

# *The Social Media Influence on Youth Spending*

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**Abstract:** In the 21st century, social media has become a tool for people to communicate and the most frequently used software. In China, the research focuses on whether social media has an impact on youth spending. This study used questionnaires and random interviews to determine whether social media has an impact on teenagers' spending. A total of 103 questionnaires were collected and 8 teenagers out of 103 teenagers (high school students) were selected as interviewees. The study found that teenagers were influenced by the spread of social media, had wrong ideas about money and led to an increase in spending. The study hopes that more attention will be paid to the development of money and spending concepts among teenagers.

**Keywords:** youth spending, teenager, social media

## 1. Introduction

With the progress of society and the development of the Internet, the way of cultural transmission is no longer single. From the beginning of the paper media era to the current Internet era, the diversity of contemporary cultural communication is reflected through social media. According to Worldometer [1], as of December 2021, the world's population exceeded 7.9 billion people, with more than 4.5 billion of them using some form of social media, or about 57% of the global population. The number of audiences on the Internet is increasing rapidly with teenagers becoming the main user group.

In 2018, the promulgation of China's Regulations [2] on the Online Protection of teenagers caused widespread discussion. Representatives from all walks of life pointed out that with the rapid development of the Internet, Chinese teenagers are seriously affected by the concept of luxury and excessive consumption. The creation and development of media have brought a huge impact on teenagers and has changed their way of spending. It affects people's viewpoint of money and consumption from all levels and fields.

Therefore, this study takes Chinese adolescents as the research object to analyze the influence of social media on adolescents' money and consumption concept.

However, most studies that have analyzed the effects of social media on spending behaviours tend to focus on adults instead of teenagers. Most scholars focus on analyzing the social media impacts on adolescent values and mental health, but less on what kinds of groups are likely to influence adolescents. Harrison Kan [3] argued that media is a double-edged sword. Inappropriate videos, texts, and pictures disseminated in media can cause harm to adolescents. It can lead to the destruction of the mainstream value system of society if governments do not pay attention to it.

Meanwhile, adolescents' financial views have been largely ignored in most academic literature. Thus, it is unclear whether social media is responsible for the changes in teenagers' luxury purchasing patterns.

This thesis analyzes the relevant existing research and defines the meaning of adolescents' money concept. Using a combination of theoretical and empirical research, teenagers' consumption values under the influence of social media is investigated and studied by means of questionnaires and interviews aiming at high school students from several schools in the neighbourhood. The negative impact of social media on high school students' consumption values is analyzed. Corresponding strategies for consumer value education are proposed to provide useful reference and guidance for high school students' consumption values.

## **2. Literature Review**

Consumption is an act, which refers to the economic behavior of human beings to satisfy their desires through consumer goods [4]. But at the same time, the concept of consumption can also be divided into the scope of consumption. How to understand money and how to plan it properly are both issues of consumption.

Consumption is the fuel for societal evolution and growth. According to Dunn, Aknin, and Norton [5], consumerism is an ideology that binds people to a particular system, an ideology that transforms consumption from a means to an end to an end in itself, so that the acquisition of goods and properties becomes the foundation of our existence, identity, and sense of self. Various forces, such as the media, have contributed to the widespread acceptability of consumerist society.

Beginning from 1980s, China experienced rapid and massive socio-economic growth, while entering the era of mass consumption. With the development of the economy and the influence of the morphology of the Chinese population, the consumer mentality and lifestyle of Chinese residents are following the consumer society that shows a clear tendency of consumerism. The purpose of consumption is to constantly pursue the satisfaction of manufactured and stimulated desires [6]. In today's Chinese society, many young people have misconceptions about money and deviations from the concept of consumption, resulting in an excessive and extravagant consumption behavior, and even borrowing and early consumption.

