

The Impact of TikTok on Chinese Teenagers' Stereotypes

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Abstract: This article explores the impact of TikTok on Chinese teenagers' stereotypes. It does so by analyzing five key factors, including user-generated content, platform algorithms and recommendation systems, social pressure and group identity, advertising and brand image, and social perception. The article provides insights into how TikTok plays a role in shaping and reinforcing teenagers' stereotypes of different groups. User-generated content, a core element of the platform, reflects the creativity and individuality of teens while potentially exaggerating and reinforcing stereotypes. The influence of platform algorithms and recommendation systems then makes it easier for stereotypes to spread among users, creating information filter bubbles. Social pressure and group identity drive teens to be more likely to be influenced by their peers to follow and spread stereotypical content. Advertisements and brand images spread stereotypical messages through the media, further deepening adolescents' stereotypes. Finally, theoretical frameworks such as Social Cognitive Theory, Symbolic Interactionism Theory and Media Literacy Theory are introduced. The mechanisms of TikTok's influence on adolescent stereotypes are interpreted from different perspectives. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of TikTok's shaping of adolescents' social perceptions and provides a theoretical basis for future intervention and education.

Keywords: Yearly Stereotypes, Chinese Teenagers, TikTok.

1. Introduction

In today's digital era, social media platforms have become an important force in shaping social perceptions and individual identities. Among them, TikTok, a globally popular short-video app, has created a unique social culture trend among Chinese teenagers. However, as its popularity continues to expand, research on how TikTok influences stereotypes of Chinese adolescents has become increasingly important. In this paper, we will explore the formation and shaping of TikTok's stereotypes on Chinese adolescents and analyze the deeper implications of this phenomenon. Stereotypes, as a cognitive framework shaped through symbols and social interactions, are not only related to an individual's understanding of others, but also to the construction of identity and role-playing in social interactions. TikTok, as a digital media platform full of creativity and interactivity, has a potential and far-reaching impact on adolescents' stereotypes through its content and socialization mechanisms.

1.1. Background and current situation

The popularity of TikTok cannot be ignored globally. Especially in China, this short-video app has become part of the daily life of hundreds of millions of users. Its unique way of presenting content, including short videos, music creation and various challenges, has attracted a large number of teenage users. This has made TikTok a digital social space that not only shapes teenagers' aesthetics and fashion trends, but also influences their social perceptions to a certain extent. However, as TikTok becomes part of teens' daily entertainment, we must think cautiously about its potential impact. Digital media platforms are often dominated by pop culture and fashion trends, which can lead to certain types of stereotypes being spread and reinforced on social media. Therefore, there is an urgent need to understand how TikTok shapes stereotypes among adolescents and the potential

impact of this influence on their identity and social interactions (Rogers, 2021).

1.2. Motivation and Purpose of the Study

The motivation of this study is to fill the current knowledge gap about the influence of TikTok on Chinese adolescents' stereotypes. Although TikTok has attracted extensive research attention in the field of social media. However, more limited in-depth research still exists on its impact on adolescents' psychological perceptions, especially on the shaping of stereotypes. By digging deeper into the mechanism of TikTok's influence on Chinese adolescents' stereotypes, we aim to provide scholars, educators, and parents with a more comprehensive understanding. This will not only help to understand the shaping of adolescents' social cognition by digital media platforms, but also provide more scientific and practical guidance for the healthy development of adolescents in the digital age.

1.3. Research framework

This paper will use the theoretical frameworks of symbolic interactionism and cultural studies to analyze in depth the process of TikTok's stereotyping of teenagers. The theory of symbolic interactionism will help us understand how TikTok as a symbolic communication platform shapes the image of teenagers. The cultural studies perspective, on the other hand, can reveal the impact of TikTok on Chinese teenagers' cultural values and social perceptions. The combined use of these two theories will provide us with a more comprehensive and deeper perception, helping to reveal the complex mechanisms of digital media platforms in shaping adolescent stereotypes.

