

Investigating reasons and effects of adolescents' online identity construction on Weibo

Xinyuan Wang

School of Sociology, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK

E-mail: wxy1173877634@163.com

Abstract. This study explores the reasons why adolescents construct online identities on social media as well as exploring the positive and negative impacts that these constructed online identities may have. Focusing upon Sina Weibo users, participants' online data was collected in order to analyse the types of online identity adolescents construct. Interviews were then conducted in order to further explore the reasons behind, and effects of, said construction. The results of the study indicate that the reasons why adolescents construct online identities on Weibo are related to their own social needs, a sense of achievement, self-worth, and sense of belonging within a group, as well as imitating celebrity identities to gain attention, traffic, and money. Their online identities, to some extent, not only help them become more confident and relieve stress but recognize their own strengths and cultivate positive values. However, at the same time, some online identities have led to issues such as confusion between adolescents' real-life and online identities, information and cultural 'bubbles', and negative behaviours caused by the pursuit of attention and online traffic. Accordingly, future research should aim to help adolescents construct rational identities, to maximize the positive impacts of online identities, and to reduce negative impacts.

Keywords: Sina Weibo, Adolescents, Online identity construction.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Identity is a pivotal aspect of self-concept and is foundational to an individual's understanding of themselves [41]. It is during adolescence, a critical developmental stage, that individuals actively engage in the process of identity formation [46]. With the digital age, online platforms, such as Sina Weibo in China, have become arenas where identity construction significantly occurs. Adolescents, with nearly ubiquitous internet access, engage in identity play, social connection, and self-expression through these platforms [34].

1.2. Research Rationale

Previous literature differentiates between an 'inner self' and an 'external persona' (Goffman), allowing people to emphasise positive aspects whilst hiding negative ones [6]. Identity is shaped by the evaluations of others [43] in a dynamic, two-way process involving 'symbolic markers' such as clothing and language [1]. Offline, face-to-face interactions are vital, as they provide visual cues that inform our judgments about others' identities [49].

During adolescence, the quest for self-awareness and identity is pivotal [11]. Adolescents explore strengths and weaknesses, facing the tension of clarity versus confusion [15]. Identity formation, a continuous process of 'becoming,' emerges through engagement with the world [46]. Unlike adults, adolescents actively express themselves through actions [26], while socialization, notably with friends, bridges childhood to adulthood [14]. Various factors - visual [22], social, cultural [1], personal [7], and media [39] - interact in this multidimensional process [14] toward relative stability. However, real identities might not always be recognized or accepted, prompting a search for resolution, even online [10].

The internet's emergence has revolutionized identity construction, providing a virtual domain for this purpose [35]. Through social media, online communities, and gaming platforms, individuals now shape and showcase diverse aspects of themselves [51]. These platforms enable persona experimentation, avatar creation, and connection with like-minded groups [9]. Originally designed for communication, these spaces have shifted towards self-promotion and personal growth [53]. In today's algorithm-driven digital culture, online identities can turn into valuable commercial tools for self-marketing and obtaining rewards [20]. An example in China, Sina Weibo, illustrates this trend, where users define their identities through multimedia sharing and discussions, under platform surveillance [57].

The majority of adolescents (95%) have internet access, with 80% having personal data on social networking sites [35]. They engage primarily in online communication for identity construction, finding security and overcoming social barriers [44]. Self-presentation is crucial, involving appearance, language, and behaviour to shape online personas [11]. The internet enables a "mask" method, letting teens control and shape their online images, often in response to media-promoted norms like idealized body standards [12]. Adolescents often use anonymity and pseudonyms for self-protection online [6]. Online platforms provide a rich space for identity exploration but also bring challenges [17]. Some adolescents, lacking strong values, might face confusion between online and real-life identities, leading to risky behaviors [54].

Previous studies have shown that the construction of online identities among adolescents is a widespread phenomenon and have introduced various methods of identity construction. However, some research also indicates that the exploration of online identities poses certain challenges for adolescents. Therefore, to address these challenges and properly guide adolescents in constructing online identities, it is necessary to first clearly understand the reasons why adolescents construct online identities and the impacts these identities have on them.

1.3. Research Objective

This project will develop a case study specifically focused on different kinds of adolescents' online identities on Sina Weibo and investigate relative reasons and effects. The research questions to be addressed are:

- 1). Why do adolescents engage in constructing new identities on social media?
- 2). What are the effects of online identity construction on adolescents?

The research will employ a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis of participants' Weibo posts and qualitative interviews. Posts will verify authenticity of online identities. Interviews will explore reasons behind these identities and their impacts, forming a comprehensive understanding. This approach enriches insights by analyzing interviews and online data within existing literature.

1.4. Research Structure

The research is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is an overall introduction to the research background, rationale, and methods of this project. The second chapter summarizes the existing literature. The third chapter provides a detailed discussion of the two research methodologies used in this study. The fourth chapter answers the two research questions, discussing the reasons, positive impacts, and negative impacts about adolescents' online identity construction. The fifth chapter concludes the study and offers suggestions for future research directions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Identity Construction

Identity is an important part of self-concept [41]. Self-concept can be defined as “the totality of an individual’s thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object” [42]. According to Goffman’s “self” theory [6], the human self is divided into “external self” and “inner self”. The former refers to the self that individuals want others to see. Individuals usually edit and transform themselves according to the requirements and expectations of the target audience, thus creating the desired idealized positive image in the external environment. The latter refers to the individual’s id, the real self that only the individual knows. In his seminal work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, he combined this division of identity about the self with the performance in the theatre and pointed out that the external self is like an actor’s performance on the stage [25]. This performance needs to be appreciated and praised by the audience, so it needs to follow certain regulations and orders. The impression conveyed to the audience by this performance is also intentionally created by the performer. The inner self is like the true state of the actor in the ‘backstage’. Put simply, in a relatively private environment, the actor does not need to perform deliberately, and can act according to their authentic nature. This self-state is generally only known to oneself, but sometimes it will inadvertently leave an impression on others. In addition to these two identities, Goffman also put forward the hidden means of identity creation in further research [30]. “A mask of manner can be held in place from within” [6], this kind of mask means that when an individual presents himself, he does not create some false identities to cater to the requirements of others, but selectively shows the parts that are beneficial to himself and hides the parts that are not good for him according to his own characteristics. In this way, the individual is still himself, and has not become “others”, thus achieving the unity of the external self and the internal self to a certain extent [25]. Therefore, in different individuals, the outer self may or may not be the same as the inner self.

Based on Goffman’s research, Markus and Nurius (1986) divided the self into “present self” and “possible self”, the former refers to the self that others have seen, while the latter is the self that others do not know. The ideal social image an individual wants to build eventually is “hopeful possible self”, that is, let others see the “I” that meets the expectations of them [21]. The theory of “self in the mirror” put forward by Charles Cooley believes that “a person’s self is formed in the attitudes and evaluations of others towards oneself” [43]. The evaluation of others can provide individuals with an image description of themselves in the external environment, which is like a mirror, allowing individuals to recognize their own identities, so that they can understand their strengths and weaknesses, improve their self-awareness, and continuously improve their behaviour to be admired by the outside world.

Therefore, identity can be regarded as a part of the “self” known by others [30]. Its construction process requires two-way interaction with the external environment, which means, the individual shows his or her identity image or characteristics to others and others can understand and recognize the individual’s identity. After the two-way consensus of these images or characteristics is achieved, the identity of the individual is successfully constructed [1].

Identity construction is influenced by symbolic boundaries [32], including object symbols (clothing, accessories, gestures) and language symbols. In offline interactions, visual effects can amplify the influence of these symbols on identity shaping. Face-to-face social interaction can provide individuals with basic visual information, such as gender, approximate age, appearance, and race, and allow individuals to infer other relevant information based on this information [49], which can help them make a rough judgment on the identity of others. In addition, physical, verbal, and other behaviours during interactions can also reinforce some individuals’ real-world identities .

2.2. Identity Construction and Adolescents

Adolescence is a critical period for identity development. This is a stage of transition from childhood to adulthood and is also a centre stage for developing self-awareness and self-identity [11], and

answering the question of identity and confusion. The tendency towards exploration and creativity amongst adolescents prompts them to actively seek their own status and role in the world. Many adolescents analyse their strengths and weaknesses and combine their experiences and abilities to try to find their identity in the world [15]. This process is full of surprises and challenges, since immature thinking and a lack of social experience will lead to constant struggles between identity clarity and identity confusion [17].

“The experience of identity in practice is a way of being in the world [46]”. The formation of individual identity needs to be recognized by the outside world through practice. The process of identity formation is also the process of individuals constantly “becoming”. After a long period of exploration, most adults have mature values and rich enough social experience to form their own way of interacting with the world. They are in different professions and their social circles and social behaviours are constantly regulate [26]. Gradually, they have gained a relatively stable in different environments. Unlike adults, however adolescents are mostly in the exploratory stage of identity construction [13]. Adolescents need to constantly express themselves through actions. They not only explore the relationship between themselves and others, but also which groups they can act in and what role they should play in the social process. Socialization is an inevitable step in the transition from childhood to adulthood [3]. Most children rely on their parents and other family members. The relationship between parents and children is “care and dependence”. But with the continuous awakening of self-awareness in the process of growing up, many teenagers gradually hope to transform the management power - from the hands of their parents into autonomy [14]. In order to gain autonomy, adolescents need to find “significant others” to break the fixed identity model between themselves and family members [3]. Friends often become the “significant other” in adolescence. Friends can be both a self-cognition mediator and an identity agent, which act like a “mirror” to allow adolescents to see their new identity image and give it recognition.

