Relationship between New Network Media and Development of University Students from the Perspective of Higher Education in China—Taking a Renowned University in China as an Example

Hong-Mei WEI\textsuperscript{1,a}, Xiao-Wei HUANG\textsuperscript{2,b}, Jia-Ni WANG\textsuperscript{1,c}

\textsuperscript{1}School of Marxism, Harbin Institute of Technology

\textsuperscript{2}School of Management, Harbin Institute of Technology

Harbin, China

\textsuperscript{a}hongmeiwei@hit.edu.cn, \textsuperscript{b}Xiaowei2000@hit.edu.cn, \textsuperscript{c}wangjian1006@163.com

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Abstract. Network media has become a new normal under new environment in this innovative age, and new network media has been applied to higher education. Taking a Renowned University in China as an Example, author used the basis of developmental psychology theory, summarized new characteristics of new network media and university student’s development, and stated the response from and development of higher education, brought forth new ideas of the relationship between new network media and development of university students.

Introduction

Popularization of the internet accelerated our step into a brand new information age. According to the 38th “Statistical Report on Internet Development in China” (hereinafter referred to as “the Report”) released by China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC),\[1\] by June 2016, the number of Chinese netizens has reached 710 million and internet penetration rate is 51.7%, exceeding the global average by 3.1 percent. Among them, 656 million are cell phone netizens, accounting for 92.5%. Compared with the preceding years, the number of Chinese netizens is growing faster in general.

The way university students use new internet media is also changing with each passing day. It has developed from surfing portal website and enjoying e-mail service to using internet blog, WeiHua, WeChat and communication forum which are very popular at this moment. Fixed internet terminals limited by network port also give way to mobile internet such as WiFi and 4G, etc. which could get information anywhere anytime. New network media exerts a significant influence over university students’ way of thinking, behavior pattern and even their self-development. This change poses both new opportunity and challenge to current ideological and political education in colleges and universities. How to integrate higher education with the internet and match knowledge impartment with multimedia terminal so as to realize development both in reality and in virtual space have become issues that needs urgent solutions. The “Survey on Internet Usage Conditions of University Students” this time is made, issued and gathered by Research Center of Youth Development in certain university. This survey mainly was targeted at undergraduate students, postgraduate students and doctoral students. During the process, 1050 copies of questionnaires were sent to the undergraduate students, recovering 952 copies of effective ones, and 472 copies of questionnaires were sent
to the postgraduate students, recovering 457 copies of effective ones. The effective rate is 92.58%. Gathered Data was analyzed with the help of SPSS v18.0, the statistical package for social science.[2]

**Concept Definition**

Definition of the new network media is as follows: It is a new media form immerged after traditional media such as newspapers and periodicals (paper media), radio broadcasting, as well as TV and movies. With digital technology and network technology, it transmits information through cable network, wireless network or satellites, etc. to terminals such as computer, mobile phone and other digital receiving equipment.

Development of university students is an international, national, social and personnel issue.[3] The "National long-term education reform and development Plan" (2010-2020) defined development of university students from the national and social point of view. The meaning is as follows: “Fully implement the Party’s educational policies. Education must serve the needs of socialist modernization and the interests of people. The basic task of education is to establish high moral values and train talented people. We must train socialist builders and successors who are comprehensively developed in morality, intelligence, physique and art.” [4] In 1965, Arthur W. Chickering from America put forward his seven-vector theory about development of university students from the individual point of view in “Education and Personality” for the first time. It includes seven aspects, which are developing competence, managing emotion, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, establishing identity, developing mature interpersonal relationships, developing a purpose and philosophy of life, as well as developing integrity. These vectors reflect different fields and levels for development of university students. Development in one field could provide favorable conditions for development in other fields. However, the seven vectors do not develop in a single direction strictly.[5] That means the students do not always develop from one vector to another. These vectors interact with each other at different speeds. No matter from which point of view, development of university students covers individual development in every aspect, close integration with the society, becoming mainstays of national development and contribution to human civilization.

