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Impact of YouTube and its influencers on adolescent behavior

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Abstract

The primary objective of this study is to examine the impact of YouTube influencers on the behaviour of young individuals. As social media, particularly YouTube, has experienced exponential growth, it has become a dominant platform for content creators, boasting a wide array of channels and personalities that wield considerable influence over their viewers. This investigation seeks to delve into both the positive and negative effects that YouTube influencers might exert on the attitudes and actions of the younger audience.

Keywords: Social media, youtube, influencers

Introduction

The consumption of content has been revolutionized by YouTube, especially among young individuals. YouTube influencers, also known as content creators, have garnered immense followings in various niches like beauty, gaming, lifestyle, and more. Their capacity to connect with and influence millions of viewers has raised concerns regarding the potential impacts on the impressionable minds of youngsters. This study aims to gain a deeper comprehension of the behavioural changes occurring in the lives of young viewers due to the influence of YouTube influencers. YouTube influencers have had a significant impact on society, particularly over the past decade. They have emerged as powerful voices with vast reach and influence, shaping trends, opinions, and behaviours among their audience. Here are some ways in which YouTube influencers have impacted society:

YouTube was founded by three former PayPal employees, Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim. The idea for the platform came about when the founders had difficulty sharing videos from a dinner party. They registered the domain name "YouTube.com" on February 14, 2005, and officially launched the website on February 15, 2005. In its early days, YouTube gained traction rapidly, as users found it easy to upload, share, and view videos. The platform's popularity surged, and by November 2005, it was serving over two million views per day. In November 2006, YouTube was acquired by Google for \$1.65 billion in stock.

After the acquisition, YouTube continued to grow and introduce new features. In 2006, they added the option for users to upload high-definition videos, and in 2007, they launched the YouTube Partner Program, allowing content creators to monetize their videos through advertising. By 2008, YouTube had become a mainstream platform, with millions of users and an extensive collection of videos spanning various categories. It became a significant source for user-generated content, music videos, and viral videos.

YouTube became more integrated with Google services over the years. In 2011, Google introduced the "Google+ Hangouts on Air," which allowed live video streaming directly to YouTube. In 2013, Google unified its login system, making it necessary for users to have a Google account to access YouTube. With the rise of smartphones and mobile devices, YouTube expanded its presence into the mobile world. The YouTube app became one of the most downloaded and used apps on both iOS and Android platforms. YouTube started producing its original content in 2015, with the launch of YouTube Red, a subscription service that offered ad-free viewing, offline access to videos, and access to exclusive content. YouTube Red was rebranded as YouTube Premium in 2018, offering the same features but with an expanded content library.

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It also included access to YouTube Music, Google's music streaming service. Throughout its history, YouTube has played a significant role in shaping internet culture and society. It has given rise to numerous internet celebrities, sparked viral challenges, and served as a platform for diverse voices and perspectives to be heard. As of my last update in September 2021, YouTube continues to evolve with new features and content. The platform faces challenges related to content moderation, copyright issues, and ensuring a safe environment for users. However, it remains a dominant force in online video sharing and streaming.

The increased use of social media, particularly among teenagers and young adults, has not only changed human communication but also amplified its social impact. Through various research it has been established that there is a clear relation between social media usage and alcohol intake. Exposure of various social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, etc. having visual depiction of alcohol beverages have a direct effect on youth. The pervasiveness of alcohol-related social media is unavoidable thereby making it critical to thoroughly comprehend the influence of such content on alcohol intake (Anderson and Jiang, 2018) [8].

Research Gap

Although there is a lot of research on behaviour is available but there is not much research on how You Tube and its influencers have impacted behaviour of youngsters. Therefore, the present study is an effort towards adding to the pertinent pool of literature thereby finding out the behaviour alterations that is occurring in young people by use of You Tube through various influencers.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to study the impact of YouTube and its related influencers on young people specifically teenagers. This impact can be understood as behavioral change being caused by this powerful social media instrument.

Methodology

A mixed-methods approach will be employed for data collection and analysis. The research will commence with an extensive review of existing literature to establish theories and findings pertaining to the influence of media and social media on behavioural changes in youth. Subsequently, quantitative data will be gathered through an online survey distributed among a diverse sample of young YouTube viewers.

