

A Study on the Dual Influence Paths of Online Social Behaviors on Adolescents' Subjective Well-being from the Perspective of Loneliness

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the perspective of loneliness and deeply analyzes the dual influence paths of online social behaviors on the subjective well-being of teenagers. Through the method combining theoretical deduction and empirical analysis, it reveals the positive role of online social behavior in alleviating the loneliness of teenagers and enhancing their subjective well-being, as well as the possible negative impacts such as Internet addiction and social anxiety. The research results show that the influence of online social behaviors on the subjective well-being of teenagers is complex and dual, and intervention and guidance from multiple dimensions are required.

KEYWORDS

Loneliness; Online Social Behavior; Teenagers; Subjective Well-Being; Double Influence

1 Introduction

In the digital age, online socializing has become an important part of teenagers' social life. According to the Research of the Pew Research Center ^[1], more than 90% of teenagers use social media platforms and spend a lot of time on these platforms every day, which indicates that online socializing has an extremely high popularity among teenagers. Online social behaviors not only change the social ways of teenagers, but also profoundly influence their psychological states and subjective well-being.

Loneliness, as one of the common psychological states among teenagers, is closely related to online social behaviors and subjective well-being. The research of Valkenburg and Peter ^[2] found that teenagers seek emotional support and social identification in online social interaction to alleviate loneliness in real life. Online social behaviors, with their characteristics such as anonymity, convenience and wide range, provide new social channels and emotional expression Spaces for teenagers. In the virtual social environment, teenagers can express themselves more freely and find like-minded partners, thereby alleviating the sense of loneliness in real life to a certain extent ^[3]. This convergence point makes online social behavior an important way for teenagers to cope with loneliness.

However, the influence of online social behaviors on the subjective well-being of teenagers is not in a single dimension. On the one hand, it may enhance teenagers' subjective well-being by strengthening their social support, providing emotional satisfaction and broadening their cognitive horizons, etc. ^[4] On the other hand, excessive reliance on online social interaction may lead teenagers to be addicted to the virtual world, neglecting social and interpersonal relationships in real life, thereby intensifying loneliness and reducing subjective well-being ^[5].

In view of the dual influence of online social behavior on the subjective well-being of adolescents, this study aims to deeply explore the dual influence paths of online social behavior on the subjective well-being of adolescents from the perspective of loneliness, providing a theoretical basis for adolescent mental health education and guidance of online social behavior.

2 The Intrinsic Connection Between Loneliness and Online Social Behavior

2.1 The Manifestation of Loneliness in Online Social Behaviors

Loneliness, as a widespread psychological state, is particularly prominent among teenagers. Adolescence is a crucial stage for an individual's physical and mental development, facing multiple changes in physiology, psychology and society, and is prone to feelings of loneliness. Online social behavior provides teenagers with a new social approach and emotional expression space, enabling them to form a complex internal connection between loneliness and online social behavior.

On the one hand, the sense of loneliness prompts teenagers to actively seek online social interaction. When teenagers feel lonely in real life, they often seek emotional support and social recognition through online social platforms. The characteristics such as anonymity, convenience and wide reach of online social interaction enable teenagers to express themselves more freely and find like-minded partners. For instance, some teenagers who are not good at expressing themselves and lack friends in real life may find their own social circles on online social platforms. Through

communication and interaction with others, they can alleviate their sense of loneliness.^[6] They can share their joys, sorrows, anger and happiness in the virtual world, gain others' attention and response, thereby feeling accepted and recognized, and fulfilling their social needs.

On the other hand, online social behaviors may also intensify the sense of loneliness among teenagers. Although online socializing provides teenagers with more social opportunities, over-reliance on it may lead teenagers to neglect social interaction and interpersonal relationships in real life. They may spend a lot of time and energy on online socializing and reduce face-to-face communication with family and friends. If this goes on for a long time, teenagers may gradually lose the ability to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships in real life, leading to the atrophy of real social interaction. When they encounter setbacks or fail to obtain satisfaction in online social interaction, the sense of loneliness may further intensify^[7]. In addition, the virtuality and uncertainty in online social interaction may also make teenagers feel confused and uneasy, further affecting their mental health.

2.2 The Regulatory Mechanism of Online Social Behaviors on Loneliness

The regulatory mechanism of online social behavior on adolescents' sense of loneliness is a complex process involving multiple factors.

On the positive side, online social behaviors can provide emotional support and social resources for teenagers, helping them relieve feelings of loneliness. Through communication and interaction with others, teenagers can receive emotional comfort and encouragement, and enhance their self-confidence and sense of self-identity. For instance, some teenagers have joined interest groups on online social platforms, discussing topics of common interest with like-minded people and sharing their experiences and feelings with each other. During this process, they can not only enhance their knowledge and skills, but also feel the power of the team and a sense of belonging, thereby reducing their sense of loneliness.

