

The influence of social psychology on adolescents' online behavior

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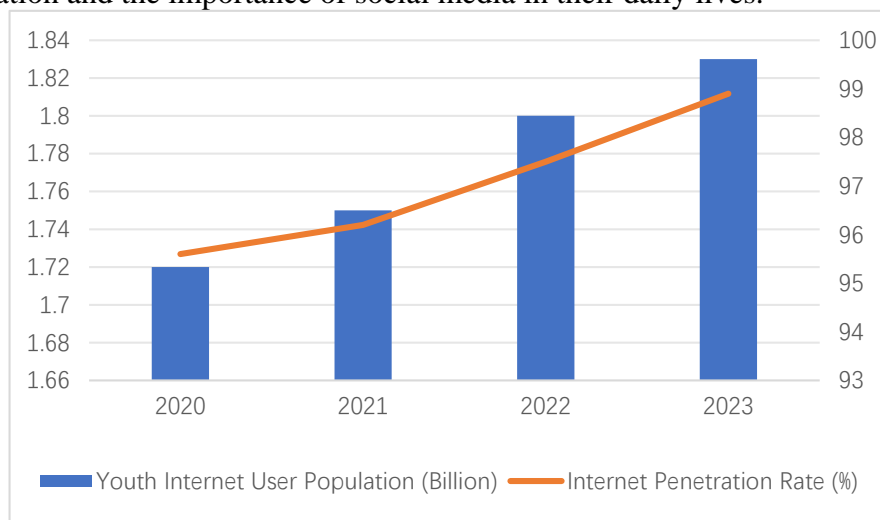
Abstract: This paper explores the influencing factors and manifestations of adolescents' online behavior from the perspective of social psychology. By analyzing social psychology theories such as social identity, group pressure and self-identity, it reveals many problems faced by adolescents in Internet use, such as Internet addiction, cyberbullying and mental health risks. The study concluded that adolescents' online behaviors are not only influenced by individual psychological development, but also by the combined effects of family, school and social environment. Therefore, this paper proposes intervention strategies based on social psychology, including enhancing self-knowledge, strengthening social support system and multi-level policy interventions, in order to guide adolescents to form healthy online behavior habits.

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of Internet technology, the Internet has profoundly influenced the daily life and socialization of contemporary teenagers. Adolescents are in a critical period of individual growth, and the Internet, as an open and virtualized social and information platform, provides them with extensive space for exploration and expression. However, this extensive access to the Internet also brings new behavioral patterns and psychological problems. In recent years, the frequent occurrence of Internet addiction, cyberbullying, and online social isolation among adolescents has attracted widespread attention from all sectors of society. Internet behavior is not just a simple matter of technology use; it is closely linked to the psychological development of the youth population and involves their core psychological needs such as social identity, self-identity, and sense of group belonging. Traditional psychological research has revealed the influence of environment and individual psychological traits on behavior, but in the context of online behavior, relevant theories of social psychology, such as social identity, group pressure, and self-efficacy, can provide more in-depth explanations for understanding adolescents' online behavior. Social psychology emphasizes that individual behavior is the result of social interaction and group influence. For adolescents, cyberspace is not only an important place for social interaction, but also the main way for them to seek identity and sense of belonging. The virtual and anonymous nature of the network makes adolescents more susceptible to group pressure and the influence of social media, which not only affects their behavioral choices, but also exacerbates their confusion and anxiety about identity. Driven by social media and online games, adolescents tend to form specific behavioral habits in the virtual world, and may even become addicted to them, making it difficult to extricate themselves^[1].

2. Current Situation Analysis of Youth Internet Behavior

In recent years, the Internet behavior of teenagers has shown a highly active and diversified development. With the popularization of the Internet, teenagers have become one of the important groups of Internet users. According to the data of China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) 2023 Figure 1, by the end of that year, the number of teenage Internet users had reached 183 million, and the Internet penetration rate was close to 100%. This group is far more active on the Internet than any other age group, and they frequently use various online tools and platforms to satisfy their needs for socializing, entertainment, learning and other aspects. Social media has become an important part of teenagers' daily socializing. Through platforms such as WeChat, QQ, Weibo, and Jiyin, teenagers can easily connect with their peers, share life moments, and gain social acceptance. The widespread use of social platforms has not only changed the way teens socialize, but also enabled them to display their personalities and participate in group interactions online. According to the Pew Research Center, 95% of teens regularly use social media, and more than half of them spend more than three hours a day on these platforms. This high frequency of use reflects teens' high reliance on online socialization and the importance of social media in their daily lives.

