

# A Study of Teenagers' Excessive Virtual Consumption Behavior: A Social Phenomenon

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**Abstract.** As virtual techniques are now developed rapidly, teens have joined in the virtual world as well, and many of them start to spend their money by virtual ways. However, recent years, some teens start to have excessive virtual consumption behavior, which become a social phenomenon. Through using literature review, this study is focused on the reasons of this phenomenon from teens mental growth, family atmosphere and variation in the society's perspectives. The specialness of adolescents' mental growth period, their parents' consumption behavior or educational ways, and the dramatic change in the society are all have big deal with teens excessive virtual consumption behavior. Also, this paper discusses the influences of excessive virtual consumption that bring to teens' growth: about their physical health, mental health and their development of purchasing value, as well as advices or solutions to help teens, their parents and the whole society to help them grow in a healthy consumption atmosphere.

**Keyword:** Virtual consumption, virtual world, teenagers, mental growth, parenthood.

## 1. Introduction

From 21st century, the Internet become more and more popular all over the world. Nowadays teenagers grow up in an Internet era. All parts of their growth are in the internet world. Indeed, Internet or the virtual world can provide many useful information in very short time for everyone: it gives teens a way to study more efficiently than before. However, since virtual world is virtual and varied, no one will know their real identity. In terms of adolescents, that can be very attractive. Therefore, they spend more and more time on virtual life, especially on virtual consumption. Some adolescents even become addicted to virtual consumption. Virtual consumption is the experience of authentic consumptive experiences replicated by alternative means. In recent decade, AI and Virtual Reality techniques have developed in an unexpectedly rapid way, as a huge community in society, teenagers have shown their enthusiasm and strong purchasing power in the virtual consumption field as well. It somehow provides a kind of opportunity for e-commerce development. However, as adolescents do not have mature mind, many special mental factors cause their virtual consumption behavior is different from each other, such as self-awareness's growth, strong request for social and peer identity and being sensitive to external variation [1]. Since teenagers are in a special time during their mental growth and also because of the parenthood and variation in society, the phenomenon of overusing virtual ways to do consumption has been strengthened. If adolescents stay in this situation for too long, it will bring some negative effects to their mental well-being, physical well-being, and the building of consumption value. Some of them are feeling hard to manage money and the time they spend in virtual life. This influences their normal life, their family's and the society's future.

Solve this problem needs efforts from teenagers themselves, their parents and the whole society. Protecting adolescents' growth, guiding them to develop healthy consumption value are the obligation of their families and the whole society. Thus, with all kinds of efforts, it can eventually let the virtual world provide a better environment for teenager's growth.

This study is focusing on the analysis of adolescents' virtual consumption behavior. By using the literature review, this paper illustrates the reasons for teenagers' overconsumption behavior, what kind of influence this behavior brings, and the solutions to this phenomenon, finally leading to a further understanding of the future of teenagers' virtual behavior.

## **2. The Reasons of Teenagers' Virtual Consumption Behavior**

### **2.1. Sense of Identity and Self-awareness of Teenagers**

The need for sense of identity and self-awareness play key roles in teenagers' virtual consumption behavior, which can be a main cause of why adolescents are eager to spend their money in the virtual environment. In the virtual world, teenagers can social with others, can spend their money, and can do anything they want to do. This provides an opportunity to build up perfect profile of themselves for teenagers: they can be everyone they want to be [2]. Because teenagers' self-awareness has developed for some years since they are born, it reaches a level where they are longing to manage money, as well as to find a sense of identity form communities and society. Being perfect or letting others not find their flaws can fit their needs. As virtual world can help teenagers build a perfect consumer profile and somehow increase social status because they "fit in", they rely on it [3]. Therefore, teenagers are addicted to virtual consumption because it can always fit their mental needs.

### **2.2. Variation of Society**

21th century is a fluctuated era because of its revolutionary techniques development. In the turn of the century, computer and television came onto the historical stage. Then, in 2010s, smart phone and other smart products like smart furniture, smart assistant, and so on started to be popular. From 2020, AI and virtual reality technology become common in public's daily life. For instance, in 2023, Chat GPT swept around the world. As a result, this generation of teenagers are always stay in a torrent of technological change; all of their growth is being along with different burgeoning techniques. That leads to adolescents' strong ability of adapting new things, so as virtual consumption.

