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Article

A Comparison of the Impact of Differences in New Media Content on the Self-Efficacy of Female Adolescents

Zitong Hao ^{1,*}

¹ Zhuhai Oriental Foreign Language Experimental School, Zhuhai, China

* Correspondence: Zitong Hao, Zhuhai Oriental Foreign Language Experimental School, Zhuhai, China

Abstract: This study investigates the mechanisms through which differences in new media content influence the self-efficacy of female adolescents. Drawing on contemporary theories of media effects and adolescent psychological development, the paper distinguishes between positive-oriented and negative-oriented new media content and examines their respective impacts across multiple domains of self-efficacy. Positive-oriented content, including knowledge popularization, inspirational narratives, and materials that foster social and communication skills, is found to enhance academic confidence, interpersonal competence, self-cognition, emotional regulation, life skills, and problem-solving abilities. In contrast, negative-oriented content, such as excessive entertainment consumption, appearance-focused and comparison-driven materials, and misleading or falsely curated social media displays, is associated with diminished self-efficacy in these same domains. The analysis highlights a notable symmetry and pertinence between the type of content consumed and the specific dimension of self-efficacy affected, suggesting a patterned and domain-sensitive relationship rather than a uniform global effect. These findings underscore the pivotal role of new media environments in shaping the psychological development and adaptive functioning of female adolescents. The study further provides an academic perspective for understanding the correlation mechanisms linking media content characteristics with self-beliefs, and it offers implications for educators, parents, and policymakers seeking to guide healthier media use and design targeted interventions to support adolescent well-being.

Keywords: new media; adolescents; self-efficacy; psychological development; social media; gender; mental health

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1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

With the rapid development of technology, new media have become deeply integrated into the daily lives of teenagers, serving as a medium for their information acquisition, self-expression, and social interaction. The diversity and popularity of new media platforms enable adolescents, particularly female adolescents, to access information, express themselves, and engage in social interactions more easily [1]. Furthermore, the richness and complexity of new media content exert a profound influence on their psychological development.

Female adolescents are in a critical stage of self-cognition construction and value formation, and the orientation of new media content significantly affects the development of their self-efficacy [1]. Positive content, such as inspirational stories or educational videos, can effectively enhance their self-confidence and problem-solving abilities. Conversely, negative content, such as cyberbullying, stereotyping, or unrealistic portrayals of body image, may adversely impact their mental health. Given the heightened sensitivity of female adolescents to cognitive and emotional influences, the

effects of new media content on their self-efficacy are particularly pronounced. Therefore, it has become a crucial area of research in adolescent psychological development to examine the varying roles that new media content plays in shaping self-efficacy among female adolescents.

1.2. Research Significance

By systematically analyzing the different effects of new media content on the self-efficacy of female adolescents, this study aims to reveal the incentive and potential harm mechanisms of various content orientations in the psychological development of female adolescents. The findings of this research will serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, educators, and parents, helping these stakeholders gain a deeper understanding of the key factors influencing the psychological development of female adolescents in relation to new media. This understanding can guide the creation of more targeted educational intervention strategies and management policies. Furthermore, this study provides a theoretical basis and research perspective for future academic exploration, facilitating deeper investigations into the mechanisms and long-term effects of new media content influence within academic circles [2].

Additionally, this study encourages new media platform operators and content creators to fully acknowledge their social responsibilities in producing and sharing content, fostering the creation and distribution of more constructive and supportive material. The research holds significant value for the healthy development of female adolescents and contributes to cultivating a positive public opinion environment [1]. Moreover, it provides strong support and proper guidance for the psychological growth of all young people.

2. Correlation Characteristics Between New Media Content and Female Adolescents

2.1. Characteristics of Female Adolescents' Use of New Media

Female adolescents frequently engage with new media, exhibiting distinct behavioral characteristics [3]. Judging from the frequency of use, their daily exposure to new media is generally longer, and the most common use scenarios are fragmented periods, such as after-school hours and bedtime. Some of them even rely on new media, which serves as a core channel for daily social interaction, information acquisition, and emotional adjustment.

In terms of content preference, female adolescents tend to focus on areas closely related to their personal growth, such as emotional content that resonates with their needs, including themes like friendship and family [4]. Fashion, beauty, and clothing align with their concern for self-image. Additionally, practical content, such as learning skills and test preparation strategies, supports their academic development. Social interaction content, including friends' daily sharing and community discussions, is also a key focus, reflecting their emphasis on building interpersonal relationships.