### **2.1. The Influence of Social Media on Youth Spending**

#### **2.1.1. Time Spent on Social Media**

Since the new century, mobile Internet technology has become more and more perfect, and social media have gradually integrated into young people's daily life, time spent on social media may influence teenagers' spending habits [7].

Social media, with the characteristics of immediacy, participation, dialogue and sharing, has shaped a new online interaction model and information dissemination landscape, profoundly affecting people's real life and behaviors. According to 2019 National Research Report on Internet Usage of Minors [8], the size of China's underage Internet users reached 175 million. Generation Z, born after 1997, are known as "screen addicts" or "screen teens" who only know a world where they have constant and instant access to the Internet and social media [9]. Generation Z has more information than any previous generation. Today's teenagers are growing up in the computer age.

#### **2.1.2. Social Influencer**

Social media is a social platform based on users' social relationships, and a platform for content production and communication. There is no consensus on the definition of social media. Some

scholars believe that social media is a set of Internet applications built on the ideas and technologies of Web 2.0, which allows users to create and exchange generated content [10]. Nowadays, the online environment is diverse, and every user can post their life on social media. This has led to the emergence of many videos on the Internet that promoted negative emotions and high luxury of life. For teenagers, they do not have a clear sense of right and wrong, and cannot distinguish between good and bad accurately.

It is difficult for teenagers to distinguish between the good and bad intentions of others across the Internet, and they cannot distinguish well between real paid content and so-called free sharing [11]. In relation to the "Report on Judicial Protection of Minors on the Internet" released by the Beijing Internet Court of China [12], since the establishment of the Beijing Internet Court in September 2018, a total of 76 online disputes involving minors have been received. The average value of the 20 game recharge cases was 84,647 Chinese yuan, with the highest amount being 610,000 Chinese yuan; the average value of the live reward cases was about 70,000 Chinese yuan; and the average value of the online shopping cases was about 35,000 Chinese yuan.

According to a study that was conducted by Swant [13], the level of confidence that consumers place in social media influencers is comparable to that which they place in their friends. Therefore, e-commerce activities among this group will continue to increase along with their disposable income, thus making them a lucrative target market due to their sheer purchasing power. Other scholars have argued that teens tend to trust the content conveyed by influencers and have a better impression of the products recommended or advertised by influencers [14]. With the overwhelming online marketing of peers on social media, teenagers are more and more eager for immediacy without waiting a longer time for consumption. It further stimulates a series of negative psychological effects such as comparison, imitation and gold worship among teenagers. This ultimately concentrates on the "consumption" effect, which makes teenagers fall into the trap of endless desire to consume products in front of the media.

### 2.1.3. Peer Pressure

The peers influence on adolescents is mainly divided into two parts, one is the influence on adolescents' mental health, such as stimulating adolescents to compare excessively and worship gold and other bad psychology; the other is the influence on adolescents' consumption concept.

The aspect is the impact on students' consumer attitude. Because of the immaturity of their minds, teenagers have been regarded as the center of gravity by their families and well sheltered by their parents, which can easily lead to their self-centered thinking. Adolescents are at a point in their lives where they are struggling to understand who they are, and at the same time, they are struggling to find their place in the group and fit in. Even though their understanding of branding and consumption is more complex [15]. In order to maintain their status in the peer group, some students will show their value in terms of appearance and life and widen the gap with others and gain the "respect" from others, without considering their family's ability to afford and their own financial ability to pursue brands and high consumption. This phenomenon is exacerbated by social media celebrities at the same age. This can result in the psychology of comparison and vanity and to make irrational shopping decisions. Moreover, the dormitory group living of high school students will influence each other's consumption values, and there is no shortage of students who are in the psychology of comparison, leading to blind and irrational consumption.

