. Some malicious speculations and comments may also hurt their self-confidence and emotions. For example, according to research from Pew in 2018, 72% of teens mentioned that using social media had led to more bullying on campus and the spread of rumors, and 15% of figures thought that social media also distorted reality and led to an unrealistic view of other people [13].

Therefore, it is evident that underage bloggers have become more active on social media. People should be wary of malicious marketing that uses “underage” as a label to attract audiences' attention, and especially pay attention to the review of content posted by underage bloggers on platforms with small audiences or high sinkage of users. From the platform's perspective, encouraging underage bloggers to post videos of good enough quality is to provide a platform for minors to show themselves. Still, it is more important to strictly review the video contents in the background to prevent the adults behind the juvenile from using the image of minors as a gimmick to attract viewers and disregard the long-term healthy development of teenagers. At the same time, they should also try not to make a "one-size-fits-all" approach to videos posted by minors and leave minors with appropriate space for development and online discourse.

In terms of minors themselves, they should also promptly improve their media literacy. Content is the core of video, and momentary gimmicks will not really retain audiences. For long-term development, the quality and standard of videos should be maintained within their capacity. Relevant departments, schools, and parents should also intervene appropriately to focus on the cultivation of media literacy and the establishment of values for minors, paying attention to the Internet environment of minors, reducing the negative impact of the Internet on minors, and creating a more harmonious and positive public opinion atmosphere and cyberspace for them.

6. Conclusion

This study investigates the relationship between the younger age trend of online social media and public opinion. The short video references used in the study were selected from Douyin and Bilibili. Data consisted of adult and underage bloggers, knowledgeable and non-knowledgeable bloggers from both platforms. 200 Comments were chosen as samples to analyze the influence of underage bloggers on public opinion. The final results indicated that underage bloggers received more positive comments than adult bloggers. According to comments under the videos of Conservative Car Fan Liu and Zhong Meimei, it can also be seen that as long as video contents have output values and the quality of videos has improved, and there is a trend of positive attitude in the public opinion towards teenagers. In this regard, in the face of the phenomenon of underage social media, the public need to break the "stereotypes" and "stubbornness", focus on the content of the videos, learn to admire minors' abilities, and protect their excellent videos from killing by inappropriate online comments. At the same time, after the label “underage blogger” was widely discussed, there were also a large number of marketing accounts and video users who used “underage” as a sign to gain attention without focusing on the output of the video, which may lead to building up incorrect values and blindly following the crowd. Therefore, while encouraging and protecting minors to post valuable videos, people need to be wary of malicious marketing by using the label “underage” and strengthen the learning of media literacy among nonage. This study is also limited since specific information about the commenters is unable to collect. If the age of the commenters could be collected under a standardized social media format, it would be more informative to study the impact of underage social media on public opinion.

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