Meanwhile, 5 years ago, COVID-19 causes many teenagers had to stay away from the outside world—the real world. Additionally, it has lasted for 3 years. As they cannot purchase commodity offline, and cannot social offline with their realistic friends, they spent more time on the Internet and virtual world. They can only choose the online purchasing way to satisfy their consumption needs. Moreover, COVID-19 causes the increasing of mental stress of adolescents [4]. In order to express this stress, many of them chose spending their money in the virtual world. That is because it can help adolescents get touch with outside world, as well as gain a sense of community belonging. After the epidemic ended, times have already let teenagers built up the habit of virtual consumption. The evidences from technical and epidemic perspective show that, the variation of society intensifies the excessive virtual consumption.

### **2.3. Family Reasons**

Expect of mental reasons and social reasons, family reasons also have big deal with teenagers' excessive virtual consumption behavior. In an analysis of the factors that influence teenagers' growth, in addition to their peers, the influence of their parents is rank among the top 3 [5]. The atmosphere of their family can affect adolescents' behavior in virtual world. According to a study, family expression is inversely related to the total using of the Internet, and family conflict is directly related to the total using of the Internet. It shows that more communication or expression and less conflict between adolescents and their parents or family members will lead to the less time teenagers will spend in the virtual world [6]. Parents consumption behavior will be reflected by their kids since their kids' growth have such a long time to be with them and mimic their behavior. Especially in more individualistic and higher power density's culture, parents influence to their kids are even more profound. Thus, family reasons stand a good chance of the reasons why many adolescents behave excessive virtual consumption.

### **3. Influences of Excessive Consumption Behavior**

#### **3.1. Physical Health**

Since virtual world brings strong immersion and attractiveness, teenagers easily become addicted to the colorful things in virtual world, so they will find it hard to consumption in the real world. While this will cause adolescents suffer from obesity, sleep disorders, and cyber sickness [7]. If they stay in virtual world and purchase in virtual ways for too long, it will reduce their time to feel out in nature, exercise outside, and stay away from all computer devices. The overusing of screen and sedentary lifestyle have even been exaggerated during the epidemic time, finally lead to bad effect of their physical health [8]. Meanwhile, some physical diseases are caused by the dependence on the virtual world; they are hard to be cured. In a word, excessive virtual consumption will bring a negative effect to teenagers physical health.

#### **3.2. Mental Health**

Excessive virtual consumption will not only lead to a bad effect on physical health but also the negative influence to adolescents' mental health. Some serious situations may make teenagers suffer from psychological diseases. According to a study, virtual activeness has a positive correlation with depression and anxiety: the more time people spend in the virtual world, the more possibility that people will be ill with depression and anxiety. A study about the overuse of smartphone shows that smartphone overuse is strongly related to depression, anxiety disorder and alcohol dependence [9]. That is because virtual world is designed to attract more people, it is full of emotions and tense factors. If virtual life stays in teenagers' growth for too long, it will bring some mental change to them, which makes them feeling harder to feel the outside change and all kinds of stimuli in natural life, eventually leading to the break of mental balance [10]. All these results prove that, for adolescents, addicting to virtual consumption enlarges the possibility of being sick in mental.

#### **3.3. Consumption View**

In terms of adolescents, excessive virtual consumption will result in the building of unhealthy purchasing value. As if they use virtual ways to purchase commodities in long run, virtual currency will make them feeling hard to feel the running off of realistic currency, then turns to the immoderate consumption behavior. Furthermore, as teenagers are being in a sensitive time in value building, immoderate consumption has high possibility to make teenagers have unhealthy consumption value. If their parents, teachers, or the society do not help them to get away from these bad value, it may lay a danger of adolescents' crime since they may do something illegal to get more money, in the end result in the slower growth of a society.

