

Social Anxiety in Adolescents: An Analysis of the Psychological Influence Mechanism of Social Media Use

Mingpu Wang*

Qingdao No.2 Middle School, Qingdao, Shandong, China

*Corresponding author email: michellelin9697@foxmail.com

Abstract: With the rapid progress of Internet technology, social media has become an indispensable part of the daily life of contemporary teenagers, which has a profound impact on their social habits, information acquisition methods and psychological development tracks. This paper explores the psychological mechanism of social anxiety in adolescents using social media, aiming to reveal how social media exerts a profound influence on social behavior, psychological cognition and emotional state of adolescents through various complex ways. The features of social media, such as convenience, interaction, anonymity and visualization, together constitute the basic environment for teenagers to use social media. They have many impacts on teenagers, including positive aspects such as the expansion of social circle, the convenience of information acquisition and the realization of self-expression, and may also bring negative impacts, especially social anxiety. This paper makes an in-depth analysis from multiple dimensions. On the one hand, the phenomenon of social comparison on social media is widespread, and teenagers are prone to inappropriate self-evaluation and feelings of inferiority when browsing the life fragments carefully selected and displayed by others, which will trigger social anxiety. On the other hand, there is also the ever-present threat of cyberbullying and harassment, and these negative experiences pose a serious threat to adolescents' mental health and exacerbate their symptoms of social anxiety. In addition, the increase of information overload and cognitive burden, addiction and dependence on social media are also important factors leading to social anxiety among adolescents. From the family, school and social level, it is necessary to strengthen the education and guidance of young people, help them establish the correct concept of social media use, set a reasonable time to use, encourage physical social activities, and cultivate self-esteem and self-confidence. At the same time, for adolescents with social anxiety symptoms, professional psychological help should be sought in time to alleviate their anxiety and promote their mental health development.

Keywords: Social Media; Teenagers; Social Anxiety; Psychological Influence Mechanism; Social Comparison.

1. Introduction

In today's digital age, the rapid development of Internet technology has not only changed our way of life, but also profoundly reshaped human social mode. According to the latest data released by China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), as of March 2020, the number of Internet users in China reached 904 million, the Internet penetration rate was 64.5%, and the number of mobile Internet users was 897 million. Instant messaging, network news and online payment were basic applications, and the number of users maintained steady growth. The user usage rate exceeds 80% [1]. Social media, as an outstanding representative of Internet technology, has quickly penetrated into every corner of society with its unique charm and become an important bridge connecting people. Teenagers, as the most dynamic and innovative group in the society, have become one of the main user groups of social media. They share their lives, exchange ideas, get information through social media, and enjoy unprecedented social convenience and fun.

American professor Mark Bauerlein pointed out that today's teenagers growing up in the digital age have become the "most stupid generation", because the electronic screen has occupied too much attention of children, so that they have no more time to learn, resulting in poor knowledge, fear of reading, no independent thinking habits and critical spirit, and increasingly weak civic consciousness [2]. Du Tao and Wang Huan analyzed the possible negative effects of social media on adolescents from the perspective of the changes in their learning styles, thinking styles and social participation styles:

the prevalence of social media intensifies the virtualization of knowledge, which may lead to fragmented thinking and broken historical sense among adolescents, and circle communication limits the openness and diversity of network media [3]. Barbara M. Newman describes the impact of social media use on the development of adolescents, exploring in depth the role of social media in changes in adolescents' feelings of friendship, loneliness, and belonging. He believes that social media can strengthen the connection and closeness among adolescents, build the group identity of peer groups, and may also create the experience of social alienation and pressure [4]. From a micro perspective, other researchers have used empirical research to explore the impact of social media use on academic performance in teenagers. In reviewing Karpinski's research, June Ahn mentioned that Facebook users have lower average grades than students who are not users of the site [5]. Dong Liu et al. also found that the use of social networks was significantly negatively correlated with academic performance, but positively correlated with language tests. In addition, it is also found that the use of social networks by women has a more significant relationship with GPA [6].

