

Controlling Teenagers' Sensibility to Online Public Opinion: From a Social Psychology Viewpoint

Zixuan Cao^{1, *}

¹Shenzhen Senior High School,
Shenzhen, Guangdong, 518000,
China

*Corresponding author: caozx@cn-school.com

Abstract:

Emphasizing the herd theory, depersonalization theory, and social identity theory, this research investigates the effects of online public opinion on teenagers via a social psychological lens. Teenagers are more often exposed to group emotions that shape their views and actions since social media has emerged. Conformity Theory helps one to understand how social validation systems on sites like Facebook and Instagram inspire young people to embrace popular viewpoints without critical review. Deindividuation Theory helps to explain how anonymity in digital environments could cause a diminished sense of responsibility, so encouraging behavior that follows group standards instead of personal values. Social Identity Theory shows even further how group membership in online communities results in homogeneity of viewpoints, therefore suppressing individual thought. This study emphasizes the need of educational interventions, platform-level adjustments, and policies to enable teenagers to interact with online content critically, oppose improper social influences, and keep uniqueness in the digital age. To lessen the detrimental effects of online opinion on teenagers, the study provides doable suggestions for social media sites, legislators, and teachers.

Keywords: Online Public Opinion; Teenagers' Sensibility; Social Identity Theory; Conformity and Depersonalization Theories

1. Introduction

Online public opinion is a powerful group of feelings to respond to societal concerns. Public opinion has always developed and been disseminated via accepted media like books, reviews, newspapers, and

magazines. But thanks to its quick spread and thorough coverage, online public opinion has become rather powerful once the Internet has become popular. Social media has changed public conversation by allowing people from many backgrounds and areas to quickly publish their ideas and comments. This

change has let online public opinion greatly affect societal views and behaviors on a worldwide basis [1].

Because of various reasons—including their growing cognitive capacities, limited life experience, and great sensitivity to peer approval—adolescents are especially sensitive to the influence of internet opinion. Changing cognitive, emotional, and social skills define adolescence; young individuals are more likely to rely on outside clues to guide their actions. This developmental feature renders kids vulnerable to false information, biased narratives, and emotionally charged content, which could have long-term detrimental effects including bad decisions and maladaptive actions [2, 3]. Furthermore, aggravating these inclinations in online environments is the drive for social validation; young people search for acceptance via likes, shares, and favorable comments [4].

They have particular difficulties in the digital age when knowledge moves at an unheard-of pace and young people simultaneously consume and create online opinions. Young people's access to knowledge, communication, and opinion-forming processes has been drastically altered by social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. These sites expose young users to major hazards including misinformation, divisive content, and pressure to fit dominant narratives and offer chances for more civic involvement [5, 6]. Young people's very undeveloped judgment combined with the fast spread of online opinion creates an environment in which they are especially prone to mainstream trends. This frequently results in what is known as the "depersonalization" of opinions, whereby people forget their own points of view and instead embrace the views of the majority or those promoted by powerful sources without critically evaluating them [7].

Often insufficient are the present strategies for controlling young vulnerability to internet public opinion. Many countries, including China, lack a structure, especially in charge of tracking young internet public opinion. With no established organizational process and no clear distribution of duties and resources, the administration of young public opinion remains essentially a conceptual problem [8]. Since knowledge travels far quicker than it can be controlled, this lack of organized management sometimes results in ineffective responses to crucial events. Conventional systems, such as removing comments or content blockings, are mostly reactive and fail to solve the underlying causes of the issue [9]. Establishing a disciplined technique to control young public opinion is absolutely vital.

Preventive actions emphasizing education and early intervention, on the other hand, have significant potential to minimize the detrimental effects of internet opinion on teenagers. Reducing teenagers' susceptibility to manip-

ulation and false information requires arming them with the tools to critically assess the material they come across, thus boosting media literacy, and so fostering psychological resilience [10, 11]. Encouragement of teenagers to become more discriminating information consumers will enable them to negotiate the complexity of the digital environment and advance their general cognitive and affective growth.