However, online social behaviors also have a negative impact on the regulation of loneliness. Excessive addiction to online socializing may lead to problems such as Internet addiction among teenagers, further intensifying their sense of loneliness. Internet addiction can make teenagers strongly dependent on online social interaction. Once they are away from the Internet, they will feel anxious, irritable and uneasy. Meanwhile, Internet addiction can also affect the study and life of teenagers, leading to their disconnection from the real society and increasing the risk of loneliness^[8]. In addition, negative information in online social interaction, such as cyber violence and cyberbullying, may also cause harm to the mental health of teenagers and trigger psychological problems like loneliness.

2.3 The Bidirectional Influence of Loneliness and Online Social Behavior

There is a two-way influence relationship between loneliness and online social behavior. Loneliness can affect teenagers' online social behaviors, and online social behaviors, in turn, can affect teenagers' sense of loneliness.

Loneliness is one of the important factors that prompt teenagers to engage in online socializing. When teenagers feel lonely, they are more inclined to seek emotional support and social recognition through online socializing. However, if teenagers cannot obtain satisfaction in online social interaction or overly rely on it, it may lead to an intensification of loneliness. Meanwhile, online social behaviors can also affect teenagers' sense of loneliness. Positive online social behaviors can help teenagers relieve loneliness and enhance their subjective well-being. Negative online social behaviors, on the other hand, may intensify teenagers' sense of loneliness and affect their mental health. Therefore, to deeply understand the intrinsic connection between loneliness and online social behaviors, it is necessary to comprehensively consider the two-way influence relationship between the two, take effective intervention measures, guide teenagers to use online social platforms correctly, and promote their physical and mental health development.

3 The Negative Impact of Online Social Behaviors on the Subjective Well-Being of Teenagers

3.1 Social Comparison and Self-Identity Crisis

In the online social environment, teenagers frequently come into contact with life fragments elaborately displayed by others. These contents are often beautified and screened, presenting an idealized state. This continuous social comparison makes teenagers prone to self-doubt and dissatisfaction. For instance, when they see their peers sharing wonderful moments such as traveling, winning awards, and participating in high-end events on social media, they might unconsciously compare their own lives with them, and thus feel that they are ordinary and lack a sense of achievement and value.

Under the pressure of such social comparisons for a long time, teenagers' self-identity will be in crisis. They may have negative perceptions of their appearance, abilities, social status and other aspects, thinking that they are inferior to others. This confusion of self-identity can lead to inner unease and anxiety among teenagers, reducing their satisfaction

and sense of happiness in life. Studies have shown that teenagers who are overly involved in social comparisons are more likely to have depressive symptoms and low self-esteem^[9]. They may spend a great deal of time and energy trying to change themselves to meet the "perfect" standards presented in online social interaction, but often fall into a vicious cycle where the harder they try, the more anxious they become, further weakening their subjective sense of well-being.

3.2 Online Social Addiction and Alienation from Real Social Interaction

The convenience and fun of online socializing have led some teenagers to gradually become addicted to it, resulting in online socializing addiction. They spend a lot of time interacting and communicating with netizens on virtual social platforms, but ignore their families, friends and classmates in real life. This excessive reliance on online social interaction leads them to exhibit withdrawal and avoidance behaviors in real social interactions.

3.3 Cyber Violence and Psychological Trauma

The anonymity and openness on online social platforms have led to the occurrence of cyber violence from time to time. Teenagers may encounter online violent behaviors such as verbal attacks, malicious defamation and human flesh search in online social interaction. These violent acts can cause serious psychological trauma to teenagers, making them develop negative emotions such as fear, anger and inferiority.

Teenagers who have suffered from cyber violence for a long time will develop fear and resistance towards online social interaction, and it may even affect their attitudes and views towards real life. They will feel that the world is full of malice and danger, thereby reducing their satisfaction and happiness with life. Moreover, the psychological trauma caused by cyber violence is often difficult to heal in a short period of time and will continuously affect the mental health and subjective well-being of teenagers.

3.4 False Information and Cognitive Confusion

The online social platforms are filled with a large amount of false information, including fake news, rumors, false advertisements, etc. Teenagers, due to their relatively weak cognitive and discernment abilities, are vulnerable to the influence of such false information. They may believe false information to be true, thereby generating wrong cognition and judgment.