Adolescents’ identity construction is influenced by many factors. The first is visual factors. Race, gender, skin colour, and age are examples of things which can be the basis for identity construction. These are often the easiest way to gain recognition [22]. The second is social and cultural factors. Cultural customs and social norms in different countries, cities and communities will have different influences on the thoughts and behaviours of young people, changing the way they see the world [1]. Additionally, personal experience factors such as education, hobbies, and personal achievements promote the cognitive development of young people, helping them to conduct self-reflection and question their values and identities [7]. Media and technology factors are also important factors. The extensive information brought by TV, movies, advertisements, and social media brings new ideas to young people. The social expectations brought by these media will also affect the construction of their real identities [39]. Therefore, the construction of identity is a multi-dimensional process. Different factors interact with each other and reach a point of relative stability, so that young people can gain clear understandings of their identities and functions. However, this is only an ideal state. The construction of real identity does not necessarily mean that teenagers truly recognize themselves [14]. No matter the “inner self” mentioned by Goffman, or the “hopeful possible self” mentioned by Markus and Nurius, the identity construction of the individual is only the identity image agreed with the outside world [30]. In some cases, adolescents may not recognize their real identities, one example being that of transgender people who may feel the need to disguise their gender [22]. Real identities can also be disruptive to teens’ lives, as in the case of homosexual or disabled people facing discrimination [10]. When their actual self-identities fail to agree with their ideal identities, adolescents often seek new ways to resolve this distress. The construction of online identity provides a new space for them.

2.3. Online Identity Construction

The development of the Internet has changed the context of identity construction [51]. It weakens or cuts off the individual’s connection to the actual scene shown and provides a virtual realm for the individual’s identity construction [2]. The development of media and Internet technology has reduced

the need for social interaction on physical space and individuals can thus communicate through non-physical text, voice mode or audio-visual mode [35], which provides a lot of possibilities for the identity construction of individuals in virtual environment interaction. For example, in text communication, users have enough time to organize their words and choose their preferred speech mode to communicate [15]. Users can also apply online voice-changing or face-changing technology in voice or audio-visual mode to edit their own voice and image [4], so as to create their new online social identity and make it impossible for chat partners to easily obtain their real offline identity. In addition, the emergence of various media platforms and online communities has also provided new methods for the construction of individual online identities. Individual identities do not necessarily need to be known to others through communication, but only need to set an avatar with personal ideal characteristics in the personal space of the social platform, or send out photos, videos or text messages that can show their online identity, then they can leave an identity impression on visitors [22].

These new ways of constructing identities within networks are increasingly used by individuals. Individuals are no longer limited to constructing an “external self” or a “hopeful possible self” but can construct an ideal “other” [48]. This “other” can be an external self that is the same or different from reality, or a self being visible or invisible to others, or an inner self. That is to say, the individual’s shaping of their own identity is no longer limited to meeting the needs of the target audience and has many possibilities. Individuals can actively choose which identity information they want to share in the network based on subjective wishes, and perform a selective self-display [43]. Essentially, this is similar to role-playing, or a process of re-empowerment [10]. In this process, individuals who might otherwise face discrimination, such as the poor, disabled people, or homosexual people can break through the limitations brought about by innate physical conditions, economic conditions, and environmental conditions, and hide part of themselves in the virtual environment [10]. They can create for themselves identity characteristics that are not significantly different from other users, which helps them to reduce discrimination or unfair treatment as in reality to a certain extent [22].

Online identity construction mainly takes place within three channels: social media platforms, online communities and forums, and online gaming platforms [51]. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and Facebook offer users the opportunity to curate and present different aspects of their identity to their online audience [15]. They can carefully choose what to share, such as photos, videos, and status updates, and engage with others through likes, comments, and direct messages [22]. Through these platforms, users can experiment with different personas, explore their interests, and define themselves in relation to their peers. Online communities and forums dedicated to specific interests, hobbies, or fandoms also play a role in identity construction [1]. Users can join communities that align with their passions, such as gaming, music, fashion, or sports. These communities provide a sense of belonging, allowing adolescents to connect with like-minded individuals and contribute to discussions, sharing their knowledge and experiences related to their interests [10]. Meanwhile, the sense of group belonging and group identity can help people strengthen their identity shaping [6]. Additionally, online gaming platforms provide a unique space for people to construct their identities. They can create avatars, customize their characters, share virtual property and interact with other players in virtual world’s [9]. Gaming communities often foster collaboration, competition, and socialization, enabling users to develop friendships and engage in collective activities that shape their online self-identity and community identity [7].

In the early days, these channels for identity construction were mainly used for interpersonal communication which helped strengthen interpersonal relationships which already existed in real life. “Friend websites” were popular, the most typical one was Facebook [51]. However, with the changes in the organization and structure of social media platforms, the focus of social activities has gradually shifted from “making friends” to “getting attention”, and the direction of social activities has also changed from expanding outwards to shrinking inwards and self-improvement [43]. At the same time, with the application of algorithmic culture on the Internet, online audiences of users are no longer limited to the interpersonal circle that coincides with reality. Algorithms can encode and quantify the

information of different users and recommend people of interest to them based on their network habits and preferences [53]. Algorithmic culture makes it possible for individuals to gain more attention from strangers. In the era of the gradual prosperity of self-media, virtual attention and “like” can be transformed into online traffic and then into real material and spiritual benefits, which attracts more users to explore ways to gain attention and “like” [51]. The success of many Internet celebrities and stars has gradually made users realize that it is an effective method to construct their identity online and conduct reasonable self-marketing and presentation [20]. Internet identity has become an object that can be commercialized and symbolized. It can be used to obtain spiritual needs such as acquiring a sense of accomplishment, a sense of belonging, and reducing loneliness or it can only be used as a tool to obtain traffic and offline material benefits.

In China, Sina Weibo, the largest micro-blogging platform, ranks among the top five visited sites [39]. A majority of users, especially those under 30 (80%) and under 18 (40%), engage actively, particularly young females aged 11-21 [57]. Operating on PCs and mobiles, Weibo allows instant multimedia sharing and interaction. User identities primarily form through posting and participating in Chaohua (Super Topic), akin to Twitter, where content is shared in text, pictures, and videos on personal pages. Chaohua, a Weibo special function, gathers like-minded individuals, resembling interest-based communities [34]. Weibo’s Chaohua is governed by rules that maintain topic relevance and format. Posts undergo administrator review, ensuring harmony in the social circle [57]. This platform provides a structured space for focused content sharing and engagement.

2.4. Online Identity Construction and Adolescents

Compared to adults, adolescents use Internet more. A survey [35] in the United States shows that 95% of adolescents have access to the Internet, 80% of them have personal data in social networking sites. In adults, the two corresponding figures are 78% and 64% respectively. The development of the Internet has continuously provided new resources and space for young people to build their identities, giving them more methods to create identities.

Adolescents’ online identity construction is mostly accompanied by online communication. Research shows that most teens prefer to use the internet for real-time communication and have profiles on social networking sites than face-to-face communication [22]. This is because online communication is more conducive to their self-presentation and self-disclosure [44], which helps them gain more sense of security in interpersonal communication and overcome social barriers. On the objective side, the anonymity, asynchrony and accessibility of the Internet have created controllable conditions for self-presentation and identity development of young people [12]. In the process of online communication, self-presentation is an important part of identity shaping [4]. In face-to-face communication, adolescents often express themselves through appearance, speech and behaviour. Symbolic materials are also used reasonably to prove their identity, such as interpersonal relationships, personal skills and hobbies [29]. Self-presentation on the Internet is similar but also has differences. Diversified media technologies and rich network resources provide reasonable barriers for young people [51], which can help adolescents connect themselves to different brands, celebrities or other sources, creating rich images of themselves. They are often related to an “ideal self” [23].

The typical characteristic of adolescents’ online identity construction is self-division and glorification [23]. Adolescents often use the “mask” method proposed by Goffman to split and partially strengthen their own image, so as to achieve the purpose of highlighting their personal characteristics. A study about American adolescents shows that adolescent boys and girls are often stereotyped in their online self-presentation [29]. For example, girls like to post photos with sexualised poses or wearing provocative clothing. Boys like to choose more diverse photos, but the overall trend is to enhance their sexual appeal. The role of this stereotype also applies to Chinese adolescents. Many adolescent girls are influenced by the idea of “white, young and thin” and use the function of picture beautification to make themselves look younger and ‘cuter’ [43]. This tendency towards self-beautification is the result of the internalization of media images [22]. The media’s portrayal of gender images mostly comes from public figures. The appearance, figure, outfit, and behaviour of

public figures is often hyped up by the media [20]. In recent years, the Chinese media have touted a series of body standards based on the common features of many female stars, such as “A4 waist” (the width of the waist is the same as the width of A4 paper), right-angle shoulders (the shoulders and the neck are at right angles), butterfly back (shoulder blades are very obvious, like butterfly wings), chopstick legs (legs are long, straight and thin like chopsticks) [31]. These standards are constantly disseminated by various media on various platforms, creating an illusion for young people that only those who reach the figure of the stars will be welcomed, and only the figure promoted by the media is correct and beautiful [56]. If they want to gain the attention on social platforms, the photos they share must cater to the aesthetic ideas spread by the media. Additionally, many products, such as weight-loss products, whitening products, skin care products, and clothing products with high body requirements, will use celebrities as publicity gimmicks, which inadvertently strengthen these stereotyped aesthetic impressions and exacerbate youth self-image beautification towards popular media images [24].