1.4. Theoretical significance and practical value of the study

Through this study, we will gain a deeper understanding of TikTok's impact on the formation and education of stereotypes among Chinese adolescents. From the theoretical

perspectives of symbolic interactionism and cultural studies expects to reveal how digital media platforms subconsciously shape and spread adolescents' images and values in social interactions. This will help to understand the dual impact of digital media platforms on adolescents' social perceptions and academic performance, providing deeper insights for future education and media instruction. On a practical level, the findings of this study will provide targeted recommendations for parents, educators, and policymakers. Through a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms by which TikTok shapes adolescent stereotypes, we can develop more effective educational strategies to guide adolescents to use digital media more rationally, cultivate critical thinking about media messages, and enhance academic performance while maintaining healthy physical and mental development.

2. Mechanisms and Potential Factors of TikTok's Influence on Adolescents

2.1. Content ecology and diversity

The diversity of TikTok's content ecology, one of the most popular social media platforms today, provides a unique space for teens to demonstrate creativity and express their individuality. The various forms of short videos that have emerged on this platform include music, dance, funny, education, and many other areas. This provides a colorful experience for young users. The diversity of TikTok helps to stimulate the interest of teenagers, push them to explore different forms of artistic expression, and develop creativity and aesthetics. On TikTok, users can showcase their talents in creative ways and create unique and engaging content. This has a positive impact on young people's self-awareness and self-expression. However, at the same time, some of the content on the platform may also present stereotypes through exaggeration or specific angles, which in turn may influence users' perceptions of specific groups. Therefore, platform administrators need to maintain censorship of content to ensure diversity without reinforcing stereotypes of certain groups (Leyn et al., 2021).

2.2. Social Influence and Group Identity

TikTok, as a social platform, emphasizes interaction and sharing among users. In this social experience, adolescents are often influenced by the views and values of their peers, forming a strong sense of group identity. This sense of identification can shape adolescents' identity perception to a certain extent, making them feel supported and recognized by the social network. However, there are some potential risks behind social influence. If a certain group widely spreads stereotypes on TikTok, teens participating in that group may be more likely to accept those impressions, thus deepening their stereotypical perceptions of a particular group. Platforms should encourage users to develop the ability to think independently and reduce the tendency to follow the crowd blindly through education and guidance.

2.3. Algorithmic Recommendation

TikTok's algorithmic recommendation is one of the keys to its success, providing users with personalized content by analyzing their behavior and interests. This personalized recommendation may also come with the problem of information filtering bubbles, which allows users to access information in a customized information environment. If this customized environment contains stereotypes, then teenagers

may be more likely to be swayed by these impressions. To address this issue, platforms should increase regulation and transparency of their algorithms. Users need to be informed about how recommended content is shaped and how they can adapt their interests to make recommendations more diverse. Additionally, user education is key, as teens need to develop critical thinking about information, rather than relying on the "filtering" power of recommendation algorithms.

2.4. Brands and consumer culture

TikTok, as a platform focusing on creativity and individuality, provides an opportunity for brands to directly interact with young users through advertisements, sponsorships and product placements. Brands are able to establish a distinctive image on TikTok through clever marketing strategies, directly influencing young people's consumer attitudes and cultural values. However, this also requires the platform and brands to act in a responsible manner, avoiding promotions that involve stereotyping or negative portrayals of specific groups. Teenagers are often easily influenced by popular brands and products, so branding needs to pay more attention to cultural diversity and inclusiveness in order to portray a positive brand image.

2.5. Educate and inspire

TikTok, as a short video sharing platform, is not only a place for entertainment, but also a window to showcase knowledge and skills. By sharing educational content, some users provide a way for young people to acquire new knowledge and inspiration. This is a positive contribution to young users' interest in learning and creativity development. However, some content may be interspersed with stereotypes and possibly even misinformation, which may affect young people's perceptions and attitudes towards relevant topics. Platforms should emphasize the review and supervision of content to ensure that educational content is authentic and reliable. In addition, users are encouraged to upload educationally valuable content on their own to improve the knowledge level of the entire platform and make TikTok a more beneficial learning resource.