Ito, an American scholar, has studied the participation patterns and activities of teenagers in the social network ecology for three years and found that teenagers use social networks to connect with their peers mainly for two purposes: friendship-driven and interest-driven [7]. Through a survey of 1,715 college students, Namsu Park revealed four main motivations for users to join Facebook groups: social interaction, entertainment, and seeking self-identity and

information [8]. Based on the theory of "use and satisfaction", Wang Hua studies teenagers' motivation of using social media. He believes that teenagers use social media mostly out of two types of motivation: "instrumental" and "ritual" : Teenagers' use of social media out of the motivation of absorbing information, escaping pressure, leisure and entertainment, seeking a sense of belonging, showing themselves, communication, etc., is regarded as their instrumental use of social media, while the use of social media out of the purpose of replacing boredom, habituation, following the trend, etc., is called ritual use [9]. Joiner et al. compared the attitudes of the first generation (born after 1980 and surveyed in 2002) and the second generation (born after 1993 and surveyed in 2012) of "net natives" toward the Internet. The results show that the second generation has a more positive attitude towards the Internet and uses the Internet more often than the first generation. Email is the most popular in both generations, but the second generation of digital natives use it more frequently; The use of social networks by the second generation of "Internet natives" is very common [10]. Although the research methods adopted by scholars are different, the research conclusions are not fundamentally different: Teenagers use social media mostly for information acquisition motivation, entertainment motivation, social interaction motivation, self-expression motivation and spiritual and psychological needs.

2. The Characteristics of Social Media and Its Influence on Teenagers

2.1. Features of Social Media

As the product of Internet technology, social media has a series of unique characteristics, which not only shape its nature as a social platform, but also profoundly affect the user's experience and behavior pattern. Social media allows users to access information anytime, anywhere through mobile devices or computers, to achieve instant release and reception of information. This convenience and immediacy greatly reduces the time it takes for information to be delivered, allowing users to quickly communicate and interact with people around the world. Social media provides a variety of interactive ways such as likes, comments, and forwarding, so that users can not only receive information, but also take the initiative to participate in the dissemination and discussion of information. This high degree of interactivity and engagement enhances the social experience of users, satisfying their need to express themselves and seek identification.

Some social media platforms allow users to post information anonymously or under pseudonyms, which reduces the social pressure on users to a certain extent and makes them more willing to share their thoughts and feelings. However, anonymity also brings problems such as cyberbullying and the spread of bad information. With the progress of technology, the content on social media is more and more rich and diverse, and the wide application of multimedia elements such as pictures, videos and audio makes information transmission more intuitive and vivid. This visual and multimedia feature attracts the attention of a large number of young users, and also promotes the rapid dissemination of information. Social media platforms often offer a wealth of personalization options, allowing users to customize the interface, content push, and more according to their preferences and needs. This personalized service

enhances user stickiness and loyalty, and also makes social media more tailored to users' personalized needs.

2.2. The Impact of Social Media on Teenagers

2.2.1. Positive Influence

Social media breaks the geographical and time restrictions, enabling teenagers to get to know friends from different regions and backgrounds and broaden their social circle. Such diversified social experience helps teenagers to cultivate cross-cultural communication ability and global vision. Social media has become an important channel for young people to obtain news, learning materials and cultural knowledge. They can obtain rich information and knowledge resources by following professional accounts and participating in online courses, which can promote personal growth and development. Social media provides a platform for teenagers to show themselves and express their personalities. They can display their talents, interests and life attitudes by Posting photos, videos, texts and other content, and gain recognition and attention from others, thus enhancing their self-confidence and sense of belonging.

2.2.2. Negative Influence

The phenomenon of social comparison on social media is widespread, and teenagers tend to have feelings of inferiority and anxiety when browsing the life fragments carefully selected and displayed by others. In addition, cyberbullying and negative evaluation also increase the social pressure and psychological burden of teenagers; The amount of information on social media is huge and updated quickly, and teenagers are prone to feel information overload and increased cognitive burden during browsing. Long-term exposure to a large amount of information not only affects their attention and memory, but also may lead to information anxiety and difficulty in choosing. Some teenagers may be overly addicted to the use of social media, spending a lot of time on it and ignoring real life learning and social activities. This addiction not only affects their academic performance and physical health, but can also lead to over-dependence on social media and difficulty in extricating themselves.

