Psychological Harm to Underage Children in the Era of New Media

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Abstract. A few years ago, when experts first started studying the impact of social media on young people, much of the concern was about access to pornography and the possibility of online strangers reaching out to children. While these are still important issues to address, it now appears that there are more and more hidden aspects of the online world that can affect a child's mental health. Young people face challenges in all aspects of life, and social media may only be part of the complex. Focusing only on online content research lacks attention to the characteristics of children. Through literature analysis, this paper focuses on three aspects of violent games, suicidal tendencies, and decreased self-confidence to discuss the impact of new media on children's psychological harm. At the same time, feasible solutions are proposed from the perspective of family, school and society.

Keywords: New Media, psychological harm, children, suicidal tendencies & anxiety

1   Introduction

The continuous development of media technology has brought human society into a new media age. The new media represented by the Internet and social media continue to rise and promote the development and change of the media and change the pattern of mass communication. Experts in the media environment school point out that technological changes help to form a "media environment"; they emphasize the role of technology but do not believe that technology is the only determinant. New media has formed a new mode of communication. The new media environment will continuously and subtly affect people's cognition, attitude, and behavior, affecting all aspects of human society [1]. Cultural studies scholars (including those from philosophy, sociology, and other disciplines) pay more attention to the group characteristics of young people, take the "cultural change" brought about by social media as the research object, and focus on the theme of youth subculture in the new media environment (some scholars called "New Youth Culture"). They believe that the value of social media is to help minors learn knowledge, and it is a new channel for them to understand social dynamics, which is conducive to children's establishment of a broader social circle. They can receive global knowledge and inspire new ideas under the influence of different cultures

[2]. Media technology determinism points out that human beings are suspended in the environment created by media technology, and their concepts and behaviors are subject to the constraints of the media environment and are reconstructed due to the change in media technology. The media have irresistible and powerful forces. The information they transmit is like a bullet hitting the body, which can cause immediate and rapid responses, so it can sway people's opinions and even dominate people's actions [3].

The interpretation of experts has specific explanatory power. However, the research of media technology researchers and the media environment school only focuses on the progress of media technology and environmental changes. It ignores children's characteristics, especially those of children's growth in the new media environment. The development of the Internet has brought some vulgar and kitsch terrible information. Children's minds are not yet sound, and they cannot discriminate against lousy content. Underage children who grew up in the Internet age can receive much information and are also affected by the negative information of the new media. Such negative information significantly impacts their psychological development [4]. In today's social media era, there are no research or feasible measures specifically aimed at the psychological impact of new media on minors. Such psychological problems that may be caused by minors' exposure to inappropriate new media content have not been fundamentally solved. For example, they are prone to violence, which affects interpersonal relationships, makes them lose the ability to think deeply, and develop empty and confusing values. Under the guidance of psychological injury theory, this paper discusses the psychological injury of minor children in the new media era. It proposes measures to protect the mental health of minor children in the new media era. At the same time, starting from the changes in children's learning, thinking, and social participation styles, it analyzes the negative impact and communication worries that social media may bring to teenagers.

2   Concepts related to minors' psychological harm

In recent years, there have been endless reports of tragedies caused by minor psychological problems. Are our children becoming more and more vulnerable? This "feeling" may not come out of thin air. Research shows that from 2013 to 2017, the cumulative number of mental health visits of minors in China increased year by year. The increase also showed an increasing trend over time, and the incidence of mental health diseases showed a trend of younger age [5]. These trends all remind parents that the psychological problems of minors need to be fully recognized and paid attention to. Psychological harm can have a severe impact on a person's mental health. The psychological shadow will be internalized into the personality in a certain way, forming a particular personality due to the injury. Most people suffer psychological harm due to changes in their mental state and behavior.

The researchers investigated the overall mental health of adolescents through the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) [6]. The results showed that frequent social media use was associated with psychological distress in both boys and girls, especially among girls. A 2014 survey of female teens showed that 28 percent of those who

checked social networks multiple times a day had psychological problems. However, only 20% of girls who checked social media weekly or at longer intervals experienced psychological distress. [7].

A 2022 survey on the mental health of adolescents showed that compared with adolescents who did not frequently use social software, those who continued to frequently use social software in previous years had a relatively low level of mental health. This trend is more pronounced among girls [8]. Girls who frequently used social media over a long period of time reported lower life satisfaction and well-being, and higher levels of anxiety, a trend that was not found among male teens. There are many more studies that have also demonstrate the positive correlation between psychological problems and social network use. For example, a 2016 study by Sidani et al. at the University of Pittsburgh showed that the more time teens spend on social media, the more likely that they tend to experience anxiety about diet and appearance [9].

3   Methods

Through the literature research method and under the guidance of psychological injury theory, this paper discusses the psychological injury of minor children in the new media era and proposes measures to protect the mental health of minor children in the new media era. This paper carefully studies the relevant papers and monographs and on the basis of the previous research results, pays attention to the latest research trends of this topic at home and abroad, deepens the understanding of the problem to be studied, and determines the research focus. This paper is based on the existing research results and possible breakthroughs on the basis of summarizing and sorting, analyzing and summarizing the relevant data collected. Finally, based on the results, it puts forward protective measures for children's psychology.

