



How Social Media Promote Sex Education Among Chinese Teenagers

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Abstract. Under the development of social media, and with teenagers' earlier approaching to it and their earlier awareness of sex, it is of great significance to manage the sex knowledge on social media and improve the environment of teenagers getting sex education in China. This paper is dedicated to analyzing how social media can promote sex education among Chinese teenagers playing a subsidiary role. The presented analysis and suggestions are beneficial for all researchers who have interest in this topic to get some meaningful information about the current situation of sex education in China and how social media affects, and helpful for all educational roles, including teenagers themselves. A questionnaire collected 146 responses is designed scientifically and accordingly under the comprehension of sex education in China nowadays. The results show that it is not surprising to see Chinese teenagers are not satisfied with the current sex education and that social media needs to make effort on the accuracy, openness, system and dissemination as a counselor.

Keywords: Sex education · Social media · Chinese teenagers · Suggestions for social media platforms

1 Introduction

Sex is the basic need like sleep to human. Appropriate sex education needs to guide teenagers who have curiosity about their own identity and sexual content. Topics related to sex are sensitive and lagging in China. Most parents who should be teenagers' first teacher won't or can't give correct and clear sex education. The main reason why tragedies related to sex happen is the lack of sex knowledge. Voices calling for better sex education arise and every source containing sex education that teenagers have access to need to be improved. As the internet develops, the most common platform for teenagers to get knowledge of sex is social media. With its speed of spread, amount of information and communicative access, social media is a powerful tool. However, there is no mature system to collect all the sex knowledge and some fake and annoying information mislead teenagers. To promote sex education in China, social media is a platform of great significance to start.

Sex education has always been active in academic research because it contains many topics worth exploring, such as gender difference and equality, sexual diseases, LGBTQ+

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groups and education itself. According to Zhang et al., limited data are available regarding the sources from which adolescents receive sex-related knowledge although sex education has been promoted by several years [1]. Chinese society at large is both conservative and silent in addressing sex-related issues, especially with children and adolescents [2]. The situation is getting more serious, especially in less developed areas. Many parents in rural areas are not highly educated and they show low acceptance to sexual content [3]. Many researchers construct insightful studies to fight for better sex education. More and more studies take social media as the core study topic in terms of sex education. The bold argument of Mediated Intimacy is that media of various kinds play an increasingly important role in shaping people's knowledge, desires, practices and expectations about intimate relationships [4]. Research points out that social media has become a tool to build internal capacity and psychological well-being as well as democratize, amplify, and share experiences around sexuality [5]. Two mostly seen topics are gender identity and sexual orientation on social media [6]. In China, social media develops at a speed that beyond everyone's imagination, and there is no doubt that it has inevitable and significant change to sex education among Chinese teenagers. Social media components are increasingly being integrated into public health interventions [7]. Living in the age of social media, sexually focused entertainment media can be a powerful and positive part of sex education efforts [8]. Research suggests that teenager's cohort may already be making use of new media to learn about and engage in activities related to sex and sexuality [8], and most students report that they prefer to receive sex education from on-line sources [9]. Adolescence is a critical period for teenagers to get to know themselves and sexual knowledge. Teenage and young adult students often encounter a range of sexual issues that usually bring them emotional damage, including unplanned pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, homophobic harassment, transphobic violence and sexual assault [8]. What's more, the most dynamic users of the mass media are young people [6]. In fact, most young people use social media that provide purely sexual content because of the inadequacies in home and school support they experience when seeking sources of sex education [8]. Although parents have available access to sex education picture books since the early 2000s [10], most of children of this generation don't get sexual educated as expected and obvious positive influence haven't occurred. Moreover, China has the second largest number of adolescents in the world with an estimated 230 millions of its population in the 10–24 years age group [9]. Thus, exploring how social media can improve sex education among Chinese teenagers is vital. Problems also appear when applying social media into sex education. If social media, the platform with huge amount of information, can develop a role to give systematically sex education, it benefits teenagers and society in lots of ways. First, the most vital benefit is that teenagers can have a clear understanding of their bodies and identity. Most teenagers who belong to LGBTQ+ groups struggle hard during puberty. Second, it helps teenagers to learn to cherish and know how to please both their and sexual partners' bodies from which they can view sex in a healthier way. Third, with correct sex knowledge, accidents happen in sex would reduce and it strengthens the responsibility if any potential harm happen. Moreover, the rate of the crimes related to sex may get lower. Eventually, a healthy and friendly online environment of discussing sex makes it a less embarrassing and conservative topic for Chinese. Existing studies