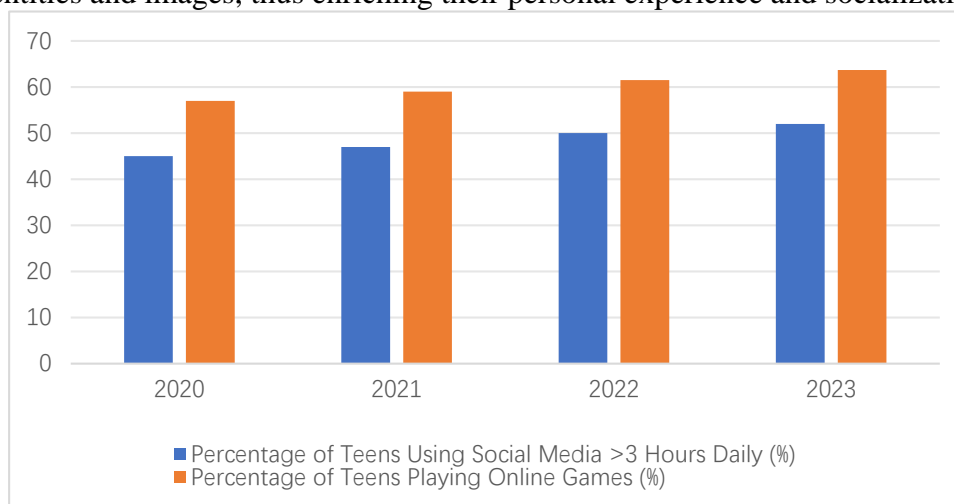


(Data Source: China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) – The 49th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China (2023))

Figure 1: Youth Internet User Population and Internet Penetration Rates

At present, online games have become an important part of teenagers' entertainment life. Online games not only provide a rich entertainment experience for teenagers, but also become a way for them to relax and interact. According to CNNIC's report Figure 2, more than 60% of teenagers are active users of online games, spending an average of more than 2.5 hours a day on games. Through games, teens are able to collaborate and compete with friends, enhancing the experience of social interaction. In addition, many teenagers communicate with others by watching live game broadcasts and participating in game forums, further enriching their online activities^[2]. And there have been significant changes in the way teens access information on the Internet. Unlike traditional news media, teenagers are more inclined to obtain information through informal channels such as short video platforms, social media and online forums. These platforms have fast information dissemination speed and rich and diverse content, which can quickly satisfy teenagers' desire for knowledge and interest needs. Teenagers not only browse news and watch videos on the Internet, but also participate in all kinds of online activities and discussions through the Internet to express their personal views. This phenomenon reflects the high trust and dependence of adolescents on the Internet as a tool for

information acquisition and expression. The Internet also plays an important role in adolescents' self-presentation and identity building. On virtual platforms such as social media, forums, and online communities, adolescents are able to display themselves and shape their online image by posting photos, sharing life moments, and posting opinions. Compared with real life, cyberspace provides adolescents with more diversified channels of self-expression, enabling them to experiment with different identities and images, thus enriching their personal experience and socialization^[3].



(Data Source: China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) – The 49th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China (2021))

Figure 2: Youth Internet User Population and Internet Penetration Rates

3. Issues and Challenges in Network Behavior

3.1. Internet Addiction

Internet addiction is a notable problem in the current online behavior of teenagers. With the popularization of the Internet and smart devices, teenagers can connect to the Internet anytime and anywhere, and immerse themselves in virtual activities such as online games, social media and video entertainment for a long time. As their self-control ability is not yet fully developed, teenagers are prone to over-reliance on the Internet for instant gratification. This addiction to the virtual world often causes them to neglect their real-life academic, social and family relationships, leading to a disruption in the rhythm of life. Internet addiction is not only manifested in excessive time consumption, but also accompanied by the formation of psychological dependence. Teenagers may show anxiety and irritability when they cannot access the Internet. In addition, long-term Internet addiction may also trigger adolescents to escape from real life, and the virtual world becomes their main source of comfort and fulfillment. This phenomenon will gradually weaken the connection between adolescents and the real world, making them more inclined to relieve pressure through the Internet rather than solving problems through practical actions when facing academic and social pressure^[4].

3.2. Cyberbullying

With the widespread use of social media, anonymous platforms and instant messaging tools, the incidence of cyberbullying is increasing year by year. Teenagers are easily involved in bullying behaviors such as verbal attacks, insulting remarks, and even malicious slander in online environments due to their lack of social experience and weak emotional management skills. Cyberbullying is often carried out through virtual interactions, and anonymity and distance make the

abusers more aggressive in the network. Bullied teenagers will encounter bad behaviors such as verbal violence, spreading rumors, and public humiliation on social media. Being under such pressure for a long period of time can easily lead to damaged self-esteem and feelings of isolation. Unlike bullying in reality, cyberbullying has a wider scope, spreads faster, and it is often difficult for victims to find specific perpetrators or seek timely help, which makes the impact of bullying behavior more far-reaching, and may even have a long-term negative effect on adolescents' mental health and quality of life.