It is worth noting that a strong level of interactivity characterizes the use of new media by female adolescents. They are not only passive recipients of content but also actively participate in interactions by commenting, sharing, and liking, confirming their self-worth through feedback from others. This interaction is closely related to the process of constructing their self-identity. To sum up, the behavior of female adolescents in using new media is driven by their psychological needs during this stage of growth and is also shaped to some extent by the content of new media [5].

2.2. The Main Ways New Media Content Influences Female Adolescents

The influence of new media content on female adolescents extends beyond the simple transmission of information [6]. It penetrates their cognitive and psychological levels through various mechanisms, which can be summarized as follows:

First, it impacts the direct reception of information and cognitive construction. Female adolescents gain knowledge, opinions, and experiences by engaging with new

media content, which directly shapes their cognitive systems and influences their judgments on various matters. For instance, educational materials may reshape their understanding of effective learning methods, while content on social skills can enhance their comprehension of building strong interpersonal relationships. These cognitive shifts further influence their initial self-assessment of their abilities.

Second, it influences imitation and habit formation [4]. Female adolescents often observe and replicate behavior patterns depicted in new media, such as time management techniques and communication strategies. This tendency to imitate is particularly pronounced when the content features individuals similar to the audience, such as peers or bloggers of the same age group. Such imitation can indirectly bolster their confidence in performing similar actions, thereby affecting their sense of self-efficacy.

Third, it subtly shapes values over time. The aesthetic standards and success definitions promoted in new media, such as the preference for thinness as an ideal of beauty or a utilitarian view of success, gradually influence the value judgments of female adolescents through repeated exposure. Prolonged engagement with such content may lead them to unconsciously evaluate themselves against these standards, which can further impact their self-perception and sense of worth [6].

Fourth, it highlights the growing importance of social feedback [7]. Social interactions facilitated by new media, such as likes and comments, directly convey external evaluations to female adolescents. Positive feedback, such as supportive comments, can enhance self-identity, while negative feedback, such as critical remarks, may undermine self-confidence. This feedback mechanism significantly influences their self-efficacy in areas like social and expressive skills.

3. The Influence of Positive Comments on the Self-Efficacy of Female Adolescents

3.1. Influence on Academic Self-Efficacy

The integration of positive and academically related content on new media has been shown to significantly influence the academic self-efficacy of female adolescents. This type of content often includes the dissemination of subject knowledge, the exchange of effective learning methods such as the Pomodoro technique and the use of mind maps, as well as the sharing of peer experiences in exam preparation.

By simplifying complex knowledge points, popular science content can alleviate the fear of studying among female adolescents and help them understand that knowledge is attainable. Content related to learning methods provides practical and actionable approaches, clarifies learning paths, and reduces the frustration caused by unstructured attempts. Additionally, success stories shared by peers, such as those detailing significant academic improvement through effort, can challenge fixed mindsets and demonstrate the potential for personal academic growth. These mechanisms collectively support female adolescents in developing the belief that their academic performance can improve through hard work, thereby boosting their confidence in their learning abilities [8].

3.2. Influence on Self-Efficacy in Interpersonal Communication

Positive-oriented social interactions on new media have significantly enhanced female adolescents' self-efficacy in interpersonal communication [9]. This includes the development of sincere communication skills, such as effective listening techniques and strategies for expressing goodwill, as well as approaches to resolving conflicts in campus and friendship settings and sharing interpersonal experiences.

During interpersonal communication, female adolescents often withdraw due to a lack of communication skills or fear of rejection. Specific communication techniques provide them with practical social methods and help them understand that interpersonal interactions follow certain principles. Additionally, conflict resolution scenarios, such as addressing misunderstandings during discussions with friends, can alleviate their fear of interpersonal conflicts and boost their confidence in managing such situations. Furthermore, the emphasis on the idea that "being true to oneself is more important than

striving to please others" helps reduce the anxiety associated with achieving flawless social interactions. This perspective encourages them to take initiative in social engagements and strengthens their belief in their ability to form genuine interpersonal relationships.

3.3. Influence on Self-Cognition and Emotion Regulation Efficacy

Positive-oriented content on new media about self-growth has a beneficial impact on female adolescents' self-cognition and emotional regulation efficacy [10]. This includes themes such as self-acceptance, the promotion of women's diverse values (emphasizing that ability holds greater importance than appearance), and simple emotional regulation techniques like five-minute deep breathing exercises and maintaining an emotional diary.