For instance, some false information about health, science, society and other aspects may mislead teenagers' values and behavioral choices. When they find that they have made wrong decisions based on false information, they will feel frustrated and self-doubt. Furthermore, the proliferation of false information will also lead to a decrease in teenagers' trust in online information, thereby affecting their attitude towards online social interaction. They may feel confused and perplexed about the information in online social interaction, not knowing what to believe, thereby reducing their participation and satisfaction in online social interaction, and ultimately affecting their subjective well-being.

4 Construction of the Theoretical Model of the Dual Influence Path

4.1 Direct Effect Path

The inherent characteristics of online social behaviors, such as the convenience of social interaction and the richness of information acquisition, directly affect the subjective well-being of teenagers. The direct positive effect is manifested as follows: Through online socializing, teenagers can expand their social circle, make like-minded friends, share the details of life and hobbies, thereby obtaining emotional support and satisfaction, and enhancing the joy and sense of meaning in life. For instance, some teenagers join interest groups on online social platforms, discuss topics of interest with group members, and participate in online activities. This kind of positive social interaction can enhance their sense of belonging and self-worth, and thereby improve their subjective well-being. However, the direct effects of the negative aspects cannot be ignored either. Problems such as information overload and the proliferation of false information in online social interaction may make teenagers feel confused and anxious, consume their cognitive resources and reduce their satisfaction with life. For instance, when teenagers are exposed to a large amount of negative information on the Internet, they may develop a negative perception of the real society, which can affect their emotional state and subjective well-being.

4.2 Indirect Effect Path

Online social behaviors have an impact on the subjective well-being of teenagers through mediating variables. Among

them, social comparison and self-identity are important mediating variables. In the online social environment, teenagers frequently compare themselves with others. Such comparisons not only cover the material aspect, such as living conditions and appearance, but also the spiritual aspect, such as social achievements and personal abilities. When teenagers find themselves inferior to others, they are prone to negative emotions such as inferiority and anxiety, which in turn affect their self-identity. The chaos of self-identity can lead teenagers to be confused about their own values and goals, reduce their motivation and enthusiasm for life, and ultimately affect their subjective well-being. Furthermore, addiction to online social interaction is also a key mediating variable. Excessive addiction to online socializing can cause teenagers to neglect important matters in real life, such as studies and family relationships, leading to the degradation of real social skills and the lack of real social support. This imbalance between the real and virtual worlds can trigger feelings of loneliness and insecurity among teenagers, reducing their satisfaction and happiness with life.

The theoretical model of this dual influence path emphasizes the complexity and multi-faceted nature of online social behaviors on the subjective well-being of adolescents. It not only considers the direct impact of online social behavior itself, but also deeply explores its indirect impact generated through mediating variables, providing a theoretical framework for subsequent research and the formulation of intervention strategies.

5 Multi-Dimensional Intervention Strategy

Multi-dimensional intervention strategies need to exert joint efforts from the levels of families, schools, society and teenagers themselves. In the family, parents should enhance communication with teenagers, create a good atmosphere for interaction, set a good example by using online social platforms reasonably, and guide teenagers to establish correct concepts, cultivate self-management and information discrimination abilities. Schools should incorporate Internet literacy education into the curriculum, impart relevant knowledge, skills and moral norms, organize extracurricular activities to provide opportunities for real social interaction, and establish a psychological counseling mechanism to solve psychological problems. At the social level, the government should strengthen the supervision of online social platforms, formulate regulations to standardize their operation, and crack down on bad behaviors. The platform operator needs to enhance self-discipline, clean up bad information and develop functional services suitable for teenagers. All sectors of society should create a positive atmosphere and advocate a healthy lifestyle. Teenagers themselves should enhance their self-awareness and management skills, clarify their goals and needs, arrange their online time reasonably, cultivate hobbies and interests, and improve their ability to distinguish information.

6 Conclusion

This study deeply analyzed the dual impact of online social behavior on the subjective well-being of teenagers and found that it not only brings positive effects such as expanding social interaction and enriching information, but also triggers negative problems such as social comparison crisis and Internet addiction. By constructing a theoretical model of the dual influence path, the mechanism by which online social behaviors directly and indirectly affect the subjective well-being of adolescents through mediating variables such as social comparison and self-identity is clearly revealed, providing a powerful theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between the two.

The multi-dimensional intervention strategies proposed based on the research results, covering the levels of family, school, society and teenagers themselves, are feasible and effective. They are conducive to creating a healthy online social environment, improving teenagers' online literacy and real social skills, and promoting their healthy growth and improvement of subjective well-being. However, the research has limitations such as sample representativeness and method diversity. In the future, it is necessary to expand the sample, adopt longitudinal research, combine emerging technologies and interdisciplinary methods to solve this problem more comprehensively and deeply, and create a better online social environment for teenagers.

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