A Study on Virtual Social Activities of College Students in Mobile Internet Environment—A Survey Based on Cases of Wuhan Technology and Business University

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Abstract. This paper adopts anonymous random sampling method to study the virtual social activities of college students in mobile Internet environment. According to the statistical results obtained by statistical package for social sciences (SPSS18.0), mobile Internet has now become one of the major platforms for virtual social networking of college students. In this context, this paper discusses new approaches, contents and characters of college students’ virtual social networking in mobile Internet environment, further researches their impact and puts forward solving strategies for negative impact.

Introduction

With the opening of 4G era and the growth of mobile devices, a huge amount of energy has been injected into the development of mobile Internet. According to the 36th Statistical Report on Internet Development by CNNIC, by June 2015, the scale of Chinese netizens reached 668 million, of which the scale of mobile phone netizens reached 594 million, accounting for up to 88.9% [1], mobile phone maintains its first position in Internet devices. College students have become the main force of mobile Internet that represented by the use of mobile phone because they are good at accepting new things.

Most of the existing researches on virtual social activities of college students are made based on traditional network environment. Although traditional and mobile networks have been covered by researches in recent two years, special studies on virtual social activities of college students on mobile network have not been made. For example, Li Wang studied the virtual survival of college students in network environment and discussed the virtual survival phenomenon of college students based on the condition of rapid development of network technique [2]. Besides, some scholars studied the communication effect of virtual mobile social networking from the perspective of communication sciences. For example, Yan Ma analyzed the communication effect of microblog virtual social networking of college students from the view of quasi-social interaction theory [3]. In addition, there are some researches on mobile network addiction of college students, such as negative impact of mobile phone addiction and WeChat and microblog dependence on college students. For instance, the research made by Jianguo Jiang suggested that WeChat addiction caused disordered lifestyle and spiritual emptiness to college students, and such students became estranged from real-life interpersonal communication and produced social fantasizing and self-lost [4].

With the coming of mobile Internet era, the virtual social networking of college students have changed, and virtual mobile social networking has become a new trend and shown its new approaches, contents and characters. Researches on virtual social activities of college students in mobile Internet environment have a certain practical significance.

Research Method and Tool

This study takes students of Wuhan Technology and Business University as an example and applies the method of questionnaire survey to research the virtual mobile social activities of today’s college
students. To ensure the integrity and reliability of data, this survey adopted random sampling method. Questionnaires were issued and collected on site, research workers have given clear answer and explanation to questions raised by respondents, which improves the effective rate of questionnaires and guarantees the quality of this survey. Then SPSS18.0 statistical software was used for data statistics, comparison, induction and summary. In this survey, 280 questionnaires were issued and 253 effective questionnaires were collected, and the effective rate of questionnaires collected reached 90.36%. After completing the survey, effective questionnaires were coded and input into SPSS18.0 software to form database for analysis and research.

**Approaches and Contents of College Students’ Virtual Mobile Social Networking**

Mobile phone social APPs have become the main carrier of college students’ virtual mobile social networking and are divided into three types: (1) Instant messaging APPs such as QQ and WeChat; (2) Microblog APPs such as Sina Weibo and Tencent Microblog; (3) Social network site (SNS) APPs such as QQ Zone and Renren Open Platform [5]. Which are the most frequently-used mobile social networking APPs in this survey (multiple choices)? They are WeChat, QQ, Sina Weibo and QQ Zone, accounting for 92.5%, 65.6%, 58.5% and 56.1%, respectively. Currently, the most frequently-used virtual mobile social networking APPs of college students are WeChat, mobile phone QQ, Sina Weibo and QQ Zone.

Most of the college students use mobile social software for: keeping in touch with their friends, accounting for 86.9%; getting news and information, accounting for 67.9%; sharing personal interests and news, accounting for 47.6%; making friends with like-minded people, accounting for 34.1%; participating in and initiating activities, accounting for 15.9%; making friends of the opposite sex, accounting for 5.6%; and doing micro business, accounting for 2.8%. Micro business has become a new element of virtual mobile social networking.