Additionally, adolescents’ identities online are often anonymized and pseudonymized [6]. In real life, many adolescents have negative experiences such as discrimination, abuse, and violence because of their perceived shortcomings or ‘inappropriate’ behaviours [10]. Due to the fear of negative experiences, many adolescents dare not continue to use their real identities on the Internet, but choose anonymity and pseudonyms to hide themselves, thereby reducing the possibility of negative experiences. This kind of identity construction has the intention of self-protection, which is conducive to experiencing positive experiences that are missing in real life and reduces the psychological damage caused by those negative experiences [23]. Anonymization and pseudonymous identities can therefore make it easier for these adolescents to enjoy online life and allow them to socialize online with more dignity.

The identity shaping of adolescents in the online space is closely related to the acquisition of self-identity. For adolescents, realistic identities emerge from “observation, imitation, and self-assessment in social contexts” [12], but online identity can break away from certain social background restrictions, making the concept of “self” more diverse and flexible [48]. Adolescents can make full use of different “symbols” on the Internet to arrange and combine, and freely choose media, technology, images, and other symbolic materials such as items, brands, and places to piece together their identities [32]. These diverse choices will bring about “who am I”. Adolescents not only need to clarify their identity, but also need to know how to update and represent it [51], which means adolescents need to explore the relationship between their identity construction and self-concept. However, there are two opposing hypotheses regarding the relationship between adolescents’ online identity construction and self-concept [5]. One hypothesis is that new identities created online may distort adolescents’ real identities. Indulging in false identities online may make them forget who they really are, or be less satisfied with who they are in reality and become more vulnerable and sensitive. Another hypothesis is that the self-confidence and self-esteem gained by their online identities can motivate and encourage their real identities. It can encourage them to become more satisfied with themselves and find resonance between real identities and ideal identities. Eventually, their self-concepts will be much clearer [28]. However, further studies have shown that the relationship between identity construction and self-concept is influenced by various factors, such as age, gender, religious, cultural context, educational experience and level of cognitive development [17]. It is difficult to draw conclusions as to whether online identity construction is beneficial to the self-concept or not [12]. They do not have a direct relationship. Clarity and ambiguity of self-concept are two possible effects of identity construction [17]. Best [5] also proposed that adolescents’ online identity construction will have an impact on other aspects such as self-esteem, intimacy, and sexual development.

Overall, it is obvious that constructing online identities has been a common behaviour for adolescents. In some important ways, compared to offline identity construction, the methods and space of online identity construction are richer and wider, which can meet diverse needs for adolescents [51]. Compared to adults, adolescents have more creativity and enthusiasm to build online identities with

the help of various technological methods [13]. However, restricted by young age, little social experience, and immature thinking, not all adolescents have appropriate values and a sound concept of right and wrong [17], and this may have negative effects, such as confusion with regards to self-concept [5]. Some adolescents, instigated by people with ulterior motives, have been reported to be involved in illegal activities involving constructed online identities [54]. Therefore, it is arguably important to guide adolescents to some extent as they construct online identities. To provide specific and targeted guidance, we should start by understanding why adolescents like to construct identities online and how those identities affect them.

3. Methodology

This project uses the largest micro-blogging platform [39], Sina Weibo, as a research platform. The research participants are adolescent users of this platform. The reasons for choosing Sina Weibo as the research platform include its ubiquity among Chinese netizens and its diverse function. Considering different standards for adolescents in different countries, and the fact that the minimum age of users stipulated by Weibo is 14 years old, the age of the participants was limited to those between the ages of 14 and 18.

The study mainly employs qualitative methods. Considering the diversity of characteristics, causes and influences of adolescents' identity construction, it would be difficult to obtain satisfactory results using quantitative methods, such as questionnaire. Options offered by researchers in a questionnaire are limited, but ideas of participants are diverse. Although 'other' options can be set in the questionnaire for participants to provide their ideas, they may abandon their thinking about a question because they are guided by the options provided by the researcher, or casually choose an option because they do not want to waste time. Conversely, qualitative research can adapt to the changing rhythms and flows of everyday life and contributes to gaining more open-minded perspectives. Researchers of the study are adults, but participants are adolescents. It is better to communicate with adolescents capture their different ideas directly instead of setting options for them through adult perspectives.

The research was divided into two stages. In the first phase, the researcher enlisted adolescents and secured their consent to access and retain their Weibo posts. This step aimed to outline their constructed identities and corresponding attributes. Collecting their actual posts was essential to capture their authentic online personas, circumventing interview-induced biases. This approach prevents participants from portraying a misleading image. The researcher analysed latest 5 posts up to a maximum of 6 months ago from each participant using content analysis. This technique accommodates text, images, and videos, enabling a comprehensive understanding of their online presence.

In the second stage, one-on-one semi-structured interviews with the participants was conducted. The focus of this stage is to answer two basic research questions: reasons why adolescents engage in identity construction and the effects of the construction. Additionally, conducting follow up interviews allows for a deeper understanding of the psychology underpinning adolescents' online activities as well as a deeper understanding of the data collected in the first stage.

3.1. Analysis of post content

3.1.1. Sampling and Data Collection

For this phase of the study, 7 participants were recruited which meets the expectation of 5 - 10 participants and gain consent for their social media posts to be used as research data. The participants were an opportunity sample, in that they were recruited from amongst a group of students that the researcher taught in the previous year. Participants were recruited by posting an advertisement along with information in the class group chat. Then I selected 7 students who often use Weibo to be potential participants.

Those who were interested in participating in the research were given a project introduction form and a consent form, including information such as project goals, some interview questions, and the contact information of the researcher, data collection. Having done this, the researcher collected latest 5 posts up to a maximum of 6 months ago from each participant and conduct a content analysis to identify themes relating to identity construction. Then an excel sheet was created to record the online identity characteristics of different users with screenshots of texts, pictures, and videos.

3.1.2. Data Analysis

In order to conduct the analysis, an excel sheet was created in which data could be stored. To protect privacy, all participants were anonymised. The first step was to make sure the unit of analysis which could be a single word, a theme, an image, or an entire profile or post [27]. In the study, the unit of analysis were divided into three categories: text, picture, and video, and recorded in the form of screenshots in the table corresponding to the participant. The next step was coding the units, which means materials were labeled based on the predefined theme [27]. The researcher analyzed the domains associated with the content of collected posts and coded them as celebrity, pet, game, dance, selfie, and the frequency of their posting activity combining the posting time. For establishing the reliability and validity of the coding process and the results [18], the researcher formulate initial hypotheses regarding the identity image that participants may intend to portray through their posts, summarize these hypotheses, and subsequently seek to validate them through follow-up interview processes. The participants' Weibo content were saved in an encrypted Excel Worksheet.

3.2. One-on-One Interview

3.2.1. Sampling and Data Collection

The purpose of the second phase was to investigate both the reasons and the effects of adolescents' online construction. After collecting data form the participants, they were invited to attend online interview for in-depth exploration of the reasons and effects of online identity construction. Two necessary questions are why they want to construct their own online identities and how does this then affect them. To be more flexible and get in-depth exploration of a certain issue, semi-structured interview was used. The researcher drew up a list of questions related to the research topic before the interview. This list was only a guide during the interview, and I adjusted interview questions according to interviewee's answers. During the communication process, all interviews were audio-recorded [38].

3.2.2. Data Analysis

The analysis of research data is mainly based on data-driven codes, which help identify different keywords related to the construction of adolescent identity. As a kind of concept labelling, codes can be generated from textual content and existing theoretical concepts. In this project, "in vivo" codes were used, they were generated from the text content. After the collected data were transferred into text content, high-frequency words were identified and many relevant codes were generated, such as "high pressure on study", "generation gap", "gain a sense of belongings", "get recognition". After going through all data, some codes were similar and could be combined. For example, "get recognition" could be combined with "get attention" to become "get recognition and attention." After refining in vivo codes, the researcher began to group them into larger categories or themes. For instance, "high pressure on study" and "generation gap" could be put in the higher level of code of "not conducive to the social needs of teenagers," this code and "gain a sense of achievements" could be put in the highest level of code of "reasons for constructing online identities." By identifying different components with given keywords, it was easier to understand the relationship and differences of participants' opinions. Also, it was helpful to conclude diverse and comprehensive research conclusion. The interview content was transcribed into text and saved in an encrypted Word Document.

3.3. Ethical Considerations

The participants are made aware that participation is voluntary, they can withdraw at any time. All participants are distributed a project introduction form and a consent form, including information such as project goals, some interview questions, and the contact information of the researcher, data collection, data use, data storage, voluntary participation, anonymity protection and withdrawal from the project. I also make it clear that parental concern is required, which gives those not wishing to reveal their social media presence to their parents plenty of notice. Considering minors are involved, I contact their parents (or other legal guardians) after the minor confirm the participation. If both the minors and contacted relatives accepted the information, they would be asked to sign the consent form. Participants are fully informed as to how their data will be used. All collected and analysed data are anonymised and used only within the research project. The participants' Weibo content are saved in an encrypted Excel Worksheet. The interview content is transcribed into text and saved in an encrypted Word Document. All data are stored in my University of Sheffield account. I will regularly change the password to prevent data leakage. The data will be destroyed after the study is complete.

3.4. Potential Harm to Participants

First, some students would worry that family members are aware of their social media presence and what they are posting. So, I make it clear that parental concern is required, which gives those not wishing to reveal their social media presence to their parents or carers plenty of notice. They have time to consider whether to participate the study under this condition. For privacy, I make it clear that data collected from their Weibo's content and interview would be saved encrypted. No one (including parents) can get access to their social media content except the researcher.

4. Findings

4.1. Reasons

4.1.1. Social Needs

Participants emphasized that constructing identities on Weibo serves to fulfil their fundamental social needs. As adolescents grow older and develop a more mature mindset, their social needs gradually shift from relying on their parents to seeking the attention and recognition of their peers. The transformation of social relationships is primarily reflected in the increasing importance placed on friendships. The willingness to communicate with friends surpasses that with parents. Among the 7 participants, 5 expressed a stronger inclination to share their thoughts with friends, while only 2 found no difference between sharing with parents or friends.