3. TikTok's Formation of Teenage Stereotypes

3.1. User-generated content

TikTok, as a platform that focuses on user-generated content, the diversity and creativity of its content is the key to its appeal to teenagers. Users can express their creativity, talent and personality through short videos. However, it is this environment of free expression that also provides the soil for the formation of stereotypes. On the one hand, while seeking popularity and likes, users may resort to exaggeration and dramatization to attract attention. This may lead them to emphasize or exaggerate the characteristics of certain specific groups, thus conveying stereotypes. For example, some users may reinforce stereotypical images of certain social groups through mocking performances, and this behavior may spread across social networks. On the other hand, user-generated content is driven by social influences and trends, and many teenagers may try to imitate popular users and cater to popular trends. If certain popular users disseminate content with stereotypical images, other users may imitate them because they are chasing the heat, thus further spreading and reinforcing these impressions. Therefore, to mitigate this

problem, TikTok needs to step up its efforts in content moderation to ensure that user-generated content does not involve discriminatory and stereotypical remarks. In addition, the platform can guide users to create content that is valuable, inclusive and encourages understanding by promoting more positive content and organizing educational events(Wright, 2021).

3.2. Platform Algorithms and Recommender Systems

TikTok's recommendation system is one of the keys to its success, providing users with personalized content by analyzing their behavior and interests. However, this algorithm can also be a factor in stereotype reinforcement. By reinforcing users' confirmation of pre-existing opinions, the algorithm may lead to the formation of information filtering bubbles, making users more exposed to content from the same point of view, which in turn deepens the perception of stereotypes. On the one hand, algorithms tend to recommend content that easily triggers users to click and engage, and stereotypes tend to be controversial and discussed, which may increase the weight of such content in the recommender system. On the other hand, focusing too much on users' past behaviors and ignoring their underlying needs and diverse interests also tends to immerse users in a particular viewpoint or position. To address this challenge, TikTok could consider optimizing its recommendation algorithms to be more focused on diversity and inclusion. The platform can slow down the reinforcing effect of stereotypes by increasing exposure to different viewpoints and directing users to a wider range of information.

3.3. Social Pressure and Group Identity

Social pressure and group identity are evident on TikTok, where adolescents tend to crave recognition and acceptance from their social networks. This psychological factor of craving for approval makes them more susceptible to the views and values of their peers. When some stereotypical content is popular on social networks, adolescents may join this communication trend because of their quest for approval, thus reinforcing the stereotype. Social influence may also lead to herd behavior, where adolescents are more inclined to adopt the views and behaviors of the majority. If certain stereotypes are dominant on social networks, teens may be more likely to accept and spread them in order to conform to group identity. To address this issue, TikTok can mitigate the effects of social pressure and group identity on stereotype formation by promoting positive social behaviors and emphasizing the importance of individual independent thinking and diverse perspectives. Users are educated and guided that they should be more rational in dealing with opinions on social networks, encouraging them to think independently and not be swayed by blindly following the crowd.

3.4. Advertising and brand image

TikTok serves as a platform for advertising and branding, and brand image and advertising content have a huge impact on adolescents. Stereotypes in advertisements may portray specific groups of people through exaggeration and dramatization, thus profoundly influencing adolescents' perceptions of these groups. On the one hand, some brands may choose to employ controversial and stereotypical content in order to get attention. While this practice may achieve a

momentary advertising effect, it also tends to reinforce adolescents' perceptions of stereotypes. On the other hand, some brands may involve stereotypical depictions of specific groups in their product placements, which may likewise leave a lasting impression on teens. To mitigate this problem, TikTok can strengthen its review and regulation of advertisements by standardizing their content and avoiding exaggerated and discriminatory expressions. Brands should be more responsible in their advertising campaigns, focusing on cultural diversity and inclusiveness and avoiding transmissions.