**Characters of College Students’ Virtual Mobile Social Networking**

**Mobility**

Traditional social networking is restricted by time and space to some extent. Communication can be made at the position of computer only, while it’s impossible for most of us to sit on our computer chairs at all time, such time and space limitations therefore restricts the degree of freedom of surfing the Internet. Nevertheless, only a mobile phone is required for accessing mobile Internet, the portability of mobile phone enables the unrestrained expansion of virtual social networking in time and space, so that virtual social networking is possible at anytime and anywhere.

**Privacy**

Although traditional virtual social networking over the Internet is an individual behavior, college students often surf the Internet in dormitory or net bar that may be monitored by other people. Thanks to small size of mobile phone which is the main carrier of mobile Internet, mobile phone can easily create a private space to avoid any monitoring, so that virtual social networking can provide more personalization and privacy.

**Reality**

Virtual mobile social networking realizes the regression of interpersonal communication and attaches more reality to virtual social networking. Interpersonal communication refers to activities in which two or more people exchange information, thoughts and feelings by using language and non-linguistic symbols. Traditional social networking emphasizes particularly on its tool role and ignores the affectivity of communication, resulting in over-virtualized social networking. Nowadays,
mobile social software implements real-name registration system and gradually reconstructs interpersonal relation network of the realistic society based on the real-life social networking of people, so as to attach more reality to virtual social networking.

**Impact of College Students’ Virtual Mobile Social Networking**

**Extension and Supplement of Real-Life Social Networking**

In this survey, 64% of the students hold the opinion that mobile social networking can expand their social circle and improve their social skills; while 14.6% of the students consider that some people may be addicted to the virtual social networking provided by mobile social networking and their ability of real-life social networking may be weakened. Besides, 21.3% of the students believe that mobile social networking has no impact on real-life social networking. Thus it can be seen that most of the students adopt a supportive attitude toward mobile social networking and actively participate in virtual mobile social networking. In the use of virtual mobile social software, friends and schoolmate of the students in real life are the most frequently-contacted persons, accounting for 98.8%; relatives are in the second place, accounting for 70.8%; teachers are in the third place, accounting for 25.7%; and net friends and strangers are respectively accounting for 13.4% and 4%. It’s obvious that virtual mobile social networking is a networkization of real-life social networking, and their most frequently-contacted persons are people they know in real life. Virtual mobile social networking can therefore be an extension and supplement of real-life social networking.

**Getting Social Support and Reducing Isolation**

According to Erik Erikson’s Stages Theory of Psychosocial Development, college students are in the stage of young adulthood (18-25 years). During this stage, the developmental tasks of personality traits include experiencing intimacy, avoiding isolation, establishing and maintaining satisfactory interpersonal relation with others, and obtaining encourage, confidence and belongingness from such relation. Due to various reasons, these demands are often difficult to be satisfied, thus the sense of isolation in this stage is particularly strong compared with that in other stages. So it’s shown that college students have a strong demand for communication. According to “The Rich Get Richer” model built by Li Lei, well-socialized extroverted individuals with relatively more social supports are likely to gain more social supports through communicating with others over mobile phone Internet, so as to reduce their inner isolation and negative affect. According to the theory of “The Poor Get Poorer” model, poorly-socialized introverted individuals gain relatively less social supports in the realistic society in most cases, while they can gain more emotional supports and reduce their inner isolation through social networking [6]. Virtual mobile social networking enables individuals to gain more network social supports and becomes an effective way of getting rid of isolation in real life.

**Further “Containerization” of College Students**

Maki Nakano, a Japanese communication savant, believes that for those who grew up in mass communication, especially in TV-based media environment, their inner world is like an “enclosed” container, they are only willing to indulge themselves in the media rather than to open their inner world to others, or to understand the true inner world of others, he called them “people who live in containers” [7]. With the rapid development of mobile Internet, college students are increasingly influenced by mobile network media and are gradually dependent on mobile phone. Compared to TV-based traditional media, college students have a greater initiative on the selectivity of information, but still remain passive in the aspect of information acceptance. Whether can college students distinguish the authenticity of the information delivered on mobile Internet in this survey? 118 students chose “Hard to say”, accounting for 46.6%; 97 students chose “Able to distinguish in most cases”, accounting for 38.3%. It’s obvious that only a small minority of students can clearly distinguish the
authenticity of information. Among the rest of the students, 12.6% can hardly distinguish the information and 2.4% are completely unable to distinguish the information. Due to limited identification ability, most of the college students passively accept the information on their social networking and are impacted by such information, the “container” state of most of the students therefore can not be essentially changed.

