

Social Media Platform Dependence: The Use Motivation and Anxiety of the Youth Group

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Abstract. With the increasing popularity and the rise of digital technology, social media platforms have become an essential part of daily lives among young group. The impact of platforms on mental health has gradually become a focus of public concern. Existing studies have shown that there is a relationship between social media use and psychological problems such as anxiety. However, the definition of concept for evaluating is always only taking the time or the frequency of social media use as the measurement indicators. Based on this information, this essay takes youth group as the research object. It focuses on how social media platforms make young group dependent and anxious from the aspect of use motivation. It adopts qualitative research methods, collects the opinions of 10 young individuals through interview methods and analyzes the dialogues systematically. The research results show that emotion regulation, social identity, self-presentation and habitual use are the main 4 motivations for young group to use social media. By reinforcing different degrees of dependence, thus it influences the anxiety level. This essay holds the opinion that the anxiety of the youth group does not origin from the social media use itself, but from the dependent use and the jealous psychology.

Keywords: Social media dependence, anxiety, youth group, motivation for use, psychological impact

1. Introduction

This study focuses on the increasingly common use of social media in the daily lives of young group in the society contemporarily. Social media has developed from an early single chatting tool to a highly integrated platform system that combines information acquisition, interpersonal interaction, and entertainment consumption functionally [1]. Currently, representative social media platforms among the young group include Instagram, TikTok, Wechat, Weibo, etc. [2]. These platforms generally contain features like content production and sharing, real-time interaction, algorithmic recommendation, and quantifiable feedback (such as likes, comments, and shares) [3]. This research has a great significance for exploring mental health problems among young group. There are differences views on the social media use and the generation of anxiety. On the one hand, some studies suggest that frequent use of social media may increase the risk of anxiety; On the other hand, there are also studies emphasizing that this relationship is moderated by specific using scenarios and

methods [4]. The opposite view indicates that merely explaining psychological effects by the amount used might be too simple. This study mainly focuses on the social media use motivations of the youth group, with an emphasis on analyzing how emotion regulation, social identity, self-presentation, and habitual use contribute to social media dependence and further cause anxiety [5]. Existing research typically defines the youth group as individuals aged between 18 and 30, who are in a crucial period of transition from the education background to the social roles. They are confronted with the process of identity construction and social relationship reorganization [3]. It is precisely for the reason that youth group is more easy to be affected by various external environmental influences psychologically, and they are also more likely to use social media for emotional regulation [6]. This essay uses literature analysis and interview these two research methods. The collation of relevant research materials and interview dialogues is help to conducting analysis in combination with the actual use experience of the youth group. The advantages of these methods are that its ability to deeply reveal the internal connection among social media use motivation, platform dependence and anxiety. The ultimate research goal of this study is to find ways to alleviate the dependence and the anxiety brought by social media platforms. To achieve this goal, this essay analyzes the social media use motivations of the youth group. It identifies the key factors contributing to the formation of dependence with anxiety and offers suggestions.

2. Methods

This article adopts qualitative research and uses the interview method as the main research approach. The reason why for choosing the interview method is that this study aims to understand how young group subjectively use social media and the lasting sense of dependence and anxiety. The interview method is more helpful in revealing the way individuals understand their own behaviors and emotions. This method is both systematic and open. Prepared questions ensure that all respondents respond to the core research argument and open-ended questions provide respondents with enough space to express their personal opinions. It can enable researchers to gain true and analytically valuable content. The research characteristic is particularly important for understanding subjective experiences such as anxiety, social identity and a sense of loss of control [3]. This study adopted the purposive sampling method to select 10 young individuals aged between 18 and 30 who frequently use at least one mainstream social media platform daily. The respondents have certain differences in terms of gender, educational background and occupational status. To avoid the interference of other psychological factors as much as possible, the individuals who reported having serious mental health problems were not allowed to include in the study.

The first category of questions in the interview outline focuses on daily social media use surroundings, including common platforms, usage time, frequency and scenarios, aiming to understand the daily features of use behavior [7]. The second type of problem centers on the motivation for use, with a particular focus on 4 factors, emotional regulation, social identity, self-presentation and habitual use [8]. By guiding the respondents to see the same type of contents, explore why they have developed a social media dependence, such as emotional regulation caused by social pressure. The third category of issues focuses on the psychological experience after use, especially the feelings related to anxiety. Respondents were encouraged to reflect on whether the use of social media increased stress or led to jealousy, and whether these emotions persisted even after the use stopped [4].

3. Findings

More introverted young group have higher anxiety symptoms, that is, highly extroverted people seem to be less vulnerable to the potential negative effects of using social media [4]. Most young group show active use of social media platforms and develop a dependence on them rather than using them passively. Higher levels of passive use are also associated with an increase in the anxiety index [9]. Media dependence reflects their perception stems more from habitual use rather than accidental contact [1].