## 2.2. The Context of Youth Spending in China

There are several psychological characteristics of adolescents during their adolescence, which will have an impact on their spending habits. First of all, the state of interpersonal relationships in

middle school has a profound impact on the degree of physical and mental health and social adjustment of individuals, and is a very important part of the adolescent growth process. Along with the widespread use of social media, more and more adolescents use social media to maintain interpersonal relationships. When over-relying on social media, it will have certain effects on realistic socialization [16]. Secondly, they are in the initial stage of socialization, starting to have the ability to think independently and have great curiosity about the outside world. In addition to the influence of group cognition under direct contact, social media can bring more convenient and fast information exchange and new social experience to adolescents. In the virtual network world, adolescents can freely communicate and combine according to their interests, forming various group communication and gaining a sense of personal psychological belonging and identity in the process [17].

Since the reform and opening up of China with the rapid economic development, the living standard of each family has increased rapidly. From the beginning, the main problem of Chinese families changed from food and clothing to the education of children, so Chinese parents have a certain degree of indulgence in their children's expenses. The problem of Chinese parents' indulgence has always existed. According to a survey conducted by China Youth News Social Survey Center and Questionnaire.com among 1,532 parents of children aged 0-6, 84.1% of the parents surveyed feel that there were more parents around who like to coax their children with electronic products [18]. Chinese parents already spoiled their children during childhood, and when it comes to adolescence, they were even more supportive of their children's money problems.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research Design**

To conduct quantitative and qualitative analysis on the survey data, this study employs two methods: questionnaire and interview.

#### **3.2. Participants**

All total has 102 participants with 48 are females and 49 are men. 5 out of 102 are unknow. Four out of 102 are aged 13-15, 79 participants are aged 15-8, 16 participants are aged 19-22, and only 2 participants are aged 23 or over.

#### **3.3. Survey Planning**

##### **3.3.1. Questionnaire Survey**

The survey was created on wjx.cn (<https://www.wjx.cn/>), which could be immediately linked to and posted on wechat - the primary social media network that used by our target respondents. The survey intends to examine the influence of social media on the consumption habits of adolescents. This impact may be moderated by gender, age, personality, and educational background of the participants. The first section of the survey was meant to collect the general information. The second section of the questionnaire is consisted by multiple-choice questions, short-answer questions, and bipolar questions to determine the feelings and thoughts of participants when they are using social media.

Throughout the survey, multiple-choice, polarity, and text input questions are used. Multiple options are mutually exclusive, and such responses can produce readily studied data. Multiple-choice questions are the briefest, therefore they save time for responses. Text entry questions can provide

participants with the opportunity to give more thoughts that can be converted into valuable data for researchers.

### 3.3.2. Interview

Three males and five females between the ages of 16 and 17 were selected from the questionnaire pool to participate in the interview. With the approval of the interviewee, conduct a 20- to 30-minute interview over WeChat calling.

The entire interview was taped in advance to facilitate investigative follow-up. All interview questions are consisting of single-choice options and can be expanded to elicit more thorough responses and more valuable research data.

## 4. Finding

In order to accurately grasp teenagers' cognition of social media, as well as the degree of social media influence on their values of money, high school students aged 15-18 were selected as the main research target people. Questionnaire and random interview were adopted to investigate teenagers aged between 13 years old and 23 years old.

### 4.1. Time

Over half of high school students play on their phones for over 5 hours daily, followed by three to five hours a day (31.37 %), and one to three hours a day (14.71 %). During the COVID-19 time, this was to be expected, but according to interviewee A, the dependency on mobile phones did not reduce after returning to regular life. Interviewee A claims that checking his phone is the first thing in the morning. They spend more than half of their day on their phones, excluding sleep, and their dependence on social media is increasing. This is not a good thing for pupils in high school who lack self-control. In addition, the more time teenagers spend on their phones, the more they are exposed to social media.

### 4.2. The Online Environment

Among high school students, the concept of money should be the most vulnerable against outside influences. Teenagers cannot understand the concept of money; the money they have now usually comes from their parents. In China, an increasing number of teenagers are using social media. Lacking maturity, they are easily swayed by others when exposing to an unfamiliar Internet environment. Currently, many Internet users choose to show off their money in order to gain attention from others. At the same time, many high school students are posting their extravagant lifestyles on social media.