**Characteristics of the New Network Media Environment**

**The New Network Media is open to all kinds of Participations**

Anyone could become information publisher or information receiver of this new media at any time, as long as there is terminal equipment with internet access. Due to this openness, different cultural values may intertwine at the same time, and the theoretical system of socialism with Chinese characteristics exists inevitably side by side with those non-mainstream Ideologies.

**Information Communication through New Network Media is Interactive**

Interactive communication between information publisher and information receiver is realized through the new media, and every user could be the information publisher and the information receiver at the same time. Furthermore, different types of new media could also exchange information.[6] In the real world, different values and world views are limited by social circles
and could not be popularized easily. However, all values and world views could find their corresponding behavior subjects easily under new media environment.

**Information on the New Network Media is Immediate**

It used to take certain time for one piece of information to go through gathering, editing, and proofreading before it was published finally in the era of traditional media. However, the new media could realize synchronized updating of information almost immediately. Users could publish information on the new media immediately whenever they see something or come up with a new idea, which would be received by all followers in the form of “message”, “push” or “attention”, etc. Once the new media user published some event in the world on certain new media platform, it’s likely to appear on every main new media platform immediately within a few hours. Nevertheless, this characteristic of new media has been taken advantage of, and some false and negative information is vigorously propagated before its authenticity has been confirmed.

**The New Media has a Virtual Structure**

All information on new media comes from reality. However the information is processed and changed during transmission process in a way that is unique to the new media. In this way, a virtual space which has realistic factors but is different from the reality could be felt by the user. Furthermore, identity of the new media user is always inconsistent with the real identity, and behavioral characteristics of user on new media exhibit a dramatic difference from that in reality, as personal information is confidential. Thus a virtual living space beyond reality has been created.

**New Media’s Manifestation Mode and Transmission Content are diversified**

Traditional media could only provide fixed information through TV, broadcast and newspaper, etc. While by now the new media has gathered multi-dimensional information in colossal amount published by users, which covers terminals such as mobile phone, computer and digital TV, etc. and occupies communication platforms such as microblog, space, WeChat, QQ and forum, etc. Each piece of information published on the new media provokes thinking of the follower group, which would lead to various ideas and discussions about other relative information.

**New Characteristics of University Students’ Development**

Growth and development of university students are affected by many factors. However, the advent of new network media plays an important role during development process of the university students, which could neither be ignored nor denied. It adds new characteristics to the development of university students.

**Learning Method is diversified**

This generation of university students grows along with the development of internet in the contemporary era. Their learning mode is diversified and drastically different from the traditional ones.

Judging from the total traffic of wireless network in certain university on 21st November, 2014 shown in Fig. 1, we could see that usage of the wireless network peaks daily in 20:00-21:30 at night and during classes. While wireless network traffic drops sharply and hits
the lowest level during class breaks around 10:00 in the morning and 15:40 in the afternoon. Network traffic always reaches the maximum value around 9:30, 11:30 in the morning, and 15:00, 16:30 in the afternoon, etc. This means that some students use mobile phone or other wireless equipment to get access to the wireless internet during class, most of whom are likely to surf internet with wireless equipment during second half of the class.

Figure 1. Total traffic of wireless network in certain university on 21st November, 2014.

Figure 2. The 12th weekly view of wireless network traffic in certain university (From 18th to 24th in November, 2014).

Fig. 2 is a weekly view of wireless network traffic. We could see from Fig. 2 that network traffic is evenly distributed from Monday to Friday, and drops sharply in weekends. Apart from the traditional ways to obtain knowledge from books, teachers and classes, new network media also has become an important knowledge source for them. Wireless network creates a convenient learning environment for students during normal class hours, and they could obtain knowledge from the internet. However, internet also poses higher requirement and challenge to students’ concentration on study.

Seeking Leisure from the Internet

New network media competes with traditional recreational activities for university students’ time and space with vivid images and diversified information which could be received immediately in a convenient way.