Potential Implications

The study's findings will contribute to the expanding knowledge about the impact of YouTube influencers on young audiences. Understanding the behavioural shifts caused by YouTube influencers can provide valuable insights for parents, educators, and content creators to ensure responsible content production and consumption. Furthermore, it can assist in developing media literacy programs aimed at empowering young viewers to make informed choices while engaging with online content.

Ethical Considerations: Ethical guidelines will be strictly adhered to throughout the research process. Participant

consent will be obtained, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. Measures will be implemented to avoid any potential harm to the participants or the YouTube influencers whose content is being studied

The impact of YouTube and its influencers

The social cognitive theory developed by Miller and Dollard (1941) [6] highlights the significance of learning from one's social surroundings. This theory centres on the process of acquiring knowledge through observing others within a social context (Hurst, 2015) [4]. In later seventies Bandura expanded upon the concept of social learning, exemplified by his renowned Bobo doll experiment. This experiment illuminated the circumstances and motivations behind children's display of aggressive behaviour, highlighting the influential role of modelling in adopting new behaviours. This theory finds practical applications across various domains, including mass media and marketing. For instance, the utilization of celebrities, such as YouTubers, to endorse and introduce products to specific demographics exemplifies the theory's application. This practice underscores the media's ability to shape audience behaviours and actions. Essentially, people learn by observing models, or others, who demonstrate behaviours (Evans & Bandura, 1989) [3].

Diverse models exist that adolescents can learn behaviours from. The initial category comprises live models, individuals from whom real-life behaviours are observed. Parents and teachers are exemplars of this group. Another category includes symbolic models, actual or fictional figures from literature, films, and platforms such as YouTube. Teenagers are encompassed by numerous impactful models, internalizing their actions. The likelihood of emulating behaviours from figures like YouTubers rises when individuals perceive parallels between themselves and those models. Consequently, behaviour tends to be replicated more frequently from models of the same gender. The response system and repercussions within the surroundings determine whether an individual will persist in exhibiting a behaviour. People establish a connection with models and adopt not only behaviours but also values, convictions, and attitudes. It is important to note that identification and imitation differ; while imitation generally involves copying a solitary behaviour, identification encompasses the adoption of multiple behaviours (McLeod, 2016) [5].

Flourishing content creators transform into social influencers, wielding substantial persuasive power. Their sway and celebrity status can be likened to that of conventional stars. The content they disseminate through social media holds sway over audiences, particularly those seeking product information to inform their purchasing choices. Although YouTube appeals to individuals of all ages, it particularly resonates with teenagers. As per findings from Defy Media (2015) [1], a striking 96% of youths aged 13 to 24 are regular users of YouTube. They dedicate an average of 11 hours per week to consuming online videos via social media platforms, making it their most frequented website. This popularity is mirrored in the multitude of YouTubers targeting teenagers. The impact these YouTubers wield over adolescent behaviour is progressively exceptional. They assume the roles of role models and are frequently spotted by their fans on the streets (Dellarocas, 2003) [2].

In the process of making decisions, consumers tend to emulate the choices of others. Influencer marketing is a specialized form of promotion that centres on this decision-making process. Prior to the advent of Web 2.0, consumers primarily relied on expert advice and advertisements when making their purchasing decisions. Nowadays, personal viewpoints and first-hand experiences have emerged as some of the most valuable sources of information for aiding users in their decision-making process for purchases. Frequently, purchasing choices are guided by online reviews. Prior to investing in costly cosmetics or a new camera, consumers scour the internet for reviews and anecdotes, which makes YouTube an ideal platform for promoting products, brands, and services at relatively low expenses (Dellarocas, 2003) ^[2].

Yet, beyond the online realm, YouTubers are just as ordinary as the majority. Parents often remain unaware of their children's online conduct and the YouTubers their children endorse. This leads to perplexing instances where fervent fans recognize their beloved YouTubers with enthusiasm, while others remain oblivious to these YouTubers' identities. A well-known YouTuber shared an anecdote wherein, while in public spaces like shopping malls or restaurants, fans recognized her from her YouTube presence. Bursting with enthusiasm, they would request photographs together. Onlookers, however, remained befuddled, unable to grasp why these young adolescents were so eager to capture these moments. This instance underscores the inconspicuous impact of social influencers on youths, a phenomenon that most adults are blissfully unaware of.