about how social media influence Chinese teenagers in aspect of sex education is not enough, update and it is urgent because crimes related to sex happen at earlier age, and the conflicts between perspectives from relatively older generation and new generation that shows that they have more open attitude towards sex are more and more obvious.

This paper is about how social media promote sex education among Chinese teenagers. This research would be helpful for people to understand the role of the social media in the field of sex education and put forward measures to improve the positive influence of the social media on educating teenagers. Teenagers here refer to people aged 12–25. This interval is larger than the usual study and the reasons are that getting mature is earlier in China and the opinion of our last generation who are born along with the development of Internet in China is also important, which we can see the change of the role that social media plays in terms of sex education. The hypothesis is that the social media acting as a counselor that helps Chinese teenagers form their sexual identity and get appropriate sex education from various aspects. The final aim of this paper is to provide possible answers for public about how social media promote sex education more systematically and accurately among Chinese teenagers. Main content will be presented by following parts containing methods, results, discussion and conclusion.

2 Methods

This paper uses quantitative and qualitative research methods to study, which means a questionnaire would be launched and it is the base of suggestions. The questionnaire is dedicated to find out the current situation of sex education among Chinese teenagers, related experiences of sex education and what they think about social media in terms of giving sex education. It is launched from Wechat and closes after collecting information for a week.

The main reason why questionnaire is chosen to be the tool to collect data is due to its convenience in terms of making, spreading, and viewing. The questionnaire designed for this paper is scientific enough to support the research. It leads participants step by step by presenting the questions from a wide to specific perspective. It is a process of going deep into the topic and helps people gain some new perspectives after finishing. It starts with the basic information like gender and age of the participants. Then, questions about Chinese sex education, social media, and the combination are presented in logical order. One of the participants leave nice comment to give approval to the questionnaire, which is a huge encouragement and recognition. There are 18 questions and most of them are multiple choice questions, which keep the patience of the participants. One important thing is that the privacy is under protect. Although the total sample is not very large, it is still valuable and worth studying. The limitations come from the launching platform, approach to wider groups of people and uncertainty of the quality.

Since the main target of the research is teenagers, the data needed to be valued and analyzed is about teenagers and the topics need to have close connection with social media.

The collected data will be visualized in different kinds of figures. Bar charts and pie charts are two main forms, and the rest of the data will be presented in words in the results part. Pie charts help show the differences better when it has fewer responses and bar charts help sort out the numbers and present the gaps more clearly. The combination of these two kinds of charts is direct and diverse.

Another critical aspect to collect data is about the content of sex education that social media posts. The focus lands on the Wechat official accounts because they have categorized the content by keywords, which is convenient for analysis because it clearly shows how they convey information and arrangement on sex education. To provide more concrete information, a Wechat official account called Maylove is set to be an example. It was awarded the 2019 Science Popularization Contribution Award and it attempts to change the traditional sexual context dominated by Confucian culture [11].

3 Results

There are 146 responses to the questionnaire. The following part would explain the data and present the results with words and charts combined.

From Fig. 1 and Fig. 2, which show girls take nearly 90% of the sample. Most of them are around 20 according to the details behind. Nobody chooses the option “Others” in the question of the gender. From the age, three peaks appear on the range 18–20, 21–22 and above 45. One main reason falls on the groups of people that the researcher can approach.