In terms of self-cognition, such content helps female adolescents overcome the misconception that they must conform to others' expectations [5]. By emphasizing intrinsic value and challenging the limitations of single evaluation standards, such as appearance or achievement, they can better recognize their own worth. This ultimately reduces self-doubt and enhances their acknowledgment of their inherent value.

Regarding emotion regulation, practical and actionable techniques provide female adolescents with effective tools to manage negative emotions, fostering a sense of control over their emotional states. Additionally, peer experiences shared about overcoming depression help normalize emotional fluctuations. This enables adolescents to understand that such fluctuations are natural and that emotional regulation is a skill they can develop, thereby boosting their confidence in managing their emotions.

3.4. Influence on Life Skills and Problem-Solving Efficacy

Positive content on new media related to practical life activities can enhance the life skills and problem-solving abilities of female adolescents. These include daily practical skills, such as efficient desk organization methods and simple meal preparation steps, as well as time management techniques like the four-quadrant method and shared experiences in overcoming setbacks [11].

For female adolescents, even minor aspects of daily life, such as organizing their living space or managing their time, can lead to frustration if not addressed effectively. Specific life skills provide clear, actionable steps, enabling them to quickly learn and apply these methods. For instance, by adopting the approach of prioritizing homework tasks, female adolescents can experience tangible improvements in learning efficiency, which in turn boosts their confidence in managing their time [4].

Additionally, sharing examples of calmly addressing minor challenges in life, such as forgetting keys or resolving small disputes with family members, can help female adolescents understand that problems are manageable and reduce their anxiety about unforeseen difficulties. Successfully resolving practical issues by applying methods learned through media further reinforces their belief in their ability to handle life's challenges, thereby enhancing their life skills and self-efficacy.

4. The Influence of Negative-Oriented New Media Content on Female Adolescents' Self-Efficacy

4.1. Influence of New Media on Academic Self-Efficacy

Negative content on new media significantly undermines the academic self-efficacy of female adolescents. Such content primarily includes over-entertainment material, such as meaningless short videos and gossip, the amplification of academic anxiety through extreme descriptions like "ten thousand people crossing a wooden bridge" and "a single misstep starts a chain of mistakes," and the dissemination of views that dismiss the value of hard work, such as "genius theory" and "IQ determinism."

Excessive entertainment content is highly engaging and can easily consume the study time of female adolescents, leading to delayed homework and insufficient review. When academic performance does not meet expectations, individuals often attribute this to a

lack of self-discipline, which can result in self-doubt. Content that amplifies academic anxiety intensifies competitive pressure, as illustrated by statements like "students in the next class study until the early hours of the morning every day." Such comparisons can cause panic, leading individuals to perceive their efforts as inadequate and gradually lose control over their learning progress. Additionally, the promotion of "genius theory," such as claims that "top students achieve excellent results without staying up all night," undermines the value of hard work. This can lead female adolescents to believe that "academic performance is determined by talent, and effort is futile," directly impacting their confidence in their learning abilities and ultimately causing a continuous decline in academic self-efficacy.

4.2. Influence on Self-Efficacy of Interpersonal Communication

The presence of negative social content on new media platforms has been shown to adversely affect the interpersonal self-efficacy of female adolescents. This phenomenon includes the portrayal of an idealized social circle, characterized by depictions of elaborate social gatherings, screenshots of praise-filled conversations, and other forms of seemingly perfect interactions. It also involves instances of cyber violence and malicious comments, as well as the imposition of unrealistic standards, such as the notion that "social interaction must please everyone."

The concept of a "Perfect Social Circle" creates a misleading impression of harmonious relationships by concealing the conflicts and awkward moments that are common in real social interactions. Female adolescents may experience self-doubt when comparing their social experiences, such as occasional disagreements with friends or difficulties participating in group discussions. This comparison can lead to a reluctance to initiate social activities. Additionally, exposure to cyber violence, such as widespread criticism for perceived missteps, amplifies the perceived risks of social engagement. This can foster a defensive mindset of "speaking less to avoid mistakes," discouraging individuals from expressing their true thoughts. Furthermore, the expectation that "social interaction must please everyone" imposes excessively high standards. For example, individuals with strong verbal skills are often viewed as more likable, which may cause female adolescents with less developed communication skills to feel inherently inadequate. Despite their efforts to engage socially, they may experience self-doubt due to the belief that they fall short of these standards. Over time, this can diminish their motivation to participate in social interactions, further undermining their sense of self-efficacy in interpersonal communication.