3. Psychological Influence Mechanism of Adolescent Social Anxiety

Social anxiety, as a universal psychological phenomenon, is particularly significant in teenagers. It not only affects the daily social activities of teenagers, but also goes deep into their inner world and has a profound impact on their psychological development.

3.1. Cognitive Level

Adolescents with social anxiety tend to have a negative evaluation of their self-image and tend to exaggerate their shortcomings and deficiencies while ignoring their strengths and achievements. They often worry about how they look in the eyes of others, which leads to feelings of inferiority and self-doubt. This distorted self-perception further exacerbates their social anxiety. At the same time, teenagers are in a critical period of self-identity formation, and they are very concerned about what others think of them. This is especially true for socially anxious adolescents, who pay excessive attention to the evaluations and feedback of others, especially negative ones, even though these evaluations may not be objective or biased. This excessive attention causes them to be more nervous and uncomfortable in social situations.

Adolescents with social anxiety tend to hold negative expectations when faced with social situations due to past social experiences or imagined negative outcomes. They worry that they will make a fool of themselves, be rejected or laughed at, and this expectation fuels their feelings of tension and anxiety, creating a vicious cycle.

3.2. Emotional Level

Adolescents with social anxiety tend to experience strong emotional fluctuations in social situations, such as tension, fear, shame, anger, etc. These negative emotions not only affect their social performance, but may also cause them to have difficulty maintaining emotional stability in non-social situations. In order to avoid social anxiety and negative feelings, some adolescents may choose emotional isolation, which means reducing interactions and interactions with others. While this self-isolating behavior can reduce anxiety in the short term, it can lead to decreased social skills, loneliness and increased depression in the long term.

3.3. Behavioral Level

Teens with social anxiety often reduce their anxiety by avoiding social situations. They may refuse to attend events such as parties, speeches or performances, or even avoid talking to strangers. This avoidance behavior, while temporarily alleviating anxiety, limited the development of their interpersonal skills and social skills. On the other hand, in order to deal with the upcoming social situation, some teenagers may spend a lot of time and energy to over-prepare. They practice their conversations over and over again and check their behavior to make sure they don't slip up socially. However, this over-preparation often backfires, increasing their feelings of stress and anxiety.

3.4. Physiological Level

Adolescents with social anxiety may have a series of physiological reactions when faced with social situations, such as increased heart rate, shortness of breath, sweating, and shaking hands. These physiological responses are direct manifestations of anxiety, and they are difficult to control and hide. Chronic social anxiety can also have adverse effects on the physical health of adolescents. Anxiety can lead to sleep disorders, loss of appetite, indigestion and other physical problems, which can affect their overall health and quality of life.

4. Intervention Strategies and Suggestions

4.1. Family Level

Parents should establish open and trusted communication channels with their children and encourage them to express their feelings and troubles. By listening and understanding, parents can better understand their children's psychological state and give timely support and help. At the same time, parents' own words and actions have a profound impact on children. Therefore, parents should establish a positive and optimistic attitude towards life, demonstrate good social skills and emotional management ability, and set a positive example for their children. In addition, children should be encouraged to participate in a variety of hobbies and interests, such as sports, artistic creation, music and dance. These activities not only help children release stress and relieve anxiety, but also develop their self-confidence and social skills.

4.2. School Level

Schools should incorporate mental health education into the curriculum system and regularly carry out mental health education courses and activities to help students understand common psychological problems such as social anxiety and master coping methods and skills. At the same time, the establishment of students' mental health support system, including psychological counseling room, psychological counseling teachers, etc., to provide students with professional psychological counseling services and support. At the same time, students are encouraged to set up mutual support groups to face and solve psychological problems together. The school should create an inclusive and accepting campus atmosphere, respect each student's individuality and differences, and avoid discrimination and exclusion. By organizing diverse campus cultural activities to promote communication and interaction among students and enhance their sense of belonging and identity.

4.3. Social Level

All sectors of society should strengthen the supervision and guidance of social media to reduce the spread of bad information and negative impact. At the same time, we should advocate a healthy and positive network culture and encourage rational expression and civilized communication among users. The government and social organizations should increase the training and investment of professionals in mental health education and improve the professionalism and coverage of mental health services. Professional training, seminars and other activities are held to enhance the professional quality and service ability of relevant personnel. Through media publicity, public service advertisements and other channels to enhance public awareness and attention to adolescent mental health issues. We advocate the participation of all sectors of society in the education and protection of adolescent mental health, and create a good social environment for the healthy growth of adolescents.