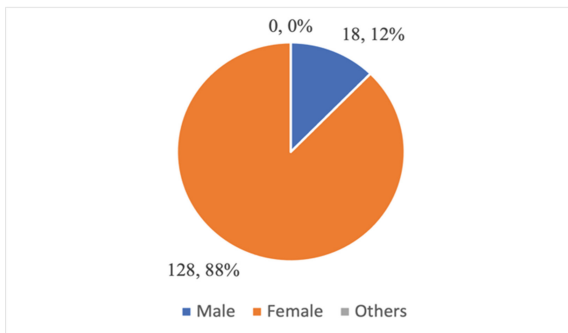


Fig. 1. Genders of the participants.

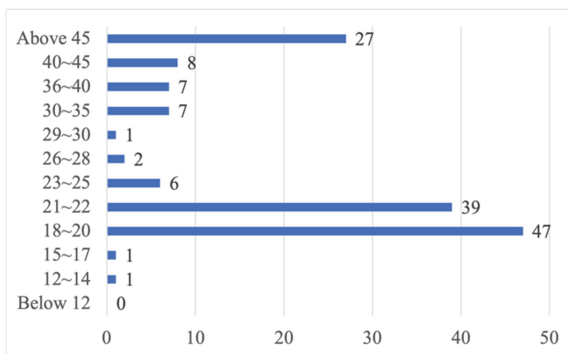


Fig. 2. Age of the participants.

The next question is what the participants think of the importance of sex education. Score one is the lowest and ten is the highest. The average of the responses is 9.44, which is very close to the highest score and the lowest score goes to six.

From Fig. 3, over 65% participants have actively or passively received sex education. There are 47 people who haven't received sex education till now and most of them are aged above 30. These people don't have as available and convenient access to social media as other two generations younger than them. The mostly seen answer is 14 years old when participants receive the formal sex education, which normally refers to the period of middle school in China. When it comes to the question of how the participants think about the development level of sex education in China, the average score is 3.38 and most people give a 4.

Figure 4 shows the most frequent ways for participants to get sex education is from their schools, followed by search engine. The online ways count nearly as the same as the offline access. Literary works such as books, movies including pornography are the most welcomed answers for people who choose others.

As for the sex knowledge of what participants receive on social media, disparity decreases according to Fig. 5. Most participants learn about the knowledge of own sex organ, the physical differences and contraception.

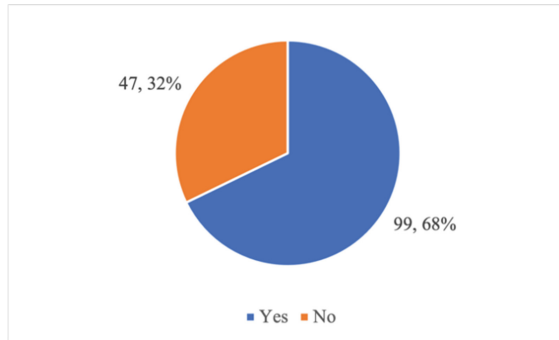


Fig. 3. Actively or passively received sex education.

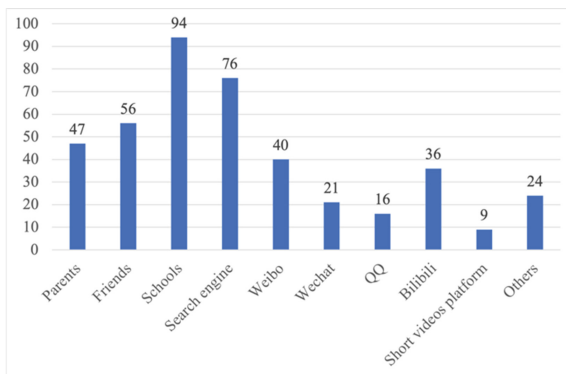


Fig. 4. Ways to attain sex education.

The attitudes towards the application of sex knowledge are basically positive because only 19 people choose to totally refuse to attempt from Fig. 6. When asked about the quality of sex knowledge given by social media, the average score is 5.03 and nearly half population of the sample select 5.