This work attempts to build a proactive management mechanism by means of a social psychology-based investigation on how best to regulate teenagers' online opinions. This research specifically addresses the issue of "depersonalization" among teenagers, whereby exposure to different biased points of view could cause a loss of uniqueness in their assessments. This study will investigate teenagers' behaviors using theoretical analyses of consistency, depersonalization, and social identity to make practical recommendations to build teenagers' resilience in the face of online public opinion, support independent thinking, and encourage informed decision-making.

2. Literature Review

The Internet era has brought many social media channels into a natural place in young people's lives. Public opinion, according to Eagly and Chaiken, is the view of openly discussed events that profoundly influence society [1]. Public opinion usually reflects social opinions molded by underlying psychological elements and has both good and negative connotations. Young people depend on social media more and more to stay current with events, which offers chances and possible hazards for civic participation as Huang notes [2]. Threats, however, sometimes accompany these chances as well; they include exposure to false information, biased narratives, and pressure to fit socially approved opinions [3, 4].

Teenagers' use of social media is mostly related to one of the key problems concerning their physical and mental state. Studies have shown the negative consequences of too heavy usage of social media, including higher anxiety, depression, and poorer general health [3]. Emphasizing the part that problematic social media use plays in aggravating negative mental health effects, Boer et al. investigated the connection between social media use and mental health among teenagers [5]. Constant exposure to well-chosen content and the temptation to evaluate oneself against an idealized picture might cause emotional pain and a reduced feeling of self-worth [3]. Furthermore, the dissemination of misleading information on social media presents a great risk since young people could lack the critical thinking ability required to identify reliable knowledge from lies [4, 6].

Social media's effects on young people go beyond only personal well-being to encompass civic involvement and opinion building. Emphasizing that digital platforms give young people chances to participate in social and political debate, Oden and Porter identified a favorable link between social media use and young civic involvement [7]. While social media can enable more engagement, it can also expose young users to biased narratives, which might cause "depersonalization," in which people adopt dominant beliefs without question [8]. Teenagers especially experience this phenomenon since they are more prone to social acceptability and peer influence [9].

Another important determinant of young people's interaction with internet opinions is their herd mentality. Herd mentality is the inclination of a person to fit the beliefs and actions of others, particularly in settings where social validation systems (like likes and shares) are quite important [10]. Due mostly to their fear of social rejection, Lee et al. found that young people are more prone to embrace popular viewpoints on social media even if they disagree totally [11]. This herd mentality homogenizes young users' perspectives and reduces their capacity to think independently and critically.

Apart from herd mentality, "depersonalization" is essential to grasp the vulnerability of young people to internet opinion. Often resulting from constant exposure to prevailing narratives and social pressures, depersonalization happens when people lose their own viewpoints and take up a group one [7, 12]. The algorithms utilized by social media sites, which usually give engaging material - often sensational or emotive - top priority over balanced or educational content, aggravate this phenomenon [13]. Echo chambers are created in great part by this algorithmic bias, which reinforces current impressions and limits young users' exposure to other points of view [12]. Scholars, teachers, and legislators concerned with young behavior and social media impacts should pay some attention and act accordingly. Often exposed to content that supports their views, young users create echo chambers limiting their access to other points of view [12].

Current approaches to controlling online opinion, including content filtering or comment deletion, have not yet addressed the underlying roots of the issue [14]. These reactionary steps neither increase teenagers' capacity to evaluate the material they come across critically nor strengthen their resilience against negative internet effects. More successful solutions are therefore preventative techniques emphasizing education and early intervention. Green and Thompson believe that schools should be essential in giving teenagers the tools they need to negotiate the complicated online information environment [15]. By encouraging critical thinking, media literacy, and psycho-

logical resilience, educational institutions can help teenagers acquire the skills to create their own opinions and oppose the pressure to fit the mainstream narrative [15]. Notwithstanding these initiatives, social psychology-based literature on proactive management techniques to counteract the "depersonalization" of young opinions in online environments still lacks clarity. This study intends to close this gap by analyzing how psychological theories might be applied to create efficient treatments to control young vulnerability to online opinion.

3. Methodology

This research uses accepted social psychology theories in a theoretical analytical approach to investigate how online public opinion shapes young people. Three main theories—conformity theory, deindividuation theory, and social identity theory—are under analysis. Through an analysis of these theories, this study seeks to pinpoint the processes by which young behavior is shaped by online public opinion and offers information for sensible management policies.