In addition, college students are quite capable of communicating in social networking because of the convenience of mobile social networking; however, they isolate themselves from others when they find it difficult to communicate in real-life social networking. They are unable to go into the inner world of others and can easily produce the “container” state in traditional media, so those who have weak ability of self control may deepen their “containerization” under the influence of mobile social networking.

**Dependence on Virtual Mobile Social Networking Affects Mental Health Level of College Students**

Virtual mobile social networking strengthens the dependence of college students on mobile phone. The survey found that the students surf the Internet with their mobile phone for 4.5 hours a day on average, accounting for 18.75% of a day. Regarding to the place of surfing with mobile phone, 85% of the students choose dormitory, 45.8% choose classroom, 55.3% choose vehicle, 32.4% choose public places such as park, 21.3% choose canteen, and 9.1% choose other places. Thus it can be seen that mobile Internet has completely permeated into the everyday life of the students. Regarding to the purpose of surfing with mobile phone, 90.5% of the students are involved in social activities; and regarding to the duration of using mobile social software, such as WeChat and Sina Weibo, in a day, 51.4% of the students choose 1-3 hours, 15% choose 3-5 hours, and 4.7% choose more than 5 hours. According to the duration of use of virtual mobile social software, virtual mobile social networking further strengthens the dependence of college students on mobile phone.

At present, “phubbing” and “mobile phone enthusiasts” can be seen everywhere on campus. In this survey, 96.6% of the students hold the opinion that dependence on virtual mobile social networking will affect the mental health level of college students. Among which 77.1% of the students consider that bad behaviors such as network dependence and obsession will form; 65.2% think this will affect interpersonal relation in real life, including intimate relationship; 39.4% believe that such dependence is not conducive to expressing and managing emotions, and 34% insist that it will lower self-recognition level.

Unfortunately, addictive behavior, interpersonal communication, emotion management and self-recognition are important criterions for appraising the mental health and behaviors of college students.

**Countermeasures**

**College Students Are Expected to Strengthen Ideal and Faith Education Themselves and Refuse to Become the Slaves of Mobile Phone**

The subjectivity of students is dominant in college education, while a lot of college students have so weak self management and control ability that they do not know how to manage their plentiful spare time, virtual mobile social networking therefore becomes the main approach of killing their spare time. College students are expected to strengthen ideal and faith education and rationally set their objectives, so that they can properly arrange their time and life and make mobile phone become a tool rather than a dominator in their life.
Colleges and Universities Are Expected to Enrich Cultural Life on Campus and Establish Social Support System

Campus is one of powerful social support systems of the students. On campus, schoolfellow and teacher can be “important persons” of college students in daily life, while cultural life on campus is an important carrier of establishment of these support systems. Colorful and interesting campus culture enables diversified connection between student individuals and helps the students to find enjoyment and support in real-life social networking on campus, so that they can reduce dependence on mobile social networking.

Strengthen Mental Health Education in Colleges and Universities and Guide Mobile Social Behaviors of Students.

We cannot live without mobile social behaviors because the popularity of mobile social networking is a symbol of society progress, while colleges and universities should strengthen guidance on virtual mobile social networking by virtue of mental health education platform, otherwise “dependence on mobile phone” will affect the physical and mental health of college students. Mental health education will help college students to improve self-recognition level, rationally control behaviors, improve social skills, establish harmonious interpersonal relation, learn emotional control, and listen and accept the emotions of others. All of the above can help students to reduce “dependence on mobile phone” and form healthy mobile social behaviors.

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References