4. Analysis of Theoretical Perspectives

4.1. Social Cognitive Theory

Social Cognitive Theory is a theory that emphasizes individual learning and cognitive processes in social environments. On social media platforms like TikTok, social cognitive theory can be applied to explain how adolescents form stereotypes about specific groups through observation, imitation, and interaction. First, social cognitive theory emphasizes the importance of imitation. On TikTok, users observe other people's short videos to learn how they act, speak, and interact. If certain users disseminate content with stereotypes, other users may be influenced and try to imitate to gain social approval. This imitation behavior forms a circle of group identity through the transmission mechanism of social networks, making it easier for stereotypes to spread among adolescents. Second, social cognitive theory emphasizes the learning role of social interactions. TikTok is a highly social platform where users form social relationships through liking, commenting, and sharing. When some users express their opinions about a group through exaggeration and hyperbole, this information may be perceived by adolescents as part of their social identity, reinforcing stereotypical perceptions of a particular group. Social interactions contribute to the propagation of stereotypes across platforms in the form of group identity. In addition, social cognition theory involves the process of observation and reflection. On TikTok, users observe not only the behavior of other users, but also trends and topics that are popular on the platform. If certain stereotypical content becomes popular on the platform, adolescents may form stereotypes about specific groups by observing these trends. This observation and thought process spreads through social networks, deepening the entrenchment of stereotypes among users. In addition, social cognition theory focuses on the reward and punishment mechanisms in the cognitive process. On TikTok, users are rewarded for getting likes and follows, and controversial or exaggerated content tends to attract more attention. Adolescents may be more inclined to accept and spread stereotypical content if it brings more rewards. This reward-punishment mechanism may allow stereotypes to be reinforced among adolescents because they are more likely to attract attention and gain more social approval. Overall, social cognitive theory provides an insightful theoretical perspective to explain the formation of stereotypes among adolescents on TikTok. On this platform, through observation, imitation, social interaction, and cognitive processes, adolescents not only form stereotypical impressions of specific groups, but these impressions are spread and reinforced among users through the communication mechanisms of social networks. Thus, in understanding and intervening in the process of stereotype formation on TikTok, social cognitive theory

provides a powerful framework that emphasizes the influence of the social environment on adolescents' cognition and behavior(Guo, 2022).

4.2. Symbolic interactionist theory

Symbolic interactionist theory emphasizes the process of constructing symbols and their meanings, as well as the way individuals construct their understanding of reality through the interpretation of symbols. In the case of TikTok, a social media platform, symbolic interactionist theory can be used to explain how adolescents form stereotypes by creatively interpreting and enacting symbols on the platform. First, symbolic interactionist theory emphasizes the polysemy and malleability of symbols. On TikTok, short videos, music, and dance are all symbols, and users express their identities and opinions through creative symbolic interpretation and rendition. However, if some users choose to use symbols to emphasize or exaggerate the stereotypical characteristics of a particular group, these symbols may create a passive-accepted interpretation among adolescents, leading to stereotyping. Second, symbolic interactionist theory emphasizes the socially constructed nature of symbols. On TikTok, the symbols created and disseminated by users are not only a means of individual expression, but also a tool for social construction. If some symbols are widely used to convey stereotypes about a certain group of people, this constitutes a social identity, making it easier for stereotypes to be formed and spread among adolescents. In addition, the theory of symbolic interactionism emphasizes the interactivity of symbols. On TikTok, users interact with each other through the creative use of symbols. If some users create content with stereotypes, other users may deepen the perception of stereotypes by responding to, imitating, or further interpreting these symbols, creating an interactive symbolic context. Symbolic interactionist theory also emphasizes the interpretive process of symbols when explaining the formation of stereotypes for adolescents on TikTok. On TikTok, users creatively interpret symbols such as short videos, music, and dance to emphasize or exaggerate certain characteristics of a particular group through exaggeration and dramatization. This process of creative interpretation makes stereotypes more attractive and more likely to attract attention and spread. In addition, the theory of symbolic interactionism involves the use and alteration of symbols. On TikTok, users may convey stereotypes by changing the meaning and interpretation of symbols to make them more controversial and compelling. This process of symbol use and alteration allows stereotypes to have a wide impact on social networks, making them more likely to spread among adolescents. Under the perspective of symbolic interactionism, TikTok becomes an arena for the creation, interpretation and rendition of symbols, where users express their identities and opinions through the creative use of symbols. However, when some symbols are used to emphasize or exaggerate the stereotypical characteristics of a particular group, they may create stereotypes among adolescents. The theory of symbolic interactionism emphasizes the importance of symbols in social media environments and how users construct their understanding of the world through creative use of symbols. On TikTok, this theory helps us understand how stereotypes are formed through the process of symbolic interaction and social construction(Carter & Fuller, 2000).