Originally put out by Asch, Conformity Theory helps to explain how people—especially under social pressure—often modify their behavior or views to fit group standards. This theory is particularly pertinent to comprehend young behavior in online environments, where social media platforms offer measures of social validation, such as likes, comments, and shares. Even if those popular opinions are biased or false, the exposure of these measures puts great pressure on young people to fit them [16]. Conformity Theory is applied in this work to examine how social validation systems produce unquestioning acceptance of dominant narratives, hence fostering the "de-personalization" of individual viewpoints.

According to Zimbardo's Deindividuation Theory, people's sense of personal responsibility decreases when they view themselves as anonymous inside a group, which causes them to act in ways more shaped by group norms than by personal beliefs [17]. Young people find it simpler to engage in activities they might not do offline, such as spreading false information or taking part in group projects without thinking through the repercussions, social media platforms sometimes give a sense of anonymity or detachment. This theoretical framework helps one to grasp how anonymity in digital environments lessens responsibility and promotes behavior in keeping with prevailing online narratives.

In addition to individual roles, each person has their own social attributes. Developed by Tajfel and Turner, Social Identity Theory emphasizes how people come to define part of their identity from their involvement in social

groups [18]. This hypothesis clarifies the behavior of young people on social media, where personal opinions and decisions are much influenced by group identification. Whether based on shared hobbies, ethnic origins, or political beliefs, young people frequently search for acceptance inside online groups. Although these associations offer social support, they can also cause conformity, stifling of independent thought, and less variation of view. Social Identity Theory is used in this paper to investigate how group dynamics and the need for belonging influence young people's sensitivity to online public opinion, therefore homogenizing their points of view.

Theoretically, synthesizing the results of books, peer-reviewed journal publications, and theoretical research helps to capture the processes that influence young people's sensitivity to online opinion. This approach is particularly helpful in examining psychological perceptions and how they play out in digital environments, so the focus of research should be on exploring questions such as: How is young people's behavior in online environments driven by social identity (Conformity Theory), anonymity (Deindividuation Theory), and group membership (Social Identity Theory)? Do young people's susceptibilities—such as the stage of cognitive development, emotional sensitivity, and need for social approval—make them more susceptible to online opinion? By analyzing these theories, we can make actionable recommendations for social media platforms, legislators, and teachers to help minimize the negative impact of public opinion on youth.

It is undeniable that this theoretical method has significant restrictions even if it offers insightful analysis of the psychological processes behind young sensitivity to online public opinion. The study is based just on current literature; however, the lack of actual data renders direct observation or experimentation useless in supporting the conclusions [19].

Furthermore, the theoretical character of this research restricts the capacity to explain personal variations and contextual elements that can affect the reaction of young people to online public opinion. Future studies should take into account empirical investigations to support the suggested mechanisms and interventions in several cultural and socioeconomic settings [20].

4. Results and Discussion

Based on Conformity Theory, Deindividuation Theory, and Social Identity Theory, the theoretical investigation of online public opinion and its impact on youth offers several important new perspectives on the channels via which social media changes the attitudes and behaviors of young people. These revelations in great depth are covered in

this part together with their ramifications for social media platforms, legislators, and teachers. Furthermore, included in the conversation are doable suggestions to lessen the detrimental effects of internet public opinion on youth.

4.1 Conformism and Social Validation's Pressure

Conformity Theory emphasizes how greatly social validation shapes young people's conduct. Likes, shares, and comments are among the things that social networking sites are meant to reward for notable interaction with material. These social validation indicators are quite effective for young people in guiding them toward what is trendy, popular, or accepted. Even if those opinions are biased or false, this results in great pressure to fit in with the popular opinions and actions of others [16]. For example, even if they do not completely grasp the subtleties of the issue, a young person may choose to share or support a particular political opinion when they observe significant positive interaction.

Adolescence, a time marked by an increased desire for approval and social belonging, calls especially for social validation. Young people may thus give compliance top priority above critical thinking, which results in the “de-personalizing” of their opinions—that is when mainstream narratives eclipse unique points of view. This dynamic is especially alarming when false information or destructive ideas get on as young people are more inclined to absorb and disseminate such materials without thinking closely [17].