Table 1 shows average usage condition of various networks. “7” means it is used constantly, and “1” means it is never used at all. Average values for search engine (6.10), instant message (5.37) as well as videos and TV series (5.03) are above 5, which means students use internet mainly to search information, deal with instant messages, as well as watch online or download various videos. Others such as social network service (4.88), online audio or audio download service (4.52), application software download (4.41), surfing portal website (4.26) and e-mail service (4.17) are in the second place. The least used are online wealth investment (2.38) and online shop management (2.07). It is clear that the students turn to internet mainly for their
information need, communication need and entertainment need. University students mainly enjoy network music, online game, network literature, online video, online shopping, online social communication and net news service and microblog, etc. during their leisure time.

Table 1. Average usage condition of various networks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Search engine</td>
<td>928</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instant message such as QQ, MSN, Fetion, etc.</td>
<td>929</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch videos and TV series</td>
<td>927</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social network service</td>
<td>930</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow celebrities’ activities through microblog</td>
<td>907</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Download application software</td>
<td>922</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online audio or audio download service</td>
<td>924</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Browse forum or blog</td>
<td>913</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail service</td>
<td>919</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surf portal website</td>
<td>915</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network resources of the library</td>
<td>910</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Update personal homepage and blog</td>
<td>914</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online shopping</td>
<td>922</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post messages in forum or join chat room</td>
<td>880</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online game</td>
<td>867</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receive network show or program online</td>
<td>887</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read newspaper online</td>
<td>879</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online wealth investment</td>
<td>848</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online shop management</td>
<td>812</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Browse school news and information</td>
<td>915</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective N (column state)</td>
<td>765</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

New Characteristics of Ideology

Internet develops along with growth of university students in the contemporary era. As part of the general social environment, network plays an important role in students’ life course and growth process. New network media based on network meets university students’ desire for personalized development exactly, giving new characteristics to their ideology and thinking pattern.

Figure 3. Utilization of social network platform.
As shown in Fig. 3 and Fig. 4, four most popular social network accounts owned by students in our university are as follows: QQ space (84.50%), RENREN (83.60%), WeChat (66.00%) and SINA Microblog (55.50%). Students use the social networks mainly to check their friends’ activities and states (37.30%) or to browse and forward relevant news (36.60%). University students are getting more and more conscious of equality and independence. They have a growing desire to participate, and like to think independently. They pay close attention to personalized development and social reality, and they are willing to participate in the management of state affairs. However, university students are likely to accept chaotic information from the outside world passively, as they haven’t formed mature values yet, and lack rational judgment. In this way, their personal ideology and moral cognition are affected, causing troubles for higher education in this new period.

**Response from and Development of Higher Education**

**Change Approach and Method of Ideological and Political Education**

New network media develops at a rapid speed beyond imagination. Teaching staff in universities and colleges shall transform their educational ideas and concepts actively, and contemplate on teaching approach and method with new media as the background initiativly. Explore new media technology to the fullest extend so as to meet different types of work requirements of various groups in varied phases.

**Promote Construction of Work Teams in the Field of Higher Education**

Rapid development of the new media technology puts forward new requirements for teaching staff in universities and colleges. They must transform ideas and concepts, improve theoretical knowledge, master information technology and change communication methods, etc. The teaching staff shall adapt themselves to the development of new media. They shall use the new network media to follow the students’ activities and states timely, and provide education and guidance. Grasp initiative and gain voice during online communication.

**Improve Campus Network System and Manage it Properly**

Strengthen management of campus network system, so as to build a comprehensive campus network information transmission system. Establish an online behavior management and service mechanism for university students and strengthen network security management, with the purpose of setting new fashion for cyber culture and forming “moral code” for online behavior.
Create a Healthy and Harmonious Cultural Atmosphere on the New Media

Cultural environment on campus plays an impressive and far-reaching role in shaping the students’ ideology. We should enrich and improve all kinds of cultural content and forms with the help of modern high-tech, so as to make campus culture more appealing and impressive. Motivate students with online campus cultural activities which are meaningful, informative and interesting, and divert the students’ attention gradually to knowledge learning and participation in scientific and technological activities during their online hours, in the hope that a healthy, harmonious and positive campus cultural atmosphere would be created on the new media.

As a milestone for social development, the new network media progresses in one direction. Higher education could only accomplish the core task of student cultivation, by further studying, using and even developing the new network media. This is an enduring research subject.

References


