

Role Reversal on Social Media in China: Adulthood of Children and Infantilization of Adults

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Abstract. Along with the development of mobile Internet, people have entered the age of informatization. People's lives are wrapped up in fragmented information, and the huge volume and redundancy of information easily confuse people in the vortex of the Internet, which may lead to some psychological problems as well as loss of reason and judgment to do something against public order and morals. The development of the Internet has also changed the way of consumption from offline physical consumption to online consumption and then gradually transformed into live shopping. At this good time to web traffic into revenue, many influencers in order to get more eyeballs by any means. This paper mainly explores the role of the Internet to reverse this small branch of behavior, through the form of sampling in the mainstream social media for thesis analysis, to dig deeper into the causes of this phenomenon and the reasons for bringing revenue, while seeking solutions. Finally, it is concluded that the causes of the adultization of children and infantilization of adults on the Internet are closely related to society, families, and individuals.

1 Introduction

With the booming development of mobile Internet, people are gradually stepping into the era of short videos. The main way for people to get information has shifted from traditional media such as TV, radio, and newspapers to the Internet. A new form of society has brought about a new business environment, where people understand world affairs through fast-food media, soothe their minds through consumption, release stress through ubiquitous entertainment, and establish a real connection with the world through virtual networks, fragmenting most things in the entire business environment.

This era is dominated by personal communication, with modernized and electronic means of transmitting normative and non-normative information to an unspecified majority or a specific single person. People can pick up a camera, everyone has a microphone, everyone is a journalist, everyone is a news disseminator, and people can post his or her work on the Internet and become self-media. This media base, with its interactive and autonomous character, has led to a significant increase in press freedom and an unprecedented shift in the media ecology.

This trend has resulted in more and more people flocking to the Internet in an attempt to share information and gain attention. The threshold of video distribution has thus been lowered, and information on the Internet is plentiful and varied. This free and open communication environment has led to the diversity and richness of information on the Internet, as well as the challenge of information authenticity.

Recently, such a phenomenon has attracted widespread attention and a lot of traffic. In social media, many adults have begun to imitate children and engage in childish behaviors, such as using

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“baby bowls”, i.e., using small bowls when eating with their boyfriends to show that they have a small amount of food; speaking in a cute voice and using superimposed words to show that they have a very soft side to provoke and so on, in order to attract traffic. At the same time, many children also actively or passively participate on the Internet, and now some small children can often be seen on social media platforms such as TikTok wearing age-inappropriate clothes and overly adult dress; including some small children can be seen uttering age-inappropriate remarks; and the number of girls among them accounts for the majority, far outnumbering the number of boys. The images of children in some short videos have been given adult appearances and behaviours, sparking concern and controversy in society.

This widespread phenomenon may lead to a series of social problems. For example, the loss of diverse aesthetics of women in social media, the commodification and symbolization of women, and the negative impact on the healthy development of children leading to the disappearance of childhood. This paper argues that these phenomena are inextricably linked to the male gaze in social media and the realization of traffic in social media.

The male gaze in social media is closely related to the social environment we are living in nowadays. In the current society, although women's consciousness is gradually rising, a man still occupies the absolute power of speech, so it can be said that the male gaze is everywhere. The male gaze refers to the male's ability to view women from a sexual perspective to fulfill certain pleasures. Similarly, nowadays society is also a consumerist society, and the traffic cash is commonly known as the cash through the click rate and the number of views. The internet mess pointed out in this article is closely related to both.

2 Literature review

As social media uses play an increasingly important role in people's lives, many scholars have studied social media and its audience acceptance. Online media employs various strategies to capture people's interest and attention. Once attention is secured, it facilitates the marketing of products, the display of advertisements, and the realization of traffic. It can be said that attention has become a precious currency in the digital age [1]. Khalid Jamil points out that social network operators should clearly drive the motivation for users to continue using social networking sites and attract more users. Social media drives content sharing, collaboration, and interaction with various forms of social media platforms and applications such as social bookmarking, ratings, videos, images, podcasts, wikis, microblogs, social blogs, and weblogs emerging. Social network users, government organizations and commercial companies are using social media to communicate with increasing frequency, leading to a dramatic growth in social media usage [2]. It is due to the interests of the communicators or their use of short videos to earn money that short video self media can continue to attract traffic [3]. Netflix has revolutionized product promotion with its unique influence and contemporary features. This phenomenon not only has a significant social impact, but also carries more economic value [4].