“For things I cannot discuss with my parents, I could share them with a sibling if I had one.” (Participant 2).

“I find it easier and more enjoyable to interact with peers because there is a generational gap between my parents and me, making communication difficult. I sometimes feel inexplicably irritable when I am with my parents. Trivial matters can lead to arguments with my mother. My parents only focus on my studies, while I can discuss many joyful things with my classmates.” (Participant 5).

The interviews revealed that all 8 participants were only children (had no siblings), which is a consequence of China's family planning policy. Prior to 2016, the policy limited families to having only one child, resulting in the majority of Chinese adolescents being only children today [16]. Parents' mindset often differs from that of teenagers, their roles within the family lead to different perspectives on the same issue, creating a “generation gap” during communication. Without same-age siblings in the family, the unmet need for self-expression within the family pushes adolescents to seek outlets for expression outside the home. Schools have become the main social environments for students [59].

However, there are two issues with socializing at school. Firstly, there is a matter of time. Due to the increasing intensity of college entrance examinations, many schools try various methods to help students achieve higher scores [58]. During the interviews, participants mentioned that some teachers extend 45-minute classes to 50 minutes, reducing the original 10-minute breaks to 5 minutes. Some teachers start classes a few minutes early, further reducing break time. One participant even encountered a situation where the previous class finished lately, but the next class started early and left only two minutes of rest time. Moreover, their physical education classes were cancelled as they are not included in the college entrance examination and do not contribute to grade improvement. These factors result in a continuous reduction in communication time during school hours. After school, teenagers are still burdened by homework pressure:

“My parents always urge me to go home and do my homework immediately after school. Last weekend, my friends and I wanted to go out, but my parents did not allow it because I had not finished my homework. I had to go to math cram school.” (Participant 5).

Secondly, many adolescents hope to fulfil their expressive needs by socializing with peers, seeking freedom from their parents’ restrictions and finding new emotional support. However, having high expectations for peer relationships also makes them more sensitive to peer choices and behaviours [40], making peer relationships more challenging during adolescence:

“I am introverted in my daily life. I struggle with how to communicate with others. I often worry about being misunderstood due to my inappropriate words and fear that others will find me boring. I truly envy those who can effortlessly chat with anyone, but I do not know how to be that kind of person.” (Participant 2).

“I was teased by my classmates in elementary school for being overweight, and they gave me derogatory nicknames like ‘fat pig.’ Although no one says such things about me now, I still worry that people will notice my appearance.” (Participant 7).

Hence, adolescents’ emotional well-being is vulnerable to shocks. This is one reason why more teenagers are prone to anxiety, loneliness, and depression. The prevalence of depression among Chinese adolescents has reached nearly 25% [52]. Time constraints and concerns about offline social relationships appear to drive adolescents to turn to virtual platforms:

“Although I struggle with communication, I excel at classical dance. I often post videos of myself dancing on Weibo. Some people who see it message me, and we can exchange dance experiences, which makes me very happy.” (Participant 2).

“No one on Weibo knows that I am overweight. People who follow me only know that I am a fan of Messi. I enjoy interacting with other fans on Messi’s Super Topic every night before sleeping.” (Participant 7).

The internet transcends time and space constraints and alleviates the pressures associated with offline social interactions. On social media platforms, teenagers have the opportunity to alleviate social anxiety by adopting their “second identity.” On the one hand, the number of internet users far surpasses the number of people teenagers encounter in their daily lives, facilitating the expansion of their circle of friends and extensive communication through their online identities [3], which makes it easier to find like-minded people with similar interest. On the other hand, social media provides a platform for teenagers to show themselves [28]. Skills that may not be easily observable in real life, such as dancing or playing musical instruments, can be shared online to attract the attention of other users. Conversely, traits that are prone to discrimination and ridicule can be concealed. By showing their strengths and concealing weaknesses on social media, teens can build self-confidence, establish more comfortable relationships, and gain social opportunities.

4.1.2. To Gain a Sense of Self-Worth and Group Belonging

According to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, human needs can be categorised into self-actualization, esteem, love and belonging, safety, and physiological needs, ranked from highest to lowest [36].

Among these, the first three needs are particularly significant for adolescents. Besides seeking emotional support through social interactions, teenagers also value their social status, the recognition of their thoughts and behaviours by others. In the school setting, a student's worth is closely tied to his academic performance [8]. Due to China's large population and limited spots in prestigious universities, there exists a common belief that only students with excellent grades can gain admission to these institutions. Attending a top-tier university is seen as a pathway to more job opportunities, higher income, and a better life. To help children achieve higher grades, many parents strive to enrol them in excellent schools that specialize in preparing students for admission to top-ranked universities [59]. Consequently, to attract students, many schools incentivize teachers to focus on training high-achieving students. Various measures are taken, such as linking student performance to teachers' bonuses, where teachers receive higher bonuses based on the number of students admitted to prestigious universities. Some schools even provide monetary rewards to students who gain admission to Tsinghua University and Peking University, China's top two universities. Furthermore, parents of high-achieving students enjoy greater status compared to other parents. Therefore, students with impressive grades receive more love from teachers and parents and are envied by their peers, resulting in higher perceived value. However, the question remains whether everyone possesses the ability to achieve high grades:

"My math and chemistry grades deteriorated significantly, and my overall ranking dropped. My parents believed I was not studying hard enough and criticized me. We ended up arguing." (Participant 4).

Nearly all participants mentioned having conflicts with their parents over grades, even those with good academic performance. For students with poor grades, some parents and teachers label them as "stupid," "lazy," or "careless." [58]. Prolonged negative evaluations not only dampen students' enthusiasm for learning or resistance to it but also lead to feelings of inferiority or even self-abandonment. Some participants mentioned that high-achieving students tend to associate more with fellow high-achievers and receive more attention from teachers. This external evaluation influences the sense of belonging and accomplishment within a group and affects the closeness among group members.

"When I see students with excellent grades discussing academic problems together, I quietly stand aside and listen. Although I would like to join the discussion, my thought process cannot keep up with their problem-solving speed. Sometimes, they have already concluded the discussion, and I do not understand the outcome, which frustrates me. It feels like I am dumb and cannot fit into their excellent group." (Participant 1).

Adolescents yearn for approval from others as a way to prove their worth. When they are blamed by others for not achieving good grades, it becomes easy for them to doubt their abilities. Excessive focus on academic performance can also cause teachers and parents to overlook other excellent aspects of adolescents [59]. For example, someone may be talented in playing games and even earn money through this skill, while another person may excel in classical dance, pet care, or possess extensive knowledge of MAG Culture (abbreviation of Manga, Anime, and Game). These identity strengths, which cannot be showed through academic performance, can be displayed on social platforms since they do not judge an individual's value solely based on grades [43]. Leveraging their diverse strengths, adolescents can create various online identities such as "game expert," "classical dance enthusiast," "pet blogger," or "anime fan." By sharing and creating content related to these identities, they can attract followers and receive encouragement and support, reinforcing their sense of identity value.

"Whenever I publish my MVP game record on Weibo or reach the highest level, I feel a sense of accomplishment. I also enjoy reading comments that praise my gaming skills. Sometimes, I even consider becoming a game streamer if I cannot get into college." (Participant 1).

“My Weibo feed is filled with pictures and videos of my dog because it is adorable. Some of my followers tell me that my daily shares bring them joy and relaxation. It makes me realize that I can bring happiness to others.” (Participant 4).

Furthermore, participants expressed that creating an online identity benefits their engagement in different Weibo’s Chaohua (Super Topics) and enables them to interact with users from diverse groups [34]. For instance, a participant can discuss a celebrity’s performance on a variety show with fellow fans in a dedicated Super Topic while also engaging in discussions about the latest anime they have watched in an anime-related Super Topic. Discussing common topics helps bridge the gap between members and allows teenagers to “enjoy their right to express themselves within the group” (Participant 6). Members within a Super Topic provide mutual recognition and encouragement, strengthening their sense of identity and belonging to the group.

“I am a long-time member of Mi Yang’s Super Topic. Before every exam, I like to post, hoping for good grades. Later, I started receiving comments from other Mi Yang fans cheering me on, which made me feel warm.” (Participant 3).

Some participants make it a point to sign in daily to the Super Topics they participate in. They perceive it as a way to demonstrate their affiliation with the group. The signing-in process is simple, merely involving clicking the “Sign in” button in the top-right corner of the Super Topic. The more consecutive days one signs in, the higher their member level becomes. Some Super Topics even provide privileges to higher-level members.

“I am a fan of the TTG team [a professional mobile game team in Glory of Kings]. In TTG’s Super Topic, there’s a tradition of organizing lottery draws before each game. The criteria for participation usually require being an x-level or higher member of the Super Topic and leaving comments to cheer for TTG. The prizes can range from We Chat lucky money lipsticks, jewellery, to milk tea. Initially, I did not have the eligibility to participate in the lottery due to my low level. However, after reaching level 5, I could participate in many lottery activities. I once won a lottery, and the organizer remotely treated me to a cup of milk tea!” (Participant 6).

Such interactions among group members foster a sense of involvement and highlight members’ significance within the group [34]. It not only compensates for any lack of belonging that some teenagers may experience but also reinforces their online identities. As participant 3 mentioned, she was initially interested in a variety show featuring Mi Yang and would occasionally post photos related to her. After joining Mi Yang’s Super Topic, the warm and friendly atmosphere made her like both the Super Topic and the celebrity even more. Now, she is an avid fan of Mi Yang on the internet. Hence, when teenagers find friends who share common interests or have something they rarely get to express in their daily lives and receive recognition and value from others within the group, they become more willing to utilize their online identities to engage in other online activities [14]. The construction of online identities not only helps adolescents gain a sense of self-worth and belonging but also reinforces these two vital sources of spiritual empowerment throughout the process [28].