According to the poll, only 9.8% of respondents consider big spending to be the exception, while 33.8% consider it to be a regular occurrence. Respondent G is 16 years old. In the interview, he revealed that he can spend \$1,500 a month on clothes, hang out with friends and buy music equipment. Also, Respondent E mentioned that she spent thousands of dollars on luxury items in one go.

82.8% of people believe that the expensive and wasteful videos made by some influencers can influence their attitude towards money and make people think it is easy to earn money. However, in the course of the interview, all eight respondents mentioned their disgust with such videos.

The report shows that 81.37% of people said they were upset after watching videos on social media of teenagers showing their wealthy families and extravagant spending, and said these videos affect their views of money. Respondents B and C did not find the videos satisfying, but wanted to

watch them out of curiosity. Also, high school students with poor self-control may be attracted to the endless videos available on the Internet.

After analyzing the data from interviews with eight high school students, it was found that all eight respondents believed they were influenced by some extent by social media to consume. Three of the girls mentioned that they had developed a desire to buy through watching videos on the cosmetics consumption, which led to their over consumption.

### 4.3. Peer Influence

In China, the phenomenon of under-age internet is becoming more and more common. Increasing numbers of adolescents are using social media, and many are posting online videos. According to the interview, high school pupils consider this as usual and also anticipate being popular. However, many adolescents opt to share their lavish lifestyle in order to attract attention.

According to the survey, just 7.84% of adolescents believe they are not going to be negatively impacted. The majority of individuals believe the video will have an effect on them, and 31.85% believe the impact will be long-lasting. According to further interviews, the majority of individuals felt some unpleasant emotions, such as envy and feelings of unfairness, due to the financial disparity amongst their peers. After watching these videos, interviewee A said she felt depressed for a while, *"I felt inferior to my family and always thought about it before I went to bed at night"*. After that, she became more concerned about money and appearance. However, at the same time, she started to make some expensive purchasing. This means that when teenagers' minds are not fully developed, they are easily influenced by outside influences and jealousy.

The results of the questionnaire indicate that a significant number of adolescents strongly disapprove of this sort of behavior shown by their peers. They believe this action is inappropriate. However, it will have a significant impact on them. Due to Internet sharing, kids will have purchasing impulses, and will result in over consumption. For adolescents who are lack self-control, excessive spending can be a regular occurrence. According to respondents, people frequently make impulsive purchases because of online shopping posts and videos, as well as the pressure of their peers. The majority of respondents desire to purchase luxury items once their peers do so. Conformity and comparative psychology lead to adolescents' blind consuming.

## 5. Discussion

This study sought to investigate the impact of social media use on adolescent spending. The findings are consistent with earlier studies showing that social media has a negative impact on adolescents' financial attitudes. Some respondents said they were not affected too much as they are wealth enough to not think that way. However, they were still subconsciously influenced by social media. Furthermore, it gives clear data on the impact of social media on teenagers, showing that the intensity of social media use has a direct impact on the outcome of these activities. In particular, peer competition is one of the major factors promoting social comparison and envy when adolescents are intensively exposed to social media [19], and it is one of the indirect causes of adolescent overconsumption. Regarding the function of the elements of the online environment, the survey showed that the Internet has negative impact on the adolescents who lack self-control and good judgment. Thus the use of social media will lead to the formation of incorrect beliefs. Consistent with the conjectured performance in the previous paper, the overall findings suggest that adolescents' misconceptions about money are partly due to their use of social media. A point worth exploring is that adolescents are resistant to becoming social media influencers.

## 6. Conclusion

This study examines the influence of social media on the financial views of adolescents. The questionnaire consisted of 14 closed questions and 7 open questions. Researchers examined 102 adolescents.