Figure 7 tells us that most participants hope the content of sex education from social media can be more systematic and accurate.

Besides, only 9 participant give answers to the question of recommending some trustful social media platform to attain sex knowledge, which can be seen in Fig. 8. Maylove is the answer for 4 participants and that’s why it is chosen to be the example.

The final question is the current roles that the participants think social media plays in terms of educating sex knowledge. Subsidiary is the most supportive response and 8 people think the total opposite as Fig. 9 shows.

Maylove calls itself a place that welcomes all cool people covetously change the current situation of sex education in China. It has launched 664 articles and divided into eight parts, which are physiology popularizes, intimate relationship, pseudo sex knowledge, diverse equal rights, toys, and other objects related to sex, sexual tips and lessons, detail information of Maylove and mailbox what the readers want to express. Under each category, it has various kinds of detailed articles talking about specific points. Some categories have its own divisions and all of them are clear and straightforward.

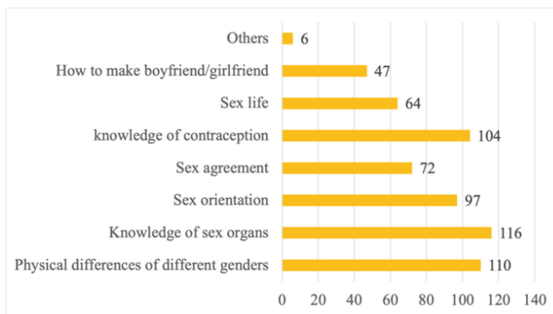


Fig. 5. Content of sex knowledge that participants receive on social media.

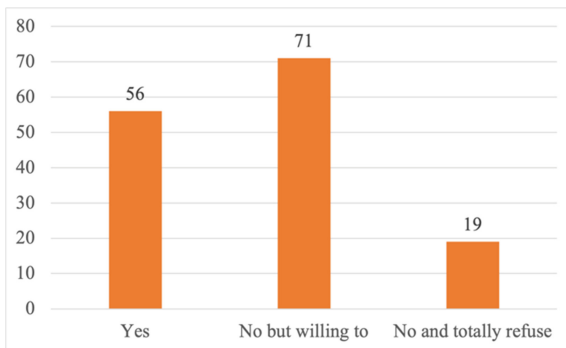


Fig. 6. Attitudes towards the practice of sex knowledge received on social media.

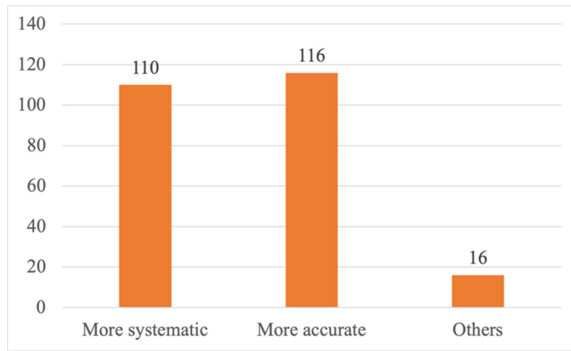


Fig. 7. Advice on social media from participants.

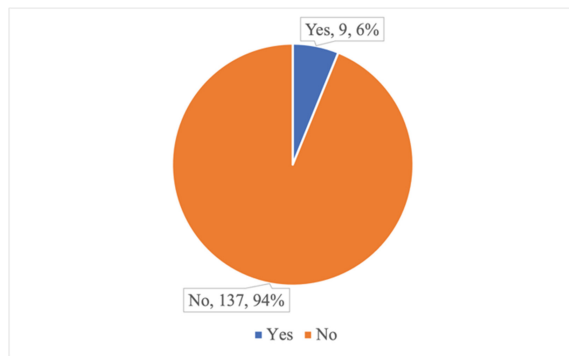


Fig. 8. Recommended social media platform to get sex education.

