Implications of Social Media Audience Ideation in Young Women

Chloe Beitchman & Jennifer Henderlong Corpus

Reed College Department of Psychology

REED COLLEGE

INTRODUCTION

Imaginary audience ideation, a construct derived from adolescent egocentrism, is a characteristic component of adolescent development (Elkind, 1967).

Social media has introduced a novel audience for adolescents to navigate and consider within the social sphere (Choukas-Bradley et al., 2022).

Previous studies have uncovered links between imaginary audience ideation and social media usage among adolescent girls (e.g., Cingel & Krcmar, 2014; Zheng et al., 2018).

The present study introduced a novel scale to measure the existence of **social media audience ideation** (SMAI) in 18–20-year-old women, and uncover links with **social anxiety** and **SM usage time**.

INTERVIEW & QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Participants: 10 interested women who had previously completed the survey.
Procedure: Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format. Participants elaborated on their survey responses and described their relationships with social media over time. Anonymous transcriptions were analyzed vis thematic analysis.
**Coding Scheme:** 61 codes; 17 specific to participant's experience during adolescence.
Thematic Analysis: 6 themes; 2 secondary themes.

Example codes
-Addictive/consuming
-Envy/comparison
-Transactional/Social Currency
-Competitive
-Connections
-Physical appearance
-Curated/performative

Example codes (Adolescence)
-Positive Experience
-Negative Experience
-Change/Evolution
-Portray desired image
-Validation
-Social pressure
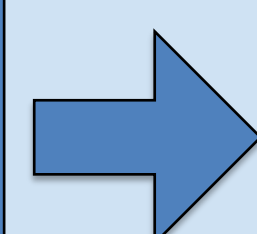
Themes
1. Adverse effects on mental health.
2. Distinct social community.
3. Curated and performative.
4. Used for a variety of purposes.
5. Promotes fixation on physical appearance.
6. Adolescence.
   1. Insecurity/Validation.
   2. Raises concerns for young people.

SURVEY MEASURES

Participants
→ 182 women.
→ All 18–20 years old.
→ All current college students.

1. Social Media Audience Scale (SMAS)
A modified version of the New Imaginary Audience Scale (NIAS, Lapsley, 1989).
→ 35 items.
→ 3 Factors: Judgment, Image, and Fame.
→ 4 pt. Likert Scale (1=Never, 4=Often).

1. Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents (SAS-A)
(La Greca & López, 1998)

1. Time Spent on Social Media
Estimate of average daily time using SM.

SOCIAL MEDIA AUDIENCE SCALE

Table 1. Factor Loadings for the Social Media Audience Scale

Item	Judgment	Image	Fame
How others react if you were gone.	0.719		
If others talk about your posts.	0.758		
Posting being in the hospital.	0.529		
Posting the loss of a loved one.	0.526		
Posting something negative about you.	0.639		
Others posting about you.	0.446		
People talking about your posts.	0.590		
Call out someone.	0.585		
Photo in a swimsuit.	0.455		
Judged for things you post.	0.490		
For another person's attention.	0.696		
For a particular person.	0.624		
Wondering about a particular person.	0.722		
Message to particular person.	0.634		
Who is looking at profile.	0.462		
Standing up to someone.	0.460		
People stalking your profile.	0.409		
Admired for body.		0.847	
Admired for the way you look.		0.832	
Admired for the way you dress.		0.748	
Admiring life based on post.		0.573	
Posting with romantic partner.		0.623	
Admired for being cool.		0.612	
Admired for SM presence.		0.456	
How others perceive profile.		0.491	
Famous friends.			0.797
Verified user.			0.828
Famous romantic partner.			0.725
Influencer.			0.750
Posted by celebrity.			0.668
Followed by someone famous.			0.707
Famous artist.			0.585
Lots of followers.			0.519

Notes. Factor eigenvalues > 1. Factor loadings for each item were included because they were greater than .400 and thus considered substantial. Some item titles have been shortened for this table. See Appendix A for a complete list of survey items.

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

Analyses of the composite SMAS score indicated that participants did display SMAI ($M = 2.4$, $SD = 0.60$)**:**

- More frequently than *never,*
  $t(181) = 30.6$, $p < .001$.
- More frequently than *rarely,*
  $t(181) = 8.0$, $p < .001$.
- Less frequently than *sometimes,* $p < .001$.

Participants also displayed SMAI as measured by each of the 3 subscales:

- Judgment
  ($M = 2.4$, $SD = 0.63$), $t(181) = 29.9$, $p < .001$.
- Image
  ($M = 2.6$, $SD = 0.75$), $t(181) = 28.8$, $p < .001$.
- Fame
  ($M = 1.7$, $SD = 0.73$), $t(181) = 12.7$, $p < .001$.

Table 2. Social media audience correlations

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
SM Audience Ideation									
1. SMAS									
2. Fame	.77**								
3. Image	.85**	.56**							
4. Judgement	.92**	.55**	.67**						
Social Anxiety									
5. SAS-A	.37**	.17*	.31**	.39**					
6. FNE	.43**	.23**	.38**	.44**	.79**				
7. SAD-N	.30**	.15	.27**	.31**	.84**	.46**			
8. SAD-G	.16*	.05	.12	.20*	.83**	.45**	.62**		
SM Time Spent Daily									
9. Time	.34**	.28**	.20*	.36**					
Mean	2.27	1.70	2.60	2.38	3.28	3.49	3.52	2.80	2.37
Standard Deviation	0.60	0.72	0.77	0.65	0.83	1.06	1.00	0.97	0.85

*$p < .05$, **$p < .001$

CONCLUSIONS

Participants displayed social media audience ideation ranging in frequency from *rarely* to *sometimes*. This ideation was positively associated with social anxiety and social media usage time.

Qualitative results indicate that young women maintain complex relationships with social media that evolve over time. Participants described feeling more secure in their identities with increased age and thus less preoccupied with their online personas.

This study was conducted with 18–20-year-old college students who identified as women. Future research should investigate SMAI in younger adolescents (i.e. middle and high schoolers) of all genders. Researchers should continue to investigate SMAI as it relates to other developmental phenomena, as well as through use of experimental designs/interventions.

CONTACT
If you have questions or would like to request more information from the authors, please contact
chloebeitchman@gmail.com