3.3. Virtual Social Stress

Virtual social pressure is a psychological burden that adolescents often face in their online behavior. With the popularization of social media, adolescents share their personal lives and display their self-image through the Internet. However, virtual interactions on social platforms are often highly competitive and exhibitionist, which can easily trigger their anxiety and uneasiness. In the network, social feedback mechanisms such as likes, comments, and retweets make adolescents strongly dependent on the attention and recognition of others, and they will constantly adjust their performance in the network to gain more social recognition. Excessive attention to other people's life displays, especially those beautified and modified “perfect life”, is likely to make adolescents have a large psychological gap, believing that they can not achieve the same achievements or external standards. In the long run, this desire for social recognition may lead to low self-esteem and anxiety in real life, and virtual socialization becomes an important source of psychological pressure. Such pressure not only affects the emotional state of adolescents, but may also further exacerbate their dependence in the Internet, forming a vicious circle^[5].

4. Social Psychology-Based Intervention Strategies for Adolescent Internet Behavior

4.1. Enhancing Self-Control: Setting a Reasonable Schedule for Internet Use

Improving self-control is a key intervention for teens with Internet addiction. Parents and schools can help adolescents develop a personalized Internet use schedule to ensure that the amount of time they spend on the Internet each day remains within a healthy range. The schedule should be set flexibly according to individual needs, taking into account study, rest and recreation, and avoiding overuse of the Internet leading to an imbalance between school and life. Teenagers should learn to reflect on their usage habits in the process of setting schedules and develop sensitivity to time through daily behavioral records. At the same time, using the “time alert” function in cell phones or computers can help youth realize that their Internet use has exceeded their expectations in a timely manner. Schools can teach adolescents about self-control and self-discipline through psycho-educational programs to help them master time management skills. For example, they can make use of time management tools such as the “Tomato Work Method”, which segments work and rest, to enhance their control over time. In their daily lives, parents can encourage their children to develop healthy work and rest habits by setting specific rules for Internet use at home, such as turning off the Wi-Fi at a fixed time in the evening.

4.2. Provide Alternative Social and Recreational Activities: Enhancing Social Interaction in Reality

In order to reduce adolescents' over-dependence on the Internet, providing rich real-life social and recreational activities is an effective strategy. Parents and schools should encourage adolescents to participate in more offline social activities to expand their real-life social circle. For example, parents

can arrange outdoor sports, music lessons, dance classes or other interest classes for their children to help adolescents find fun and fulfillment in real life, thus reducing their dependence on the virtual world. Sports activities and group games can enhance their teamwork skills while improving their physical fitness, so that they can gain a sense of achievement and belonging in real life. Schools can also promote social interaction among adolescents by organizing group activities, such as field trips, extracurricular clubs, and community services, to help them build close friendships in real human interactions. Especially through the group belonging theory in social psychology, it can help teenagers feel recognized and supported in real social interactions. Through a rich variety of offline activities, adolescents can better balance between the Internet and real life, and avoid over-indulgence in online socialization.

4.3. Strengthening family and school supervision: establishing a good communication and guidance mechanism

Family and school supervision and guidance play a key role in adolescents' online behavior. First of all, parents can reach a consensus with their children on the time, content and way of Internet use by establishing clear rules for Internet use. For example, families can set up a “no Internet day” or “family time” where all electronic devices are turned off at specific times to increase family interaction. Parents should be careful to discuss online behaviors with their children in a non-confrontational and constructive manner to avoid over-control and resistance. Schools can also popularize healthy Internet use among young people through Internet behavior education courses to help them understand the dangers of Internet addiction. Teachers can organize regular seminars on topics such as Internet safety and time management to share students' experiences of Internet use and guide them to self-reflection. At the same time, schools can also communicate regularly with parents about their children's Internet use through the home-school communication platform, and establish a continuous monitoring and feedback mechanism.

5. Conclusion

With the rapid development of network technology, adolescents' online behaviors will become more diversified and complex. Therefore, it has become a challenge for society, schools and families to combine social psychology theories and develop more scientific interventions to help adolescents use the Internet in a healthy and rational way. Future research should further explore personalized interventions, using technological tools such as artificial intelligence monitoring and big data analysis to identify and guide adolescents' online behaviors in a timely manner. At the same time, research on the impact of virtual socialization should be strengthened to cope with new behavioral patterns and psychological problems that may emerge.

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