4.1.3. Imitating Celebrities

Some participants engage in identity construction by imitating internet celebrities. For instance, Participant 5 enjoys sharing photos of herself wearing designer clothes and jewellery, dining at internet-famous restaurants, and visiting popular city attractions. She learns her outfits, photo locations, and poses from various internet celebrities, which makes her appear more mature than her age would suggest.

“I follow many beauty bloggers, travel bloggers, fashion bloggers, and famous stars. They often wear beautiful clothes and take luxurious photos in well-known and visually appealing places. These beautiful photos can make people attractive, even if they might not be conventionally good-looking. I believe I can also take such photos to attract followers.” (Participant 5).

This phenomenon is associated with the celebrity effect, which refers to the unique allure and appeal of various stars and internet celebrities in society due to their high popularity [31]. Celebrities' makeup, physique, outfits, behaviours, and even their roles (which are often amplified by the media) are imitated by their fans and followers [56]. The rise of social media has bridged the communication gap between celebrities and the public. Previously, the public's understanding of a celebrity might have been limited to their works, but now, celebrities not only appear in films and television shows, but they also share their identity lives with fans through social platforms and interact with them through live streaming [20]. The public's understanding of celebrities extends beyond their professional lives to their private lives, providing a more comprehensive picture. However, the publicization of the private sphere is often accompanied by embellishment. Celebrities not only bear the responsibility of being role models but also seek identity gains [31]. Similar to how people edit and enhance their photos and content before posting them on social platforms to show positive images, celebrities publicize their private lives to attract fans but also face the risk of losing them. Therefore, when celebrities comment or live stream, they avoid sharing negative aspects of their lives and instead focus on displaying as much "energy" as possible [20]. This naturally leads to a reduction and reconstruction of their identities. They actively create an image that benefits their careers and showcases their uniqueness, which prompts companies, media outlets, and fans to discuss them. Attention translates into monetary benefits, creating a premise for young people to imitate celebrity identities.

Additionally, the emergence of self-publishing has significantly expanded the range of celebrities. Terms like "bloggers" and "streamers" have become synonymous with fame. Ordinary individuals now have the opportunity and potential to become celebrities themselves. Unlike traditional celebrities, many of these individuals are not marketed by agencies but rely on their ability to create content on social media platforms and gradually accumulate followers. For them, their fans serve as their financial support. The number of views and likes they receive directly impacts their earnings [56]. Therefore, satisfying their fans' needs and catering to their preferences becomes essential. Unlike 'traditional' celebrities, these individuals lack a professional PR team to protect their identities and images, so they are more cautious in maintaining their online presence. They leverage the internet to enhance their popularity, leveraging their unique strengths to gain more attention and even using the opportunity to enter the entertainment industry and compete with established celebrities for resources [55]. Internet celebrities can be seen as a typical product of "symbolic consumption," promoting the idea of "symbolization." [32] This process involves deconstructing an individual into numerous labels or tags, which are then commodified and marketed. These labels can originate from various aspects of a person's identity, such as appearance and attire, personality traits, behaviors, interpersonal relationships, and some might even be fabricated. When a particular label or set of labels associated with an internet celebrity gains widespread recognition—to the extent that the public instantly associates these labels with that individual—these labels effectively become symbolic representations of that person. The followers of this internet celebrity may not have a comprehensive understanding of the individual's true self, but these labels or symbols are potent in attracting and engaging followers. The celebrity can further capitalize on this by intensifying the association between their public image and these symbolic representations, thereby encouraging increasing numbers of people to engage in consumption related to these symbolic representations of the celebrity's identity. Therefore, as long as individuals can identify their unique characteristics and successfully publicize them, they can attract the attention of fans, such as "beauty bloggers," "food bloggers," "fitness bloggers," and "travel bloggers." After these individuals gain benefits through their own traits, they will further strengthen their characteristics and reinforce their identity image.

"I think it is great to be a game blogger. Anyway, I enjoy playing games. Plus, many game bloggers can make a lot of money, earning over 20,000 yuan per month! If it were not for my mom disagreeing, I would quit studying and become a game blogger, doing live streams."(Participant 1).

In an era when teenagers are widely using social media, the idea that everyone can create, and everyone can become an internet celebrity is constantly promoted. The image of making quick profits

in a short period of time constantly tempts young people [55]. Many teenagers prematurely enter the world of adults without having the ability to think maturely and, as such, are more susceptible to the allure and impact of identity interests. As a result, they try to imitate the online behaviours and identity characteristics of adults, hoping to gain attention and benefits like those celebrities.

“I feel that being criticized online does not really matter. As long as it is not illegal or immoral, using certain methods to gain attention is reasonable. Many celebrities do the same, do not they? They intentionally create controversy on shows, but without crossing legal boundaries, like purposely interrupting others, rolling their eyes, or stumbling on the red carpet. Then they deliberately let the media write about them, creating topics to capture people’s attention. After that, they use the subsequent shows they participate in or the works they appear in to improve their image. There is a saying that goes ‘being criticized or praised, it is all attention,’ and I believe this saying makes a lot of sense.”(Participant 5).

4.2. Positive Impact

4.2.1. Gaining Self-confidence

From the perspective of why teenagers construct their identities online, it is closely related to fulfilling their identity recognition in virtual social interactions [47]. When teenagers’ online identity continuously receives positive evaluations from other users, they generate a sense of pleasure. They gradually become dependent on this identity, hoping to deepen the impression they leave on others through more online activities, while also building self-confidence through the process of continuous recognition. The self-assurance gained from their online identity encourages them to express their opinions and thoughts on social media, actively seek like-minded online friends, and participate in online group activities [44]. Their confidence also motivates them to contribute to the team and proactively showcase their value. For some teenagers, this sense of confidence can also extend to their real-life experiences:

“Since I can find friends with common interests and get along well with other users online, I believe I can do the same in real life. Moreover, through interacting with other fans, I have learned many ways to get along with people, which are also applicable to my interactions with classmates.” (Participant 3).

4.2.2. Positive identity constructions cultivate values

Building a positive online identity based on the cultivation of positive values is crucial. Many teenagers tend to construct their online identities based on the images of celebrities. Celebrities often portray positive and inspiring identities, serving as role models. Their identities become a spiritual support for some individuals, as they align with their fans’ idealized versions of themselves [56]. The celebrities’ lifestyle and achievements also align with the fans’ ideals of a perfect life. For teenagers in the stage of education, the positive images portrayed by celebrities serve as a guiding force. These positive identities are frequently found in idol groups, whose members are typically aged between 20 and 25. These groups are associated with concepts like “youth” and “passion,” and their performances and daily lives shared on social platforms often exude the vigor and vitality of young people. When a group of enthusiastic young individuals performs synchronized dances on stage and sings inspiring songs, it can empower teenagers, giving them the courage to face life positively and nurture hopeful wishes for the future. Besides idol groups, many celebrities subtly influence the formation of teenagers’ identities and values through their actions:

“Because my idol Messi is someone devoted to charity, he frequently helps underprivileged children. I also want to become like him, and my parents support me as well. So, I joined an organization in our community that assists impoverished children. Every month, my parents and I bring old clothes and buy essential supplies to visit the needy families assigned by the organization. I take photos during these visits and share them on Weibo, hoping that more people will see the lives of these underprivileged children and be willing to help.” (Participant 7).

“I often watch the live broadcasts of the members of TTG [a professional mobilegame team in Glory of Kings]. I noticed that each of their live streaming rooms has a message saying, ‘Minors, please refrain from sending gifts.’ I think this is a correct guidance. As underage fans, we basically do not have an income, so if we want to send gifts to the members, we can only use the money our parents have worked hard to earn. I read a news article before about a boy secretly using his parents’ bank card to send gifts in a female streamer’s live streaming room. The total cost of those gifts was almost equal to his mother’s one month’s salary. I do not think he should have done that.” (Participant 6).

For these teenagers who receive proper guidance, celebrities are their role models and a source of motivation to become better. While imitating these positive identity images in the online sphere, they also urge themselves to make changes in their behavior, striving to align themselves with their idealized versions [20]. They aim to narrow the gap between their real selves and their idealized selves, ultimately becoming the person they aspire to be. Throughout this process, teenagers gradually correct their negative behaviors and erroneous thoughts, while their worldview, life philosophy, and values mature. Therefore, for these teenagers, creating a positive online identity can serve as a driving force, urging them to rectify their shortcomings and develop a correct perception of themselves and the world, thereby facilitating identity growth and improvement [55].

4.2.3. Unleashing Potential and Relieving Pressure

The construction of online identities not only helps teenagers gain recognition from others but also aids in self-exploration [17]. They can join different online communities, learn skills they are interested in, and engage in creative activities such as writing, photography, and video production. Throughout this process, they continuously discover their strengths and find identity images that suit their development, thereby promoting their growth [10]. Additionally, the process of exploring different identities also serves as a means of relieving pressure. Some participants mentioned that they often face significant pressure from parents and teachers in their lives. They carry high expectations from their elders and bear a heavy burden of stress [8]. These teenagers’ thoughts and behaviors are strictly regulated in reality, such as the need to focus on studying, not being allowed to date, dye or perm their hair, and being expected to be obedient and well-behaved. Under these restrictive conditions, some individuals can only fantasize about the kind of person they should be. The emergence of online identities provides an outlet for relieving pressure.

“Whenever I discuss games with others online, I forget that I am a bad student.” (Participant 1).