4.4. Individual Level

Teenagers should learn to know and evaluate themselves correctly and avoid paying too much attention to others' evaluation and negative expectations. Through positive self-talk and reflection, enhance self-confidence and self-esteem, reduce feelings of inferiority and anxiety. At the same time, learn effective emotional management techniques and methods, such as deep breathing, relaxation training, positive thinking, etc. These techniques help teenagers stay calm and rational in the face of pressure and challenges, and effectively relieve anxiety. Participate in social skills training courses or activities to improve the social skills and interpersonal skills of young people. These skills include communication skills, listening skills, conflict resolution, etc., which help teenagers better adapt to social situations and build good relationships.

5. Conclusion

Social anxiety has a high incidence in adolescents, which not only affects their daily social activities, but also has a profound impact on their mental health development. The psychological influence mechanism of social anxiety involves cognitive, emotional, behavioral and physiological levels, which are interrelated and influence each other, and constitute the complex psychological process of adolescent social anxiety. The intervention strategies for adolescent

social anxiety should be comprehensive, targeted and effective. Through the joint efforts of family, school, society and individual level, we can provide all-round support and help for adolescents, and effectively relieve their social anxiety.

Although this paper has made some achievements in the study of adolescent social anxiety, there are still many fields worthy of further discussion. For example, the differences of adolescents' social anxiety in different cultural backgrounds can be further studied. To explore more effective intervention strategies and methods; And strengthen interdisciplinary cooperation, in-depth research on adolescent mental health issues from multiple perspectives. At the same time, with the continuous development of science and technology and the constant change of social environment, the problem of adolescent social anxiety will also show new characteristics and trends. Therefore, it is also necessary to continue to pay attention to the development of this problem and provide more timely and effective mental health services for adolescents.

References

- [1] China Internet network information center (CNNIC) : 45 times China Internet network development state statistic report, in April 2020, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/m7jgPBLbczV4-UE1IkN2yw>.
- [2] Mark Bauerlein, *The Dumbest Generation*, translated by Yang Lei, Tianjin Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2011, p. 45.
- [3] Tao Du, Huan Wang, "The Illusion of Progress: The Negative impact of Social Media on Adolescents", *Chinese Youth Social Sciences*, 2015 (1), 76-81.
- [4] Barbara M. Newman, "The Impact of Social Media on Adolescent Peer Relationships: Friendship, loneliness, and Belonging," *China Youth Research*, 2 (2014), pp. 16-20.
- [5] June Ahn. "The effect of social network sites on adolescents' social and academic development: current theories and controversies ", In *Journal of the Association for Information Science & Technology*, vol.62, 2011,p. 1435 ~ 1445.
- [6] Dong Liu, Paul A. Karschner, Aryn C.Karpinski. "A meta-analysis of the relationship of academic performance and Social Network Site use among adolescents and young adults ", In *Computers in Human Behavior*, vol. 77,2017,p. 148 ~ 157.
- [7] Ito M., Horst H., Bittanti M. et al."Living and learning with new media: summary of findings from the digital youth project ", In *The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation*, 2008 Nov, Retrieved from <http://www.digitalllearning.macfound.org/>. Quoted from Yang Guang: "Digital Natives" and social network overseas research Overview ", *News University*, 2015, No. 6, 73, 108-113.
- [8] N Park,KF Kee,S Valenzuela."Being Immersed in Social Networking Environment: Facebook Groups, Uses and Gratifications, and Social Outcomes ", In *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, vol. 12,2009,p. 729 ~ 733.
- [9] Wang Hua, *Research on Teenagers' Use and Satisfaction of Social Media*, Master Degree Thesis, Hunan University, 2014, p. 32.
- [10] Joiner R, Gavin J, Brosnan M, Cromby J, Gregory H, Guiller J, Maras P, Moon A."Comparing first and second generation digital natives' Internet use, Internet anxiety, and Internet identification ", In *Cyber Psychology, Behavior & Social Networking*, vol. 16,2013,p. 549 ~ 552.