4.3. Media Literacy Theory

Media literacy theory emphasizes an individual's ability to understand and respond to media messages, including identifying sources, evaluating messages, and thinking critically about media content. In the context of TikTok, a media platform, media literacy theory can be used to explain how adolescents form stereotypes about specific groups through their understanding and evaluation of content. First, media literacy theory emphasizes the identification of information sources. On TikTok, there is an influx of user-generated content, and some of the content may contain stereotypical statements and opinions. Adolescents need to have the ability to recognize the source of information and understand the producer, purpose, and intent behind the information in order to avoid being misled and accepting stereotypes. By recognizing the source of information, adolescents can be more intentional about the content on TikTok and avoid being influenced by one-sided or misleading information about specific groups. Second, media literacy theory involves the evaluation of information. On TikTok, the truthfulness and objectivity of content are important factors to be evaluated. Some users may convey stereotypes through exaggeration and dramatization, and adolescents need to have the ability to discern whether a message is objective and truthful in order to prevent misinterpretation and the formation of stereotypes. By evaluating information, adolescents can be more autonomous in filtering and understanding content on TikTok, reducing the acceptance of stereotypes. In addition, media literacy theory emphasizes critical thinking about media content. On TikTok, user-generated content may contain stereotypical content, and adolescents need to have the ability to think critically and actively question and analyze media messages. This includes censoring rhetoric, questioning opinions, and being sensitive to stereotypes implicit in content. By developing the ability to think critically, adolescents can better understand the messages on TikTok and mitigate the acceptance and dissemination of stereotypes. Additionally, media literacy theory involves a requirement for digital literacy. On TikTok, digital content is used in a variety of editorial and technological ways, and adolescents need to have the ability to understand and decode digital content. This includes recognizing the authenticity of digital content, editorial practices, and an understanding of digital technology. By improving digital literacy, adolescents can better understand the content on TikTok and avoid being misled by the special effects and editing of digital content and forming stereotypes. Overall, media literacy theory provides a useful theoretical framework to explain the formation of stereotypes on TikTok for adolescents. By identifying sources, evaluating information, and thinking critically about media content on this platform, adolescents can process information on TikTok more consciously and mitigate the acceptance and dissemination of stereotypes. Cultivating media literacy among adolescents is an important way to prevent stereotype formation and help them use social media platforms more rationally. Therefore, the cultivation of media literacy among adolescents should be strengthened in education and family environments to improve their ability to understand and cope with social media messages(Alvermann & Hagood, 2000).

5. Conclusion

By comprehensively examining the formation and educational impact of TikTok on Chinese adolescents' stereotypes, this study aims to delve into the complex relationship between digital media platforms and adolescents' social cognition as well as academic performance. The research framework synthesizes the perspectives of symbolic interactionism and cultural studies, while deeply analyzing the underlying mechanisms and factors that influence TikTok on academic performance. Through this inquiry, we hope to reveal the dual role that social media plays in shaping adolescents' images and influencing their academics in the digital age.

First, by integrating the perspectives of media literacy theory, symbolic interactionism, and social cognitive theory, this paper is able to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the process by which TikTok shapes the stereotypes of Chinese adolescents. The theory of symbolic interactionism emphasizes the importance of symbols in media and how these symbols construct social reality through interaction. Through this theoretical lens, we were able to analyze the symbolic exchanges on TikTok and reveal how adolescents are shaped, positioned, and socially perceived. At the same time, the cultural studies perspective helps to understand the cultural values and social trends conveyed by TikTok, thus digging deeper into the cultural identity of adolescents on digital media platforms. Second, by analyzing in depth the potential mechanisms and factors of TikTok on academic performance, we can see more clearly the impact of digital media on adolescents' learning behaviors. We focus on the diversity of the platform's content, users' interactions with the platform, and the platform's algorithmic pushes to reveal how these factors interact with each other to influence

adolescents' academic performance. This research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how digital media platforms are important factors in shaping learning environments and academic attitudes.

By examining these aspects in depth, this paper aims to provide insights into the impact of social media on adolescents' social cognition and academics in the digital age. This comprehensive research framework not only expands our understanding of the impact of TikTok on adolescents, but also provides useful references for future related studies. In the context of a digital society, this comprehensive study helps us better understand and guide the healthy growth of adolescents on digital media platforms.

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