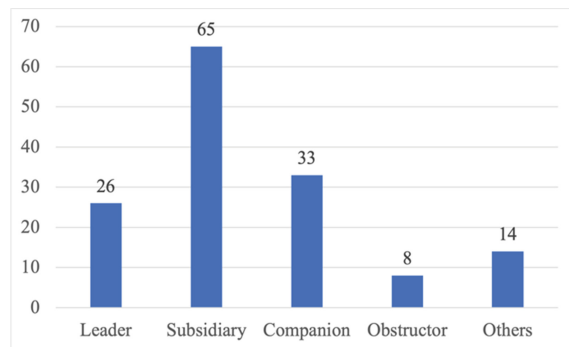


Fig. 9. Role that participants think about social media in field of sex education.

Maylove has covered all the content mentioned in the questionnaire. Overall, it wears appealing titles to get readers' attention presenting solid content but it barely shows references used for the articles. The comment zone welcomes all kinds of ideas, and some valuable comments receive responses from Maylove.

4 Discussion

4.1 Meaning and Significance

The above results extend three significant points related to the research. First, the current situation of sex education in China is still poor and can't satisfy the needs for teenagers. Great gaps between what teenagers need and what they can actually get are obvious. Efforts needed to put down take a long time and way. The traditional ways, such as educated by schools and parents for teenagers to get sex knowledge are no longer enough because the main flow of the reaction when talking about sex is still embarrassing and shameful for most parents, which makes no progress compared to before, and access to approach content related to sex online is more and the quality doesn't have a prove with the development and universality of social media. It is important for social media to realize they can do something for sex education in China and how they can improve themselves. Second, the data of the genders, age and types of sex knowledge implies a critical issue in sex education. It is believed that females take more in most of aspects and process related to sex, such as pregnant, which only females can realize. That's why the current Chinese sex education leans more focus on females. Content like females should wear proper cloth so that they won't get hurt from others, put all stress on females in terms of contraception and how females should prepare to get themselves attractive before having sex, is all over the social media, which indicate females are the relatively weaker side. Not only should females care the contraception, but also males need to be responsible for it. This gap gives space for social media to spread the right awareness to both man and woman, because it is much easier to change the concept with its imperceptible influence. Third, more opinion on how social media affect the sex education in China are inspired by the problems the participants mention in the questionnaire. As the saying goes, everything has two sides. The benefits of social media improving sex education can't be overvalued. Take good use of the advantages while solving the current problems make it the best way for social media to improve how they can give better sex education. Eventually, how can more and more social media platforms like Maylove come to reality is another question acquire efforts. A specific success can't represent the rest and the availability of experience is too small. Therefore, the suggestions need to be thought as a whole but also give consideration to different types of social media.

4.2 Suggestions

After analyzing the results from the questionnaire and the example, suggestions can be concluded in several parts, concerning the accuracy, openness, system and dissemination. All the suggestions would be presented regarding social media as the subsidiary role in

promoting sex education among Chinese teenagers, which reflects most of the responses in the questionnaire and is the most appropriate role in nowadays China. The reasons are as follows. Considering the developing level of social media in China, the quality of cyber citizens still needs a long way to improve, the information from social media is not totally reliable and the cyber environment is not healthy for all teenagers. Besides, the developing mind that teenagers have can't help them get away from all incorrect information and potential dangers such as being frauded to expose their own nude photos and sexual videos. If they only take what they learn on social media into practice, instead of receiving sex education from traditional ways like from parents and schools, some unexpected accidents may take place. Therefore, subsidiary role is the best role for social media in China in terms of delivering sex education.

As for the accuracy, accounts in social media should check before they post and change the wrong knowledge as soon as they find out. What's more, references are a must to put at the end of the content, which provides more credits for teenagers to practice. Accuracy brings trust, and trust for social media is a crucial key to get more attention. As a result, more and more teenagers can get correct sex knowledge from reliable social media platform.