### **4. Solutions and Suggestions**

#### **4.1. Teenagers' Perspective**

Since teenagers themselves are now behave in an improper way of consumption, it is beneficial for them to change their mind by themselves. Lots of adolescents choose to release their reality and mental stress by consumption in the virtual world, it can do harm to their further growth. Thus, they should develop the ability of regulating their stress and managing the bad or negative mood. As for suggestions, they can exercise in the outside door, doing yoga or meditation training—to help them develop deeper mind and also increase the sense of happiness [11]. They can also talk to their peers, parents and teachers or change their cognition evaluation dimensions in order to reduce their stress. It is crucial for them to study mental health knowledge, and to seek for help to their parents, teachers or psychologists.

## 4.2. Family Perspective

Parents should behave in healthy way of consumption to let their kids know what kind of way is advantageous to their growth. Based on reason analysis, adolescents can be strongly influenced by their family atmosphere. That is because teenagers may be less affected by ideological polarization than adults, and they are easy to be influenced by the people who is close to them [12]. In that case, parents need to be positive models of their kids, to make their kids follow them to behave positive. Meanwhile, parents should communicate with their kids regularly, give their kids more attention, especially in mental health perspective. Parents should listen to their kids about their trouble and their ideas, and provide a way to deal with their problems. Last but not least, parents should induce their kids and help their kids to build up healthy consumption value, and when the problems appear, they should deal with them in proper ways with their kids.

## 4.3. Society Perspective

All kinds of parts in the society should help adolescents to grow in a healthy environment. Teenagers are significant to the society's development, as well as are the group that society should concern and protect. So that, all parts in the society have obligation of providing a healthy consumption environment for teenagers to set up proper consumption value.

The suppliers of virtual consumption platform should design special mode of adolescents to guide them do not stay to long in the virtual world, avoid them to be addicted to the virtual world. For instance, restricting teenagers money that spend in their platform or reminding them when they spend too much money.

The schools should set some special courses or teach their students how to purchasing properly. They can also invite some experts to give students lectures about virtual consumption, including the mechanism, reasons and influences of virtual consumption.

Educational or teenagers-caring organizations should spread the necessity of dealing the problem of teenagers' excessive virtual consumption to let more public realize that adolescents are in such a trouble. Moreover, they also cooperate with different communities to encourage teenagers in community to do volunteer jobs or to join commonweal activities in order to lead adolescents get rid of virtual world.

## 5. Conclusion

Teenagers virtual consumption behavior is caused by multiple and complex factors, encompass their mental growth, family atmosphere and society environment. Excessive virtual consumption will have the bad effect to adolescents' growth. Result of the specialism of adolescents' age in their physical and individual growth, this kind of behavior will harm their physical, mental, and purchasing value development. In the meantime, if these unhealthy behaviors become a kind of negative phenomenon, it will lead to the spread of bad atmosphere in the whole society, eventually leading to the negative influence of the future of that nation and country. This phenomenon can also reflect some problems in the society, for example, whether parents are take good care of their kids' mental health or mental need, whether schools and other educational department have done something positive do help teenagers build up healthy consumption value and so on. In short, solving teenagers' excessive virtual consumption is necessary and crucial as it has significant effect to families' harmony, society sustained development and nation's future.

On account for this paper analyzes the reasons of adolescents being such an unhealthy consumption way as well as provide a way for teenagers themselves to get rid of bad situations of consumption, this study is beneficial to the teenagers who are now struggle with the overusing of virtual techniques or excessive virtual consumption. Besides, it also gives adolescents' parents and the whole society a kind of caution to care about adolescents' mental health or solutions to help them solve the trouble of overusing virtual ways to purchase commodities.

On the other hand, this paper provides a comprehensive review of the reasons and influences of excessive virtual consumption in teenagers' health field, which provides an overall source for further research. However, indeed, because this study does not include realistic data to give quantized analysis, it has boundedness to give an accurate analysis of this phenomenon's influences to the whole society specifically. Therefore, future studies or research could collect authentic data in multiple ways to give this phenomenon's influences to the whole society or even the world a deeper understanding. That could make the public realize the negative effect of adolescents' excessive consumption behavior more specifically, which can let the efforts from every part of the society help to provide a favorable environment for teenagers' growth.

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