“our school requires us to wear uniforms every day, tie our hair into ponytails, and we are not allowed to dye or perm our hair. Students are also not allowed to wear makeup. Everyone looks so plain. I really wish I could appear in front of others every day looking beautiful, wearing pretty dresses, and having a beautiful makeup look.” (Participant 5).

Teenagers can project their desired image onto their online identities, showcasing aspects of themselves that are difficult to express in reality and thereby gain emotional satisfaction. On one hand, teenagers can fulfill their desire to “be themselves” in the virtual environment, defining themselves according to their own ideas in the free cyberspace [3]. On the other hand, due to the widespread nature of social platforms, virtual socialization is more capable of breaking the constraints of time, space, and age, allowing teenagers to access diverse information, make friends with individuals from different identities, confide their troubles, and even gain friendships and familial connections that may be lacking in their real lives through virtual identities [39]. This can help some teenagers alleviate psychological problems that often arise during adolescence and contribute to their future academic and identity well-being.

4.3. Negative Impact

Interviews showed that participants generally prefer their online identities and have varying degrees of dissatisfaction with their real-life identities. This reflects the inability of many teenagers to achieve self-consistency and self-integration between their real-life and online identities [17]. According to

cognitive dissonance theory, when adolescents' personal beliefs clash with societal expectations, it creates internal discomfort and develop internal rejection and hostility towards the roles provided by society, school, and family, leading to feelings of imbalance, deprivation, or pressure [45]. To ease this, they may reject or resist the conflicting external role. As a result, there arises an explicit or implicit need and motivation to escape these feelings. At the same time, the various characteristics of the internet make it an ideal tool and means to satisfy needs, express emotions, and alleviate tension [4]. The crisis of adolescent identity stems from the conflicts and contradictions that arise when real-life identities extend into the online world or vice versa. These conflicts and contradictions disrupt an individual's self-image, identity formation, and internal values, leading to a loss of unity and external behavioral incongruity [44].

4.3.1. Virtual Identity Addiction Leads to Self-disorientation

In *The Strength of Weak Ties*, Mark Granovetter [19] classifies social relationships into two categories: strong ties and weak ties. Strong ties are primarily used to maintain close relationships and convey routine information, typically involving people we are close to and frequently interact with. Weak ties, on the other hand, occur with people who are less familiar or closely connected to us. They connect different social circles and provide access to information and opportunities from various social circles. For example, through weak ties, we may learn about new job opportunities, industry trends, or opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaboration. This cross-pollination of information across social circles can help broaden our perspectives, acquire new resources, and have a positive impact on career development and social opportunities. According to Granovetter's classification, online relationships fall under weak tie relationships, which involve broad scope, weak connections, and superficial interactions in social cognition and social interaction. In the construction of weak tie relationships, individual social activities are symbolized, and the expression of social emotions is formalized. Although virtual relationships, interactions, and identities between people are recognized and strengthened, the sense of dependence between individuals continues to diminish. Anyone can praise and encourage others through words, even if those words do not reflect their true feelings. This virtual interaction may result in relationships lacking the authenticity and depth of real-life interactions but can quickly provide a sense of relaxation, reciprocity, and satisfaction in terms of relationships and information. Over time, individuals may gradually become addicted to the virtual identities that offer rapid emotional gratification and be unwilling to face their real-life identities [50]

Through shaping their online identities, teenagers can obtain a sense of identity, boost self-confidence, release stress, and satisfy inner desires. However, as a consequence, some teenagers often become reluctant to face their real selves due to the satisfaction they experience in the virtual realm [23].

"I know a classmate who is very fake. She often brags about her designer clothes and jewelry, and she posts pictures of herself traveling to different places. But some of the luxury items she uses in her photos are rented or fake. The travel photos are also digitally composed using pictures found on the internet. The pictures she posts where her face is shown are taken after she puts on heavy makeup, but she insists she is makeup-free." (Participant 5).

On social media platforms, some teenagers deliberately embellish themselves, such as using their parents' hard-earned money to create a "rich second-generation" identity or using heavily edited and staged photos to create a "naturally beautiful" image [29]. Through these methods, these teenagers satisfy their vanity, and their virtual identities naturally become cosmetics to conceal their self-deficiencies and masks to escape from reality. However, the danger of excessive self-packaging is the collapse of identity [31]. False dreams are never sustainable. The collapse of a celebrity's public identity triggers a phenomenon known as "fan backlash." Similarly, the collapse of a teenager's online identity can also provoke ridicule and attacks from other internet users. For these teenagers, when they are unwilling to face reality but find themselves in a dilemma of identity collapse, they are highly likely to experience psychological breakdown or even engage in extreme behaviors. In this case, the establishment of an online identity actually limits the depth of a teenager's life. The labeling of identity generalizes significant aspects such as interests, dreams, and aspirations, causing teenagers

to focus solely on constructing external appearances and images while neglecting self-reflection and spiritual nourishment [13]. When people worship external appearances as the ultimate standard, how many can maintain consistency between their inner “true self” and their external “social self”? And how many can use this image as a driving force to maintain self-reflection and critical thinking? Over time, the online identities constructed by teenagers will become empty shells, superficial and lacking substance.

4.3.2. Facilitation of Online Identities Leads to Enclosure

The convenience of the internet reinforces the closed nature of individual identities because people tend to selectively accept similar information based on their subjective desires and interests [34]. The seemingly diverse choices, however, can actually narrow down the audience into individuals with singular preferences. Platforms use algorithms to recommend content based on users’ previous interactions. Over time, the more we watch or listen to a specific type of content, the more similar content gets recommended to us. So, instead of broadening horizons with the diverse options available, the internet inadvertently funnels us deeper into our existing preferences, reinforcing them and making them more singular. This leads to a categorization trend among online audiences, where individuals in the same domain share similar values, experiences, and modes of expression, forming a sense of self-identity through mutual recognition [1]. However, categorization can also hinder people from exploring other identities due to the impact of information homogeneity and cognitive biases in the online realm. Differences in the use of information technology, access to social resources, and information manipulation abilities may further widen the information and social identity gaps between different social classes [53]. For example, urban, middle-upper class individuals have smartphones, laptops, and high-speed internet for education, job searching, and global news. Yet, rural, lower-class people with basic phones and limited connectivity access only local news. Online resources seemingly reach all, but in reality, they widen real-world identity gaps and deepen social divisions.

When using social media, if a user frequently searches for and follows a specific type of information, the platform itself, as well as other platforms, often recommend similar or related content to that user. Over time, the user’s scope of interest becomes increasingly narrow, leading to the enclosure of their information bubble. This phenomenon, as interpreted in Public Opinion, extends the concept of a “pseudo-Environment,” where mass media selectively process and restructure original news information to present content to the public, shaping a “pseudo-Environment” through agenda-setting of news information [33]. The main factor contributing to this “pseudo-Environment” is the recommendation system in the era of big data. Recommendation systems are ubiquitous in current social platforms, utilizing various algorithms to replace traditional information selection and filtering in social interactions, thereby providing more effective information matching for internet users [53]. Examples include friend recommendations on QQ (an instant messaging service application), movie recommendations on Youku and Tudou (two famous online video platforms), book recommendations on Douban (a comprehensive community network that integrates blogs, social networking, groups, and favorites). However, the convenience and effectiveness of information also bring about the solidification and enclosure of information bubbles. Within these increasingly closed information bubbles, users are prone to forming information islands, where their knowledge and social interactions largely remain within the same circle. Users within the same circle mutually influence each other’s thoughts and behaviours, gradually reaching consensus and forming relatively unified identity representations.

The enclosure of information and cultural bubbles among teenagers is evident in the following aspects. Firstly, there is the requirement of identity verification before entering a specific circle [34]. Some participants mentioned that when applying to join certain Super Topics, they were required to answer specific questions as a prerequisite for admission. This situation is also common on other social media platforms. For example, on QQ, teenagers can join different cultural circles based on their preferences, but usually, they need to answer questions related to that circle before joining. If the screening process is strict, they may even need to communicate with administrators individually to ensure their

eligibility for joining group chats. Another example is Bili Bili, which focuses on anime and requires users to pass a quiz to become official members. Only after passing the review and examination can they obtain access to the cultural circle. Different circles establish boundaries and distinguish themselves from other circles, providing teenagers with a relatively closed environment for information exchange [32].

Once inside the circle, different communities develop unique languages that become key factors for identity recognition within the circle [21]. In fan communities, abbreviations are commonly used. Moreover, within these circles, numerous internal rules emerge [1]. For example, fans of a particular couple (CP) are not allowed to discuss CP-related things in the presence of the main character, People wearing a fan badge of a particular celebrity should refrain from making arbitrary comments in other celebrities' discussion threads, leaving a fandom or switching allegiance requires creating a new account, and comments within the online communities must follow a fixed format. Through these means, different circles can form relatively stable cultural systems. However, people outside these circles often fail to understand the language and behaviours within them. For instance, when researchers separately asked participant 3 and participant 4 about the fan community's commonly used language mentioned above, participant 3 said that she had only seen these terms online but did not have a deep understanding of them. In contrast, participant 4 was familiar with every term and could even provide examples to the researchers. This is also why many parents feel increasingly disconnected from their teenagers during adolescence. These unique and enclosed cultural circles serve as evidence of teenagers' self-identification through labels [41].