When it comes to the openness, which refers to the words and phrases to describe sexual things. Many articles containing direct sexual things use different words that have similar pronunciation as the original words to express. For instance, in an article giving advice on how lesbian make love, the author uses metaphors, sweet potato, to write all along, which can't provide clear instructions because it is too vague. The false why this phenomenon happen can't take social media as the main role to blame. Talking about sex is thought to be dirty and shabby in China to some degree, and the freedom to mention sex is limited. If a social media platform uses obvious sexual words, the content they post may be marked as sensitive and face the risk of getting banned. Therefore, not all platforms are brave enough to show openness in the content. However, this phenomenon needs to be broken and it can start with social media standing up to show the attitude and keep making high-quality content. The open use of description related to sex should spread and platforms in social media shouldn't give up trying. With some content which is more proper only for teenagers above 18 years old, social media platform can mark down at the very beginning. In this way, people's awareness of treating sex as a normal thing and a healthy social ecosphere to talk about sex can develop.

The sex knowledge from social media is not in a system, which cause confusion to teenagers. There are many small pieces of knowledge needed to compile and deliver. The structure of the whole content is not clear and social media should better categorize the knowledge. Maylove makes some effort in putting the knowledge into different aspects for the convenience of searching but they don't have a logic to present all the content. Therefore, a system for collecting and presenting the sex knowledge should establish and social media can take books as references. Set up a theme, expand the knowledge into different but closely related branches, which makes it real sex education. It is like a course in school.

Some participants think they don't know the access to social media delivering sex education. This problem requires efforts from both sides. From the perspective of social media, dissemination is a critical factor. Strong dissemination lead lots of views and

follows, which can increase the exposure of the platform. Social media can create some attractive posters for the content and the activities they have. Like charity, a good and warm figure win people's hearts. Thus, social media not only need to produce high-quality content, but also ensure those good content can be seen by public. As for teenagers, feel free to discuss and ask for recommendation with your friends. Information doesn't come from nowhere and initiative action is necessary.

4.3 Scope of Validity

This research concentrates on how social media can promote sex education among Chinese teenagers. The responses mainly come from Guangdong province, so it can be applied to examine the current sex education that teenagers in Guangdong receive and how social media influence them. Generally, Guangdong is regarded as a province relatively developed in China. The findings and suggestions can also make a good use in other relatively provinces or cities such as Hunan, Sichuan, Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen. Hypothesis in different areas can be made based on this research. What's more, the same method can be used in discussing topics concerning how social media affect other educational aspects among Chinese teenagers, such as law education and psychological education. The core is to explore the effects that social media bring on vital issues to teenagers and how can social media improve the present situation.

5 Conclusion

To warp up, there is a huge gap between lots of aspects in Chinese sex education, such as the gap between the demand and provision, and the genders. The recognition to social media giving sex education is not as high as expected. Nevertheless, social media plays a subsidiary role in promoting sex education among Chinese teenagers, which proves the hypothesis is correct. For further development, more accurate, opener and more systematic content, and effective dissemination need social media to try harder.

Future study can put the focus on the process, the difficulties, and the consequences when social media make a success in promoting sex education among Chinese teenagers. Related research can track the status of some teenagers in approaching social media to get sex education, which is practical and meaningful. Moreover, another focus can be put on exact social media platform to see how they develop. Besides, concentrating on one specific part of sex education like contraception would also make profound research. Eventually, comparative studies between China and foreign countries with similar or totally different cultures would also be constructive. Although it is a huge topic, it is worth researching because teenagers in all over the world are a very important group.

The limitations of this paper can be concluded in two points. First, the sample is not large enough, so the paper doesn't have wide universality. Second, the data from social media only counts on one platform although almost all platforms on social media disseminate sex education share lots of things in common. A more systematic collection needs to be made.

Sex education is of great significance in teenagers' growth which not only influence the way they see themselves, but also the way they treat others. Everyone is unique and

respect is the essential and basic thing to have. With such strong tool like social media, society needs to hold the chance tight to provide better sex education, and create a healthy and open social ecosphere where everyone feels free and comfortable to discuss topics relevant to sex.

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