The growth of social media has also brought about many psychological problems. Through an in-depth study of data from 2021, Ghee Kian Koh explores the association between social media use and psychological distress, taking into account family dynamics and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE), two factors that are predictive of mental health. While these factors have often been overlooked in previous studies, our study controls for them to more accurately analyze the relationship between social media use and psychological distress [5].

In the process of constructing childish images of adults, the role of media technology is crucial. Innes has pointed out that changes in communication technology affect people's interest structure, communication symbols, and sources of thought, especially when youth groups display childish visual images on social media, and that the media environment, media symbols, and media technology play a key role in shaping “digital children”. Various visual media symbols that tend to be childlike further blur the boundaries between adults and children, while the emergence of various beauty tools enables youth groups to achieve a technologically youthful appearance [6]. Zhu Tianfeng pointed out that adult infantilization blurs the boundaries between adults and children, bringing about not only the disappearance of adults but also the disappearance of children. Therefore, the phenomenon of adult

infantilization in the network environment deserves the attention and vigilance of society as a whole, and adults need to reverse the status quo in time so that the roles of children and adults can be put into practice [7]. At the same time, Li Yang suggested that “childhood” is considered to be the most carefree, happy, and beautiful period in a person's life, and as early as 1982, due to the emergence of new media such as television, Neil Bozeman put forward the “disappearance of childhood”. Nowadays, with the emergence of short video platforms, the phenomenon of “adultization of children” shown in these short videos has once again brought the “crisis of childhood” to the forefront [8]. Yu Feng believes that the reason for this phenomenon is that, for the onlookers who watch short videos of children being adultized, they choose to watch such videos ostensibly for their own “use and satisfaction”, but in fact, it reflects their lack of media literacy. For short-video creators, posting videos not only helps to increase the number of fans, but also realizes traffic cash through the number of plays, likes, retweets, and comments on the videos, so as to obtain the corresponding “compensation” [9]. Such phenomena are also widely manifested in the post-modern era, where the mass media and patriarchal culture have shaped the standard image of women, leading to an overemphasis on external beauty and making the demands on body shape even more demanding. The female body thus becomes commodified and symbolized [10].

Although there are many scholars who have studied the profit-making behaviors on social media and role reversal behaviors in society, there is still a gap about the causes of such behaviors appearing on social media by linking the two together. This Paper argues that it is necessary to analyze the causes of undesirable social behaviors in the context of social media, which is conducive to the care of psychosocial problems and the long-term stability of society.

3 Methodology

This paper focuses on the analysis of a sample of data around the adultization of children in social media, the infantilization of adults in this category, and bad social media moves.

The first is the adultization of children. This research sampled 2,000 videos containing children on mainstream social media such as TikTok and Kwai, in which the criteria for determining the adultization of children were whether the clothing was revealing, whether the external features such as hair and makeup were mature, and whether the words and behaviors were suggestive such as winking. In addition, the article also analyzed 2000 samples of specific behaviors of adult chyfication on social media, mainly sampling videos posted by adults on social media and comments in the comment section. Among the criteria for determining childishness of adults is the presence of infantilizing behaviors, such as using children's language, imitating children's actions, and chasing after popular cartoon images.

4 Results

From the sample, the researcher finally concluded that most of the children in the sample would overdress. For example, children would imitate adult hairstyles such as perms. They tend to be trendy and revealing in their clothing such as wearing halter tops, V-necks, and short mini-skirts. An additional finding was that the number of girls in the sample was much larger than the number of boys. Regarding the childishness of adults, it is mainly manifested in the use of children's language such as brother, baby, etc., and also childish behaviors such as beeping. At the same time, such videos are highly visible and popular on the Internet, and such video hosts have a huge number of followers and frequent interactions on the Internet.

5 Discussion

The article begins with a discussion of the adultization of children, a phenomenon that occurs for the following reasons. First of all, the development of social media, social media crowded the market for children's cartoons. With the popularity of short video platforms such as Jittery and Fast Hand, people

are addicted to watching entertainment content, the platform precision push to immerse the user, Bingqian gradually from the viewer to the sharer and then to the producer identity change. Network technology breaks the virtual and real isolation, children participate in the adult world, exacerbating the adultization of children. At the same time, the lack of children's programs, adult-produced programs may be "adult" color, the lack of respect and understanding of children, resulting in the loss of children's ability to argue, and gradually follow their parents' choices to watch short video platforms, the phenomenon of "child adultization" spread. The phenomenon of "adultization of children" on short video platforms is spreading.