4.3.3. Erroneous Online Identities and Amusing Ourselves to Death

Many individuals in the media age, due to excessive focus on the fulfilment of self-desires and identity anxiety, consciously or unconsciously abandon or delegate their civic responsibilities [15]. Some dominators create imaginary worlds to obtain special social benefits, making it easy for teenagers to obtain the perfect packaging of their individual identities in the online world, leading them to be addicted to yearning for a perfect life and gazing at a perfect self-identity. During adolescence, a period of constructing worldviews and values, some teenagers lack the ability to discern right from wrong and cannot fully distinguish which opinions are beneficial or harmful to themselves. However, with the increasingly rich functionality of social media and the expanding coverage of online information in the current network environment, teenagers inevitably encounter various people in social media, revealing novel and peculiar thoughts [17]. At the same time, cyberspace freedom provides a free expression environment for different online entities [39]. For adults, publishing or commenting on exaggerated or controversial online content does not have a significant impact on themselves because their thoughts and behaviours have matured, and their worldviews and values have been formed. They know the purpose behind their actions and the responsibilities they need to bear [26]. More often, some individuals transmit negative content or ideas to gain popularity or attention. But for teenagers, the information they see often directly influences the construction of their worldviews and values. In interviews, participant 1 mentioned the idea of giving up education to become a game streamer for earning money, while participant 5 stated that as long as she can attract attention, it does not matter if she receives criticism for posting fake photos. "Being criticized is better than not being noticed." Recent years, there have also been many absurd events related to teenage online identities on Weibo. For example, there was a trend of "early pregnancy internet celebrities". An underage internet celebrity's pregnancy ignited extensive discussions among netizens. Then many young girls posted pregnancy videos, seeking admiration and aiming to become "teenage mothers." Another instance involved a middle school student feigning a tragic backstory, claiming loss in a car accident to gain attention and praise. This, however, was untrue. Some students mimicked internet celebrities running in a typhoon without any regard for risk.

"I only later realized how perilous that typhoon was, I knew some people were injured and even died in the typhoon... However, at that moment, we just felt exhilarated, although there was a point when we could hardly control our bodies due to the force of the wind. It seemed as though the wind was pushing us in a different direction, and we were already soaked through by the rain... We never

considered the possibility of injury. We were simply captivated by the notion that ‘being cool is a lifelong matter’.” (Participant 1).

These online identities have indeed garnered a significant amount of attention on the internet, but they have also raised concerns about the construction of values among young people. As the new generation, teenagers should clarify their identity and social values through learning and practice. However, with the advent of the entertainment era, the allure of responsibility and commitment pales in comparison to the allure of popularity and online influence [23]. The ideals of the new generation have shifted from being “scientists” or “writers” to being “internet celebrities” or “stars.” Contemporary teenagers have prematurely entered the adult world, pursuing their interests in immature ways, driven by the interests valued by adults [56]. In the online environment, symbolized teenagers are no longer pure. They express all their emotions and attach corresponding labels in an entertainment-oriented manner, hoping to gain relevant benefits. Online identities have also become products of entertainment [13]. Neil Postman [37] once wrote in *Amusing Ourselves to Death* that we will perish from what we love. If teenagers lose the ability to judge whether their online identities are correct and perceive virtual identities as a means to gain benefits, underneath the facade of entertaining packaging, they hide an empty soul. As they gradually dissolve into the idealistic world created by the internet, immersed in a consumer culture of “amusing ourselves to death,” they seem to have found an ivory tower in which they can find solace in their loneliness. However, when they are forced to re-examine the fundamental pursuit of values they left behind, they would experience a sense of confusion. Moreover, the browsing-based interactive nature of the online space weakens and relaxes the teenagers’ sense of self-worth, diminishes their emotional involvement, and turns them into detached observers with diluted responsibilities [24]. In fact, online identities subtly weaken the centripetal force within teenagers sometimes. It refers to the values, norms, or identity that bind them to their family, school, community, or society at large. The identities that teenagers build online can, over time, diminish their sense of connection or belonging to these traditional social units or norms, leading to a societal aphasia, which means teenagers becoming somewhat disconnect or alienate from society as a whole - they may struggle to understand or engage with societal norms, values, or communication.

5. Conclusion

This study has identified that the motivations for adolescents to construct their online identities are associated with three aspects. The first is to satisfy a more extensive range of social needs, which in real life are limited by spatial constraints, academic pressures, and the generational gap between themselves and their parents. The second reason is to conveniently access different Chaohua (Super Topics) that correspond with their online identities, allowing them to make friends with similar interests within these online communities and derive a sense of belonging and achievement from these virtual groups. The third motivation is the desire to emulate the identity of celebrities, gaining recognition and attention from others, and then converting this attention into online traffic or monetary gains. The construction of online identities brings many positive effects to adolescents, such as helping them gain self-confidence and find joy in interactions with like-minded friends. They can also learn and embody positive qualities of famous individuals they look up to during the process of establishing their online identities, thereby fostering positive values. Additionally, posting content under these online identities can serve as a means to alleviate daily pressures, as well as help unearth and cultivate their potential in areas they excel at. However, online identity construction also poses potential negative consequences for adolescents. It may lead some to become overly indulged in the pleasures associated with their online personas, to the extent that they become unwilling to face real-life responsibilities. This online behavior is easily influenced by algorithmic culture, leading to the gradual closure of adolescents’ information circles. Moreover, some adolescents may mimic controversial or negative identities to gain attention, neglecting the cultivation of personal safety awareness and moral values.

The external manifestation of identity as a way of dealing with people and handling situations is necessary. Those who are willing to invest time in crafting their identity are undoubtedly individuals with aspirations. Whether they desire more social opportunities, self-worth and group belonging, or attention and benefits similar to celebrities, teenagers will constantly explore the most suitable ways to interact with the world while building their identities. Decoding the virtual social context of teenagers' online identity contributes to a deeper understanding of online communication, and teenagers in general. It is not difficult to comprehend teenagers' shaping and identification through the construction of virtual identities since, after all, their choices and power are somewhat limited in 'real life', while in the online world, they can customize identity images. At the same time, the benefits derived from their online identity, such as boosting confidence and relieving pressure, may reinforce their use of online identities. Building a positive online identity allows teenagers to express themselves and their interests, which can be an important part of self-discovery. This may include sharing art, writing, or other creative pursuits, and engaging with communities that align with their interests and values. Teenagers can use online identities to advocate for causes they believe in. This can empower them to feel that they are making a difference, and it can also connect them with networks of activists and organizations that align with their values. If identity aligns with a teenager's true self and values, it can contribute to a healthy sense of self and mental well-being. It avoids the stress and anxiety that can come with portraying a false or overly curated persona. As teenagers mature and consider their career paths, a positive online identity can serve as the foundation of a personal brand. This is increasingly important in many professions, where an individual's online presence can significantly impact their career opportunities. We cannot deny that online identities can provide many positive benefits for teenagers, and even some positive feedback which can assist them in their real lives.

However, at the same time, we must also pay attention to the potential negative impacts that teenagers may experience when constructing online identities. In the era of internet communication, understanding, anticipating, and regulating the psychology and behaviour of the younger generation in virtual spaces will be an important direction for future communication research. When online identity becomes the passport for interpersonal communication in cyberspace, perhaps we should consider whether it is desirable to manage online identities according to the same legal and moral standards as in everyday life. On the one hand, in the relatively free environment of the Internet, some people will use their online identity to conduct negative behaviors, such as spreading illegal information, making hate speech or harassing and threatening others, thus affecting the normal order of the Internet. On the other hand, applying the same legal and moral standards online as in the physical world could potentially infringe on individuals' freedom of speech and expression. Some might argue that the online space should remain a relatively unrestricted platform for expression, even if it allows for contentious or unpopular viewpoints. We should also consider how to help teenagers develop a proper understanding of online identity. Identity is merely a means of promoting oneself, and individuals who treat their identity as a purpose that they must constantly uphold or defend may eventually be limited to the identity and ignore the diversity of people. Only by grasping and using identity reasonably can they distinguish between reality and ideals, face their true selves, and avoid getting lost in illusions. The act of constructing identity for teenagers on social media has both advantages and disadvantages. We need to adopt a dialectical and rational perspective towards identity construction, break free from the constraints imposed by identity, and prevent the abnormal development of their internal and external, personal and social relationships caused, in part, by the construction of potentially detrimental online identities. Gradually, we should encourage teenagers to shift their confidence from online identity to real-life confidence, help them recognize the difference between ideals and reality, and enable them to understand the phenomenon of identity construction in the online world correctly.

Taking a further look, perhaps the initial establishment of online personas by teenagers does have positive values and significance. However, over time, these values will eventually be eroded. Each person's life has infinite breadth and exploring different possibilities of oneself is inherent to human

existence. When teenagers create identities for themselves, they are essentially disassembling and compartmentalizing their rich and diverse selves into one identity after another. Each identity is labelled with fixed tags, and the self becomes constrained by these so-called definitions. They constantly respond to the expectations of others regarding their identity, but ultimately end up losing themselves, wallowing in self-pity, or experiencing the collapse of their constructed personas. When identity becomes the entirety of a teenager's life, they lose the potential to transcend themselves and become imprisoned as one bottled individual after another. Therefore, questions like how to help teenagers to clarify the relationship between network identity and real identity, how to help teenagers to use network identity to obtain more abundant information resources, and how to guide teenagers to establish a positive network identity conducive to their own development should be further explored.