From the findings, the following conclusions are drawn: 1. Current teenage perspectives on money are not completely established and are susceptible to being influenced by social media, which can cause emotional volatility. 2. Social media may have a detrimental effect on teenagers' purchasing habits since teenagers lack a strong financial awareness. In the subject of study on adolescents, research on money idea is scarce, although research on money concept for adults exists.

It is vitally crucial for adolescents. Upon reflection on my study, I've determined that the survey data must be more comprehensive for our research results to be more credible. Teenagers' thoughts are mutable, and each person's ideas are unique. There must be sufficient evidence to support the case. The poll of adolescents reveals that social media has a significant influence not just on adolescents' views on money, but also on their studies and daily lives.

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## Appendix

本次问卷调查中所指的网红为社交媒体的网络红人

Celebrities referred to in this questionnaire are Internet celebrities on social media

问卷调查 Questionnaire

1. 请问你的年龄是多少? What's your age?

A.13-15 B.15-17 C.18-20 D.20-24 E 24+

2. 请问你的学历是什么? What's your educational background?

a.初中 Junior school b. 高中 High school c.大学 undergraduate d. 研究生及其以上 Postgraduate and above e. -----

3. 请问你在日常生活中会使用社交媒体吗? Do you use social media in your daily life?

a.Yes, five hours a day on average 经常,平均每天五小时

b.No,occasionally use 不经常,偶尔使用

c.Not at all 基本不用

4. 请问,你在日常生活中使用哪些社交媒体软件? What social media apps do you use in your daily life? (rank top 3)

A.WeChat

B.Red book

C.Weibo

D.Douyin

E.Instagram

F.-----

5. 请问,你在社交媒体上最关注哪一类的博主? What kind of bloggers do you follow most on social media?

A.美食博主 food bloggers

B.美妆博主 beauty channel

C.娱乐搞笑博主 Entertaining funny bloggers

D.新闻类博主 News Bloggers

E.其他 others

6. 请问你是否会在社交媒体上观看 vlog 视频? Do you watch vlog videos on social media?

A. Yes, every day b. Yes, occasionally C No

A.是,很频繁,每日都看 B.是,偶尔会看 C.基本不看

7. 请问你一般喜欢看什么类型的 vlog? What kind of vlog do you like to read?

A. 美妆 beauty makeup

B. 日常生活 Daily life

C. 旅游 travel

D. 留学日常 The daily life of international students

E. 美食 Food

F. 补充说明 supplement



8.请问你是如何定义高消费的?(w) How do you define high consumption? (w)

9.请问你认为现在高消费视频在社交媒体上是否普遍?Do you think high-cost videos are common on social media now?

A. 普遍,80%以上都是 Common,more than 80%

B. 普遍,50%以上都是 common,more than 50%

C. 不普遍 Not

10.请问,你对于青少年在社交媒体上发布高消费 vlog 视频上是什么看法?What do you think about teenagers Posting high-consumption vlog videos on social media?

11.对于这种视频,是否会影响到你的消费观和金钱观?For this kind of video, will it affect your view of spending and money?

12.你认为是什么因素导致这种现象(青少年在社交媒体上发布高消费视频)的?What factors do you think contribute to this phenomenon?

13.请问你对于网红“一日消费一百万”这种视频有什么看法?What do you think of the video of "one million dollars a day" by Internet celebrities?

14.对于此类视频,是否会影响到你的金钱观和消费观? Does this kind of video affect your view of money and consumption?

15.你认为,大网红和同龄人的高消费视频,哪一个对于你产生的影响更大?为什么? Which do you think has more influence on you, big Internet celebrities or expensive videos from your peers? Why is that?

16.你认为,这种高消费现象对于青少年的发展有什么影响? In your opinion, what effect does this phenomenon of high consumption have on the development of teenagers?

17.你是否想过成为一名网红?为什么?Have you ever thought about becoming an Internet celebrity? Why is that?