Secondly, the commercial concept of parents, the video shooters, mostly children's parents, have become the promoters of the phenomenon of "adultization of children". On social media platforms, video broadcasts and interactions can realize traffic flow, and the accumulated number of fans can be paid in various ways. Parents, for the sake of vanity and financial gain, stimulate their children's desire to shoot videos, resulting in the adultization of children's behavior, even make-up, and performances, ignoring the potential impact on children's bodies and minds, and accelerating the "disappearance of childhood".

Children's natural instinct for imitation encourages them to imitate. Children's strong imitation ability and curiosity make them interested in video shooting. With the advancement of mental enlightenment and the enhancement of imitation ability, the videos shot by children are full of laughs and attraction and gain more attention. At the same time, some children see making videos as a means of escaping from learning, putting on exaggerated performances to attract viewers and satisfy the need for socialization and performance, possibly at the expense of the real experiences of childhood.

The impact of the phenomenon lies in the adultization of children may cause children's childhood to be compressed, unlike the childhood of people in the last century, children in the Internet age are prematurely involved in the affairs and responsibilities of the adult world, which deprives them of the time to enjoy innocence and carefree time, which may affect their mental health and development. In addition to this, the infantilization of adults may lead to distortion of values, as children's early exposure to adult content and behaviors may result in age-inappropriate and inappropriate behavioral patterns and unsound values, which may affect their future code of conduct and moral values. The adultization of children leads to the excessive pursuit of entertainment and pleasure, which may lead to the neglect of important aspects such as learning, socializing, and experiencing real life, thus affecting their overall development and growth. Not only that, this phenomenon may lead to the blurring of boundaries between children and adults. From the perspective of consumption, the adultization of children may cause them to be overly dominated by commerce and consumption, and to overly pursue fashion, brand names, and consumer goods, which may lead to distorted consumer attitudes and descent into consumerism.

Solution measures are mainly explored at three levels, namely, at the social level to improve the media literacy of the public, at the level of parents to strengthen their own modeling role as well as at the level of new media platforms to open up the pedagogical perspectives of short video platforms.

There are main reasons regarding the infantilization of adults. Firstly, the monopoly of media technology leads to the homogenization of thinking, visual culture replaces text in the new media era, information fragmentation, people are addicted to instant sensory stimulation of entertainment products, loss of discernment and judgment, the adult spirit stays in childhood, and the society is vulgarized.

Secondly, social pressure and anxiety aggravate consumerism, contributing to the phenomenon of Infantilization of Adults. In a risky society, people relieve anxiety by pursuing a childlike state. Consumerism pushes adults to buy goods with children's symbols to satisfy psychological needs and create a childish atmosphere. Merchants use marketing strategies to make adults feel treated as children and promote the market of childish goods, and Netflix marketing strategies accelerate the trend of adult childishness.

In addition, the family education environment affects individual differences. According to Vygotsky, adult guidance and environment are crucial to children's cognitive development. China's Post-80s and Post-90s, influenced by the family one-child policy, are overly dependent on their parents to plan their lives and lack independence. Urbanization leads to the early maturation of rural

left-behind children, who lack complete childhood experiences and seek childhood satisfaction by purchasing childish commodities in adulthood, and some adults make up for childhood deficits through compensatory consumption.

Finally, adult childification is related to individual psychological needs. Freud's concepts of ego, self, and superego explain adult psychological development; the ego is formed in childhood hedonism, and socialization requires adapting to rules. Adults need to balance the relationship between ego, self, and superego, but some adults, when coping with stress, have excessive ego resistance and pursue the carefree state of childhood, which leads to the phenomenon of childishness.

With regard to this phenomenon, there are the following implications. Excessive childishness of adults may influence adults to over-pursuing entertainment and consumption, neglecting responsibility and self-discipline, causing problems in the values of the whole society. At the same time, parents are the best teachers for their children. When adults pay too much attention to their own joy and fulfillment, they may neglect their responsibility of educating the next generation, which leads to a decline in the quality of education and affects the children's mentality, in a vicious circle. Mental health problems should not be ignored, this phenomenon may make individuals ignore the importance of facing reality, growth, and self-improvement, making people emotionally unstable and self-cognizant.

Regarding the solution to this problem, I have the following points to make. First, pay attention to media literacy and be alert to technological alienation. Adults need to enhance their resistance to the negative effects of media information, realize the anesthetic effect and guiding diversity of media technology, and avoid mental dependence. They need to improve their critical interpretation of media content, maintain in-depth reading habits, and have the ability to assess the current situation and analyze it critically in order to maintain a clear mind in an era of information overload. Adults also need to master the control of personal media use, clarify the purpose of media use, clearly distinguish between social roles and information needs, and maintain a mature identity while moderately incorporating romance and fun into their lives.