4.3. Influence on Self-Cognition and Emotion Regulation Efficacy

Negative-oriented content about self-awareness on new media significantly impacts the self-awareness and emotional regulation efficacy of female adolescents. Its content presentation primarily falls into three categories: the first is the promotion of appearance anxiety, which is evident in the one-sided glorification of specific body shapes and external images, such as asserting that beauty is only achieved by reducing weight to a certain level or viewing imperfections in makeup as failures [12]. The second category involves rigid value judgments, where an individual's worth is defined by narrow standards. For instance, this may include directly linking academic performance to future opportunities, implying that poor academic results limit personal growth. It may also involve evaluating an individual's ability to manage their external image as a measure of how others perceive them, suggesting that struggles with image-building hinder social recognition. The third category is the amplification of negative emotions, characterized by the frequent dissemination of content related to anxiety and depression, such as claims that anxiety is incurable or that depression is universal and normal.

In terms of specific impacts, content promoting appearance anxiety causes female adolescents to overly focus on perceived flaws in their appearance, such as body proportions, skin tone, and other external features. This reinforces aesthetic ideals, such

as prioritizing "fair skin, a slim figure, and a youthful appearance" or flawless skin as benchmarks of beauty. Consequently, they may equate their self-worth with their external image, leading to a cognitive distortion: "If my appearance does not meet the standard, I lack the value of being loved." This can result in the negation of their intrinsic value [5, 13]. Additionally, some individuals narrowly define "success" using limited criteria, such as academic performance and social activity, which can marginalize female adolescents who do not meet these standards, including those with average academic achievements or introverted personalities. Furthermore, the frequent dissemination of negative emotional expressions, such as anxiety and depression, often conveys messages like "life feels meaningless." During emotional fluctuations, individuals may engage in self-denial regarding their perceived inability to control emotions, which can ultimately lead to a sustained decline in emotional regulation efficacy.

4.4. Influence on Life Skills and Problem-Solving Efficacy

The negative, life-oriented content on new media can weaken the life skills and problem-solving efficacy of female adolescents. This includes unrealistic portrayals of an "exquisite life," such as the notion that "students need to use expensive skincare products" or "spend hours daily on elaborate meal preparation." Furthermore, the promotion of a "lying flat" culture and passive coping strategies, characterized by attitudes like "hard work is meaningless, so giving up is better," disproportionately emphasizes life's challenges and discourages proactive efforts [14].

New media content that promotes the unrealistic theme of an "exquisite life" encourages female adolescents to compare their own circumstances to unattainable standards. This paradigm often exceeds the economic and energy capacities of ordinary teenagers, showcasing high-value consumer goods and meticulously maintained living spaces. When adolescents notice discrepancies, such as eating convenience food or having a messy living space, they may experience frustration and begin to question their life skills. Similarly, content related to the "lying flat" culture can lead adolescents to evade problems rather than actively address them, as it diminishes the perceived value of effort. For instance, the idea that achieving life goals, such as homeownership, is unattainable may foster a perfunctory attitude toward life.

Examples of such challenges include heavy academic workloads and familial disagreements [15]. Female adolescents may develop the belief that "problems cannot be solved, so countermeasures are unnecessary." This mindset gradually erodes their internal motivation to address issues proactively. Additionally, new media content that overemphasizes life's difficulties can lead adolescents to perceive life as overwhelmingly challenging. For example, minor setbacks, such as forgetting keys or missing public transportation, may provoke self-doubt and a denial of their ability to solve problems. This can result in a continuous decline in their sense of self-efficacy regarding life skills and problem-solving.

5. Conclusion

The influence of new media content differences on the self-efficacy of female adolescents is both evident and consistent. Positive-oriented content, such as knowledge dissemination, social skills development, and self-growth material, can significantly enhance the self-efficacy of female adolescents across four dimensions: academic performance, interpersonal communication, self-awareness and emotional regulation, life skills, and problem-solving. This is achieved by providing practical information, promoting positive values, and sharing successful experiences. Conversely, negative-oriented content on new media, including excessive entertainment, appearance-related anxiety triggers, and misleading portrayals, undermines their sense of self-efficacy by inducing anxiety, diminishing self-worth, and reducing motivation to address challenges within the same dimensions.

The findings of this study underscore the critical role of new media content in influencing the psychological development of female adolescents. They also highlight the importance of guiding adolescents toward rational and constructive use of new media to strengthen their sense of self-efficacy. In the context of new media engagement, it is vital to prioritize the curation of content that fosters positive development. This approach aims to enhance the capacity and confidence of female adolescents by ensuring access to beneficial content while mitigating the detrimental effects of negative material, thereby supporting their overall growth and well-being.

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