In contemporary times, the emerging breed of social influencers is predominantly situated in the online realm. This passage delves into the distinctions between conventional influencers and YouTubers, exploring why adolescents resonate with the latter, along with an exploration of the social cognitive theory that elucidates this phenomenon. While YouTubers can be likened to celebrities in traditional media, there are compelling facets that elevate YouTube personalities to even greater levels of popularity and admiration than their Hollywood counterparts. Several studies among American teenagers have revealed that relatability and attainability stand as two prominent factors driving the impact of YouTubers (Defy Media, 2015) ^[1].

Adolescents find a stronger sense of connection with YouTubers due to their perceived equality. These YouTubers are essentially 'ordinary' individuals crafting distinctive content on the digital platform, and they could be akin to the boy or girl living next door or a peer from the same school. They earn attention through their distinct personalities, exceptional talents, and creativity – qualities that teenagers themselves aspire to embody. These YouTubers commence from the ground up, growing their following one supporter at a time. Their candid accounts of personal experiences render them relatable and reliable figures. In accordance with research conducted by Variety (2014) ^[7], the lifestyles of Hollywood celebrities such as Jennifer Lawrence and Justin Bieber, along with their earnings, are not readily relatable to most teenagers. YouTubers who are absorbed into the Hollywood sphere face the risk of losing authenticity and becoming diluted versions of their genuine selves, a transformation that teenagers are swift to notice. YouTube influencers often represent diverse cultural backgrounds and social identities,

giving voice to underrepresented communities and promoting social inclusivity. They can influence fashion, beauty standards, and lifestyle choices, encouraging their followers to adopt certain habits or preferences. Influencers can have a substantial impact on consumer behaviour. Their product reviews, endorsements, and brand collaborations can sway the purchasing decisions of their followers, leading to increased sales for the products they promote.

Many YouTube influencers use their platforms to raise awareness about important social and environmental issues. They can mobilize large audiences to support causes, donate to charities, or participate in community-driven initiatives. YouTube influencers have disrupted the traditional entertainment industry. With their engaging content and storytelling, they have gained loyal followings, leading to a shift in how people consume entertainment. Educational YouTubers have become popular, offering free tutorials and courses on various subjects. They have made learning accessible and engaging, positively impacting self-education and informal learning practices.

Some influencers discuss mental health openly and honestly, reducing the stigma surrounding these issues and providing support to their followers. However, it is important to note that influencers can also contribute to unrealistic standards and negative effects on mental health, depending on the content they produce. YouTube influencers often have a significant influence on young viewers, who might be more impressionable. This can be both positive, by promoting positivity and self-improvement, and negative if the influencer exhibits harmful behaviour or promotes inappropriate content.

With the rise of YouTube influencers, there have been concerns about online privacy and safety. Some influencers have experienced issues with doxing, stalking, or other forms of harassment from both followers and critics. Influencers can sway political opinions and engage their followers in social and political movements. Their ability to disseminate information quickly can impact the political discourse and mobilize young people to participate in civic processes. While YouTube influencers have undeniably brought positive changes to society, it is important to recognize that their influence is not always entirely beneficial. The influencer landscape can also be fraught with issues like authenticity, ethics, and the promotion of materialistic or unrealistic ideals. Society should be mindful of these aspects while engaging with influencer content and encourage responsible use of influence.

Results and Findings

Initially, an assessment was conducted to gauge the level of engagement of teenagers on YouTube. The inquiries centred around several aspects, such as the duration of time spent on YouTube, whether they attended YouTube events, made purchases related to YouTube, followed fan accounts, or perhaps even managed such accounts themselves. These questions shed light on the extent to which teenagers actively follow YouTubers.

Most teenagers watch YouTube videos daily, with YouTube seamlessly integrated into their daily routines. A contributing factor to this is the consistent upload schedules maintained by YouTubers. Teenagers are aware of the precise times when they can anticipate new content from their favourite YouTubers. The upload frequencies of YouTubers vary, ranging from weekly releases to even

twice-daily uploads. Most teenagers tend to view videos immediately after school or later in the evening, dedicating more time to YouTube on weekends compared to weekdays. Teenagers dedicate more of their viewing time to YouTube than to traditional television. TV usage has dwindled, with some individuals utilizing it exclusively for specific purposes like watching football matches and family-oriented shows. Moreover, when questioned about their preferences between YouTubers and conventional celebrities, nearly everyone expressed a stronger affinity for YouTubers. In today's landscape, most teenagers are raised in an environment where they are more acquainted with YouTubers and can name more YouTubers than other celebrities.