Second, advocate rational consumption and promote spiritual development. According to Marx, the essence of consumption is to satisfy human needs, which is "a new proof of the essential power of mankind and a new enrichment of its essence". In the current context of childish consumerism, it is crucial to return to a rational view of adult consumption.

Finally, abandon pure hedonism, realize the transformation of the superego, and establish a complete personality structure. In the process of socialization, the individual completes the transformation into a "social being" and ensures the coordination and unity between the ego, the self, and the superego. Adults need to improve their ability to be bound by rationality and moral norms, emphasize external pressures and real challenges, and develop healthy psychological quality and stress resistance. Continuously carry out the transformation of the superego, monitor one's adult role, and get rid of childish and childish labels in order to realize effective interaction with the external environment and strengthen self-identity. At the same time, elevates the status of women and awakens a sense of feminism; strengthens media literacy, and promotes rational consumption.

There were also additional findings during the analysis. Through this series of investigations and analysis the article hypothesizes that a common influence on this phenomenon may be the male gaze. Due to the data we come up with that the filmmakers of the videos are far more female than male and the viewing audience of the videos are far more male than female's, the article deduces that such undesirable videos are influenced by the attention and clicks of such people and also the heat of the social media generates revenue for the publishers of the videos, so it persists as an internal driving force.

This paper explores the concept of the male gaze, the importance of the male perspective in feminist theory. This gaze implies the portrayal of women and reality from the point of view of male heterosexuals in visual arts and literary creations, objectifying women as sex objects to cater to heterosexual audiences. When the mass media habitually observes, shapes and evaluates women through a male perspective, society's perception of gender is affected. Despite the gradual advancement of women, men still have a dominant position in society. Influenced by the power of men in society, the mass media constantly portray the ideal female image in accordance with male

aesthetic standards and disseminate this notion to women, causing them to regard physical appearance as the highest goal to be pursued. This practice treats women as the other and men's viewing of women as the subject. The frequent appearance of various body challenges on social media, such as the A4 waist and chopstick legs, has triggered a large number of netizens, reinforcing the notion of slimness as an aesthetic standard. Social media has further amplified and popularized this aesthetic trend, becoming a platform for people to view different body landscapes, so that women continue to be bound by scrutiny and self-regulation. Solving this problem requires women to strengthen their self-awareness and sense of value, while men should realize the awakening of women's power and treat them as equals. The efforts of both sides will lay the foundation for a fluid, diverse and inclusive approach to gender communication and a more orderly social landscape.

In addition, with the advent of the post-modern period, the types of mass media are becoming more and more diversified. In order to survive in a competitive market, the mass media must yield to capital and social power and constantly convey new consumer concepts and lifestyles in order to motivate consumers to buy products. Businesses understand this, especially for women, a large consumer group. In order to capture the interest of their audience, women are often portrayed in advertisements as having both the perfect body and face. By overemphasizing the importance of appearance, the mass media have successfully shaped women's consumer attitudes, leading them to pursue celebrity dressing, chase fashion, buy brand-name goods, pursue high quality of life, be keen on plastic surgery and cosmetic treatments, pursue a luxurious lifestyle, and throw themselves into the trend of body aesthetics.

6 Conclusion

This paper focuses on the role reversal phenomenon that exists on social media in the context of the Internet and its relationship with the realization of web traffic. Through the statistics, it can be concluded that the causes of the phenomenon of adultization of children are closely related to the rapid development of social media, parental education and the regulation of social media platforms. Adult infantilization is closely related to adults' childhood experiences and social environment.

Adultification of children may deprive children of the opportunity to enjoy innocent and carefree time, affect their mental health and development, and may distort their values. It may also blur the boundaries between children and adults, leading children to be dominated by commerce and consumption and to fall into the quagmire of consumerism. Infantilizing adults can lead to problems in their self-perception and trigger social conflicts.

In order to prevent this phenomenon from escalating, people should strengthen their own psychological construction and enhance their ability to screen information, so as not to lose themselves in the vortex of social media. At the same time, social media platforms should enhance the supervision, triage different information, and regulate the bad information. In addition, the education of the society, both the family education and the government should pay more attention to these aspects and pay attention to people's mental health problems.

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