References

- [1] Ashforth, B.E. and Schinoff, B.S., 2016. Identity under construction: How individuals come to define themselves in organizations. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 3, pp.111-137.
- [2] Allen, K.A., Ryan, T., Gray, D.L., McInerney, D.M. and Waters, L., 2014. Social media use and social connectedness in adolescents: The positives and the potential pitfalls. *The Educational and Developmental Psychologist*, 31(1), pp.18-31.
- [3] Balleys, C., Millerand, F., Thoër, C. and Duque, N., 2020. Searching for oneself on YouTube: Teenage peer socialization and social recognition processes. *Social Media+ Society*, 6(2), p.2056305120909474.
- [4] Bozkurt, A. and Tu, C.H., 2016. Digital identity formation: Socially being real and present on digital networks. *Educational Media International*, 53(3), pp.153-167.
- [5] Best, P., Manktelow, R. and Taylor, B., 2014. Online communication, social media and adolescent wellbeing: A systematic narrative review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 41, pp.27-36.
- [6] Bullingham, L. and Vasconcelos, A.C., 2013. 'The presentation of self in the online world': Goffman and the study of online identities. *Journal of information science*, 39(1), pp.101-112.
- [7] Belk, R.W., 2013. Extended self in a digital world. *Journal of consumer research*, 40(3), pp.477-500.
- [8] Cai, X., Lu, Y., Pan, J. and Zhong, S., 2019. Gender gap under pressure: evidence from China's National College entrance examination. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 101(2), pp.249-263.
- [9] Costa Pinto, D., Reale, G., Segabinazzi, R. and Vargas Rossi, C.A., 2015. Online identity construction: How gamers redefine their identity in experiential communities. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 14(6), pp.399-409.
- [10] Craig, S.L. and McInroy, L., 2014. You can form a part of yourself online: The influence of new media on identity development and coming out for LGBTQ youth. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, 18(1), pp.95-109.
- [11] Coleman J. (2011) *The nature of adolescence*. 4th ed. London: Routledge.
- [12] Doster, L., 2013. Millennial teens design and redesign themselves in online social networks. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 12(4), pp.267-279.
- [13] Elliott, R., 2020. Making up people: Consumption as a symbolic vocabulary for the construction of identity. In *Elusive consumption* (pp. 129-143). Routledge.
- [14] Eames, C., Barker, M. and Scarff, C., 2018. Priorities, identity and the environment: Negotiating the early teenage years. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 49(3), pp.189-206.
- [15] Eleuteri, S., Saladino, V. and Verrastro, V., 2017. Identity, relationships, sexuality, and risky behaviors of adolescents in the context of social media. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 32(3-4), pp.354-365.
- [16] Feng, W., Gu, B. and Cai, Y., 2016. The end of China's one-child policy. *Studies in family planning*, 47(1), pp.83-86.
- [17] Fullwood, C., James, B.M. and Chen-Wilson, C.H., 2016. Self-concept clarity and online self-presentation in adolescents. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 19(12), pp.716-720.
- [18] Graneheim, U.H., Lindgren, B.M. and Lundman, B., 2017. Methodological challenges in qualitative content analysis: A discussion paper. *Nurse education today*, 56, pp.29-34.
- [19] Granovetter, M.S., 1973. The strength of weak ties. *American journal of sociology*, 78(6), pp.1360-1380.
- [20] Hackley, C., Hackley, R.A. and Bassiouni, D.H., 2018. Implications of the selfie for marketing management practice in the era of celebrity. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 36(1), pp.49-62.
- [21] Henry, A., Dörnyei, Z. and Macintyre, P.D., 2015. The dynamics of possible selves. *Motivational dynamics in language learning*, 83, p.94.

- [22] Herring, S.C. and Kapidzic, S., 2015. Teens, gender, and self-presentation in social media. *International encyclopedia of social and behavioral sciences*, 2, pp.1-16.
- [23] Huang, H., 2014, November. Self-presentation tactics in social media. In 2014 International Conference on Social Science (ICSS-14) (pp. 416-421). Atlantis Press.
- [24] Jia, L. and Han, X., 2020. Tracing Weibo (2009–2019): The commercial dissolution of public communication and changing politics. *Internet Histories*, 4(3), pp.304-332.
- [25] Khan, S., 2020. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). *Public Culture*, 32(2), pp.397-404.
- [26] Kasperuniene, J. and Zydziunaite, V., 2019. A systematic literature review on professional identity construction in social media. *Sage Open*, 9(1), p.2158244019828847.
- [27] Krippendorff, K., 2018. *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. Sage publications.
- [28] Khan, S., Gagné, M., Yang, L. and Shapka, J., 2016. Exploring the relationship between adolescents' self-concept and their offline and online social worlds. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 55, pp.940-945.
- [29] Kapidzic, S. and Herring, S.C., 2015. Race, gender, and self-presentation in teen profile photographs. *New Media & Society*, 17(6), pp.958-976.
- [30] Lenz, K., 2022. The presentation of self in everyday life. In *Goffman-Handbuch: Leben–Werk–Wirkung* (pp. 267-274). Stuttgart: JB Metzler.
- [31] Lin, M., 2018. Discursive construction of personal and social identities by Chinese celebrities on Sina Weibo.
- [32] Lamont, M., Pendergrass, S. and Pachucki, M., 2015. Symbolic boundaries. *International encyclopedia of social and behavioral sciences*, 2, pp.850-855.
- [33] Lippmann, W., 2004. *Public opinion* (Vol. 1). Transaction Publishers.
- [34] Ma, X., Gong, X., Cong, X. and Cong, J., 2021, November. Weibo “Super Topic Community”: Virtual Community from the Perspective of Interactive Ceremony Chain. In 7th International Conference on Social Science and Higher Education (ICSSHE 2021) (pp. 63-67). Atlantis Press.
- [35] Madden, M., Lenhart, A., Cortesi, S., Gasser, U., Duggan, M., Smith, A. and Beaton, M., 2013. Teens, social media, and privacy. *Pew Research Center*, 21(1055), pp.2-86.
- [36] Maslow, A. and Lewis, K.J., 1987. Maslow's hierarchy of needs. *Salenger Incorporated*, 14(17), pp.987-990.
- [37] Postman, N., 2005. *Amusing ourselves to death: Public discourse in the age of show business*. Penguin.
- [38] Roller, M.R., 2019, September. A quality approach to qualitative content analysis: Similarities and differences compared to other qualitative methods. In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (Vol. 20, No. 3).
- [39] Rauchfleisch, A. and Schäfer, M.S., 2015. Multiple public spheres of Weibo: A typology of forms and potentials of online public spheres in China. *Information, Communication & Society*, 18(2), pp.139-155.
- [40] Reitz, A.K., Zimmermann, J., Hutteman, R., Specht, J. and Neyer, F.J., 2014. How peers make a difference: The role of peer groups and peer relationships in personality development. *European journal of personality*, 28(3), pp.279-288.
- [41] Reid, G.G. and Boyer, W., 2013. Social network sites and young adolescent identity development. *Childhood Education*, 89(4), pp.243-253.
- [42] Rosenberg M. (1979) *Conceiving the self*. New York: Basic Books.
- [43] Shi, R., 2022, June. From Sharing Life to Shaping Online Image. In 2022 8th International Conference on Humanities and Social Science Research (ICHSSR 2022) (pp. 2479-2483). Atlantis Press.
- [44] Schlosser, A.E., 2020. Self-disclosure versus self-presentation on social media. *Current opinion in psychology*, 31, pp.1-6.
- [45] Singer, E., 2017. Reference groups and social evaluations. *Social psychology*, pp.66-93.
- [46] Stapleton, S.R., 2015. Environmental identity development through social interactions, action, and recognition. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 46(2), pp.94-113.
- [47] Stopfer, J.M., Egloff, B., Nestler, S. and Back, M.D., 2014. Personality expression and impression formation in online social networks: an integrative approach to understanding the processes of accuracy, impression management and meta-accuracy. *European Journal of Personality*, 28(1), pp.73-94.
- [48] Stam, D., Lord, R.G., Knippenberg, D.V. and Wisse, B., 2014. An image of who we might become: Vision communication, possible selves, and vision pursuit. *Organization Science*, 25(4), pp.1172-1194.
- [49] Tsakiris, M., 2017. The multisensory basis of the self: from body to identity to others. *Quarterly journal of experimental psychology*, 70(4), pp.597-609.
- [50] Valkenburg, P.M., Meier, A. and Beyens, I., 2022. Social media use and its impact on adolescent mental health: An umbrella review of the evidence. *Current opinion in psychology*, 44, pp.58-68.

- [51] Van Dijck, J., 2013. 'You have one identity': Performing the self on Facebook and LinkedIn. *Media, culture & society*, 35(2), pp.199-215.
- [52] Wu, H., Ji, J.M., Qian, Y., Jin, X.H., Yu, H.R., Liu, X.M., Du, L., Fu, X.L. and Chen, H.L., 2022. Relationship between depressive symptoms and internet usage time among adolescents: Results from a nationwide survey. *Psychiatry Research*, 313, p.114603.
- [53] Willson, M., 2017. Algorithms (and the) everyday. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(1), pp.137-150.
- [54] Wang, W.Y., 2013. Weibo, framing, and media practices in China. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 18, pp.375-388.
- [55] Xu, M., Reijnders, S. and Kim, S., 2021. 'Mingren are the respectable ones': an analysis of everyday engagements with contemporary celebrity culture in China. *Celebrity Studies*, 12(1), pp.84-101.
- [56] Yang, C., 2022, January. A Case Study of Media Influence on Public Attitudes Towards Celebrities. In 2021 International Conference on Public Art and Human Development (ICPAHD 2021) (pp. 62-66). Atlantis Press.
- [57] Zimeng, X., 2019. The effects of violent content in Sina Weibo on Chinese generation Y's perception.
- [58] Zhou, Z., Tang, H., Tian, Y., Wei, H., Zhang, F. and Morrison, C.M., 2013. Cyberbullying and its risk factors among Chinese high school students. *School psychology international*, 34(6), pp.630-647.
- [59] Zhang, Y., 2013. Does private tutoring improve students' National College Entrance Exam performance?—A case study from Jinan, China. *Economics of Education Review*, 32, pp.1-28.