3.1. Emotion-regulating usage motivation

Among the interviewed young group, emotion regulation is the most common and most easily motivation associated with anxiety [8]. Most respondents indicated that when they felt anxious or under great pressure, they generally regarded browsing updates, watching short videos or browsing others' content as temporary means to relieve negative emotions. However, this kind of emotional relief is usually obviously a short period. Many respondents mentioned that their emotions would temporarily stabilize during the usage process. But anxiety often reappeared and even deeper after the usage ended, requiring continuous browsing to relieve it [7]. This manifestation has gradually transformed social media from an tool into an emotional burden, thereby deepening the psychological dependence of young group on social media platform [8].

3.2. Social identity and motivation for use

Social identity is another usage motivation that repeatedly appears in the interviews and is highly correlated with anxiety. Respondents generally focus on interaction indicators such as the number of likes, comment content and page views, and regard them as important signals of social acceptance and self-worth at the emotional level [10]. Despite being rationally aware of the superficiality of these indicators, most respondents still find it difficult to shake off their psychological impact. When online feedback fails to meet expectations, respondents often experience self-doubt and anxiety, and even repeatedly check [8]. Anxiety no longer origins solely from external pressure but is integrated into daily platform interactions. Social identity motivation significantly amplifies the evaluation anxiety of the youth group by internalizing others' immediate reactions as self-evaluation criteria. In a state of dependent use, individuals find it more difficult to maintain a psychological distance from these feedbacks, and anxiety experiences become more frequent and persistent [6].

3.3. Self-presentation motivation for use

Self-presentation is also one of the important motivations for young group to use social media. Many respondents mentioned that before posting content, they would carefully consider the wording, pictures and timing to ensure an idealized self-image was presented [9]. This highly conscious presentation process itself has already constituted a psychological burden. Anxiety also occurs before the content is released. Respondents generally described a state of persistent anxiety, worrying about others' evaluations before the release and continuously paying attention to feedback after the release [9]. In this situation, social media is not merely a tool for relaxation but has long occupied emotional resources.

3.4. Habitual usage motivation

Habitual use was the last relatively obvious key motivation presented in the interview, characterized by the lack of a clear purpose. Respondents generally mentioned that after unlocking their mobile phones, they often unconsciously open social media apps and only realize the passage of time after using them. This unconscious trait makes habitual use an important sign of dependency formation [11]. When the usage behavior is out of subjective control, individuals are more likely to experience psychological anxiety.

Overall, emotion regulation, social identity, self-presentation and habitual use are not isolated from each other, but rather influence and reinforce each other in the actual usage process [5]. Emotional regulation motives often lead to initial dependence, while social identity and self-presentation intensify emotions. However, habitual use enables the state of dependence to be maintained for a long time, thus resulting in persistent anxiety [6].

4. Discussion

This study finds that the social media dependence of the youth group is not merely for entertainment or to gain information. Among various psychological influences, anxiety is often regarded as one of the most common negative manifestations of social media dependence. Dependency addiction is generally due to poor mental health or unsatisfied psychosocial needs [8]. When young group are highly dependent on social media, they often show increased sensitivity to social evaluations [9]. In addition, anxiety is often interacted with other negative influences. For instance, respondents generally mentioned that they had difficulty falling asleep or a decline in sleep quality because of browsing social media at night. The fear of missing out (FoMO) keeps individuals highly alert even during their rest time, worrying about missing important information [8]. The algorithmic recommendation mechanism of the platform reflects users' emotions, thus creating a mutually reinforcing cycle of dependence and anxiety [2]. In contrast, although some studies have pointed out that social media plays a certain positive role in providing social support and information acquisition, these positive impacts often fail to change the negative effects brought about by long-term dependence [7].

4.1. Strengths and limitations

The main strength of this research is that the subjective experiences of the youth group in social media use through qualitative interviews, revealing the connection between dependence formation and anxiety. However, the samples were mainly from young people with a higher level of education, which might have limited the applicability of the research results to other populations. Furthermore, qualitative analysis is inevitably influenced by the researcher's perspective. It may involve acquaintances and cause some little errors.

5. Conclusion

The research results of this essay indicate that there is not a simple causal relationship between the social media use by young group and their anxiety experiences. The four motivations of emotion regulation, social identity, self-presentation and habitual use have, strengthened young group's psychological dependence on social media variously. Exacerbated anxiety experiences through mechanisms contain social comparison and evaluation sensitivity. The further research conclusion drawn from this is that the anxiety risk among young group does not mainly origin from social

media itself, but rather from its dependent use and the psychological motivation structure behind it. This research has certain reference significance for the research and practice in related fields. On the one hand, the research explores the existing research approach mainly focusing on use frequency and duration from a qualitative perspective, emphasizing the role of use motivation in understanding the psychological impact of social media. On the other hand, the research results provide inspiration for mental health intervention, paying more attention to the emotional needs and social identity processes of the youth group.

Future research can further expand its research directions on this basis. For instance, hybrid research methods can be combined to explore the dynamic changing process between social media dependence and anxiety. At the same time, it is also necessary to pay attention to the differences in the social media use model of young group under different cultural and social backgrounds. So that they can have a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term impact of social media on the mental health of young group.

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