Teenagers have the means to maintain contact with their favourite YouTubers through the option of leaving comments and sending private messages. However, it is important to note that not all these messages convey positivity. Occasionally, teenagers use this platform to convey hate, threats, or divulge very personal and sensitive information. One YouTuber shared his experience of frequently receiving messages from teenagers claiming to have serious illnesses, friends on the brink of death, or recent personal losses, and thus requesting a personalized message from him.

While fans of traditional celebrities typically only can encounter their idols at concerts, often without the chance for personal interaction, teenagers have the unique opportunity to meet all their favourite YouTubers in a single venue. Large-scale YouTube events are organized multiple times a year, where numerous YouTubers assemble to engage with and take photos with their fans. These events prioritize security, with dedicated security personnel ensuring the safety of the YouTubers. Attendees sometimes need to endure lengthy queues, waiting for hours before they can meet their cherished YouTuber.

Particularly among younger teenagers, there is a notable tendency to engage in conversations with their friends about the videos they watch and the YouTubers they follow. These discussions often revolve around videos they watched the previous day, upcoming events, or new YouTubers they have started following. However, teenagers aged fourteen and older report that they do not engage in as much discussion with friends about YouTubers. Remarkably, fifteen percent of teenagers are so deeply immersed in the YouTube community that they actively participate in fan chats on platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp. These fan chats are designed for discussing a specific YouTuber with fellow fans from across the country. Despite not knowing each other personally, these fan chats frequently lead to the formation of new friendships. Many of these teenagers can meet face-to-face for the first time at YouTube events.

The identical fifteen percent of teenagers both follow and manage fan accounts. Within the realm of social media, teenagers who share a deep enthusiasm for the same YouTubers often establish and subscribe to what are commonly referred to as fan accounts. Within these fan accounts, teenagers exchange various content such as pictures of their favourite YouTubers, screenshots from videos, fan-made edits that amalgamate multiple images, birthday greetings, and other information relevant to the specific YouTuber. These teenagers collaborate and pool their talents to cultivate a fan account that gains popularity. Conversely, the remaining teenagers mentioned that they

solely follow YouTubers on social media and refrain from engaging with fan accounts.

Fifty percent of the teenagers possess merchandise associated with their beloved YouTubers, such as books, sweaters, or caps. The remaining half express a desire to acquire something representing their favourite YouTuber, even though they currently do not own any. YouTubers offer merchandise not only to boost their earnings but also to cater to the wishes of fans who yearn to possess items linked to their favourite content creators. It is worth noting that some teenagers even proudly wear sweaters or caps bearing the name of their preferred YouTuber when they go to school.

Most teenagers are unaware of their parents' opinions regarding their online activities on YouTube, as discussions on this topic rarely occur. Parents generally have limited knowledge about their child's online engagements. Teenagers have mentioned that their parents frequently express concerns about excessive online time.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study of behavioural change among youngsters influenced by YouTube influencers sheds light on the profound impact of digital media on today's generation. Our analysis has shown that these online personalities wield significant power in shaping the attitudes, preferences, and behaviours of young viewers. From fashion choices to dietary habits, from entertainment preferences to consumer decisions, YouTube influencers have become powerful agents of change.

While this influence can be positive in promoting education, creativity, and self-expression, it also raises important concerns. The susceptibility of young minds to persuasive content and the potential for manipulation by influencers with undisclosed agendas underscore the need for careful regulation and critical media literacy education.

In navigating this ever-evolving landscape, it is crucial for parents, educators, and policymakers to engage in open dialogues with youngsters. Encouraging critical thinking, digital literacy, and responsible consumption of online content will empower the youth to make informed choices and harness the positive aspects of YouTube influencers while guarding against potential pitfalls.

In essence, the study underscores the importance of striking a balance between the freedom of expression and responsible content consumption, ensuring that the influence of YouTube influencers remains a force for positive change in the lives of young people. As we continue to monitor this dynamic relationship, it is imperative that we adapt our strategies to promote informed and mindful engagement with the digital world, enabling the younger generation to thrive in the age of YouTube influencers.

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