4.2 Digital Spaces: Anonymity and Deindividuation

Deindividuation Theory clarifies how young people's conformist conduct gets diffused in online contexts by means of anonymity. Particularly when they are part of sizable groups or communities, users of social media sites can feel anonymous or less self-aware. By reducing emotions of responsibility, anonymity can cause people to act more in line with group standards than their own principles or convictions [18].

For young people, this sense of anonymity can show up in a number of troubling actions including endorsing extremist opinions, disseminating false information, or engaging in online abuse. Young people are more prone to act impulsively or destructively when they do not feel individually responsible for their acts, therefore further de-personalizing their unique identities. This phenomenon emphasizes the need to teach young users to take responsibility for their actions both online and offline [19] and to help them to think through their effects.

4.3 Group Affiliation and Social Identity

Social Identity Theory offers a prism through which one may view how young people's views and actions on social media are shaped by their group memberships. Whether these online communities are founded on political ideas, cultural identities, or shared hobbies, young people frequently get a sense of belonging from their participation in them. Group membership can result in conformity and stifling of individual thought even while it might offer social support and help to build an identity [20].

Social media companies' algorithms generally give content that is interesting and emotionally charged top priority, which helps to create echo chambers by often supporting already-held opinions. For young people, these echo chambers can restrict access to many points of view and produce a homogeneous environment where opposing ideas are discouraged. This dynamic not only suppresses critical thinking but also supports the predominance of some narratives, therefore making it challenging for young people to create complex and well-rounded viewpoints [21].

4.4 Suggestions for Reducing Online Public Opinion Sensibility

Theoretically, numerous suggestions can be made to reduce young people's inclination to online public opinion. These suggestions aim for teachers, legislators, and social media sites since each significantly influences the internet experiences of youth.

Media literacy instruction should be given top priority in schools so that young people have the tools necessary to examine the material they come across online with a critical eye. Students should be taught by media literacy initiatives how to spot reliable sources, spot prejudice, and comprehend how social validation systems affect their opinions and actions. Encouragement of honest conversations about the impact of social media can also help students grow more conscious of the demands they experience and create plans of action to oppose conformity [15, 22].

Encouragement of responsibility among users—especially young people—should come from social media channels. This could include tools asking users to consider their comments before publishing or ones motivating them to confirm their identity before posting. Such steps can help to lower impulsive behavior and promote online accountability for one's activities. Platforms should also include means for reporting offensive material or false information, thereby integrating young users in keeping a better online environment [17, 23].

Encouragement of exposure to several points of view is

crucial to offset the consequences of echo chambers. Social media sites can change their algorithms to give content variety top priority instead of concentrating merely on interaction statistics. Young people's perspectives can become more balanced and autonomous if encouraged to interact with a range of material and join different online communities. Schools and community initiatives could also inspire involvement in events that support interaction among several social groups, so building resistance against the pressure to fit the standards of one group [21, 24].

4.5 Implications for Future Research

Although this theoretical study offers important new perspectives on the psychological processes behind young people's susceptibility to online public opinion, an empirical study is required to confirm these conclusions and evaluate the success of the suggested remedies. Assessing the effectiveness of these approaches would especially benefit from longitudinal studies tracking the effects of media literacy instruction, platform-level improvements, and exposure to many points of view on young behavior. Moreover, cross-cultural studies could help to clarify how cultural elements affect sensitivity to online public opinion, thereby guiding the creation of intervention plans with cultural sensitivity [25].

5. Conclusion

Control of young sensitivity to online public opinion calls for a combined strategy including regulatory interventions, platform-level reforms, and education. Understanding the psychological processes behind conformity, deindividuation, and group behavior helps stakeholders create plans that enable young people to interact critically with online content, fight the pressure to fit popular but maybe misleading narratives, and preserve their uniqueness in the digital age. Although the suggestions given in this debate provide a basis for reducing the harmful effects of internet public opinion on young people, long-term success depends on ongoing research and cooperation among educators, legislators, and social media channels.

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