4   Case study

4.1   Violent Game

It is easy for minors to acquire socially harmful criminal methods from violent online games. The game provides samples for children to imitate. These role models often appear in the image of heroes and winners, which intensifies the children's imitation. Psychologist Bandura believes that human aggression comes from observation and imitation [10]. In the context of direct and realistic aggressive behavior provided by online violent games, minors imitate models and continuously reinforce aggressive behavior. Gradually, online violent games make violence a way for minors to resolve conflicts. In the game of online violence, fists, fighting, and bullying the weak and the strong prey on the weak. Whoever is decisive is the hero. When conflicts arise between characters, they are resolved violently. Children have been affected by violent online games for a long time [11].

The real thing is that in August 2017, a 13-year-old boy alarmed society with a shocking case of killing his biological mother. Shockingly, the murderer of the criminal

case was only a 13-year-old junior high school student. How he killed his mother was extremely crucial, and the reason for this is that his mother did not let him play games. After committing the crime, he maintained a stable psychological quality, went to Internet cafes to play online games, and bought tickets to escape. Children have been affected by violent online games for a long time. When encountering real-life interpersonal conflicts, they often do not think of relying on laws or other legal means to solve them. Instead, they naturally think of and use violent means.

4.2   The emergence of suicidal tendencies

Frequent access to social networks can reduce children's sleep time, and lack of sleep can affect teens' behavior, leading to emotional loss, performance decline, binge eating, and other manifestations, as well as exacerbating existing depression, anxiety, and attention deficit disorder, etc. Dr. Bernadka Dubicka, chair of the Department of Childhood and Adolescence at the Royal College of Psychiatrists, said Young people with depression are more likely to rely on social media to pass the middle of the night [12]. In a 2018 study by Sami et al., given the presence of depression and Internet addiction, their study aimed to better understand the relationship between sleep problems and suicidal ideation. They randomly recruited 631 adolescents aged 12 to 18 from various middle and high schools to complete self-report questionnaires assessing sleep disturbance, Internet addiction, depressive symptoms, and suicidal ideation. 22.9% of subjects had suicidal ideation in the month prior to the study, 42% had sleep disturbance, 30.2% had internet addiction, and 26.5% had severe depressive symptoms [13].

The impact on network dependence and sleep relationships thus becomes an interrelated issue. The more sleepless teenagers are, the more likely they are to rely on mobile phones; the more teenagers rely on mobile phones, the worse their sleep quality. Sleep problems may increase suicidal behavior in depressed patients [14, 15]. In the last week of life, adolescents who committed suicide reported severe sleep disturbance and worsening depressive symptoms compared to adolescents without depressive symptoms [14]. This will become a severe social problem.

4.3   Appearance anxiety

The unrealistic expectations and fear of losing people generated on social media can reduce self-confidence and lead to depression. People are also always used to showing their positive, bright side on social media, which can help people build and maintain relationships. The problem is that people often forget that those shiny pictures are not always what real life looks like. The occasional use of filters and retouching software to make up for an unpainted face may seem harmless. However, when people use it repeatedly, filters create a new normal of communication. Pessimists argue that such a new standard will disconnect people from reality — in real life, no one has attractive outlook all the time.

This is especially evident on Instagram, the photo community. Today, it has 1.45 billion users worldwide. A study from the Royal Society of Public Health found that social apps have a strong negative impact. The data for this study is based on 1,500 UK

teenagers between the ages of 14 and 24, collecting their feedback on mainstream social networks such as Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, YouTube, and Twitter [16]. The study used a questionnaire that asked about their health, anxiety, community connection, identity, sleep quality, and other factors when using social networks. Among respondents' feedback, only YouTube had an entirely positive impact on users. Other social platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram, all have varying degrees of negative psychological impact. One girl told CNN that she was often compared to heavily processed and unrealistic images. In the report, one interviewee also said: "Instagram tends to make girls feel that their bodies are not perfect because people's real lives are not edited to make them look perfect."

5   Countermeasures

First, society should strengthen the management and supervision of the network and purify the network content. Creating a civilized and healthy growth environment for minors has become a significant issue related to the quality education of the next generation and the country's future development.

Second, teachers and parents should learn more about the Internet to guide students to surf the Internet properly. Suppose teachers and parents do not understand online games, online chats, and online information spam. In that case, it will be difficult for students to control online behaviors. They will not be able to detect problems in time, making students more and more trapped and unable to extricate themselves. Some parents and teachers regard the Internet as a monstrous beast and keep their children away from the Internet, which is also unrealistic and impossible. In order to understand the Internet, teachers, and parents must master the knowledge of the Internet to consciously guide students to choose healthy and beneficial content and use the Internet scientifically. At the same time, it can also cultivate students' good network morality, prevent the occurrence of network crime and network anomie, and make teachers and parents become the guides of students' network life.

Third, it is necessary to guide minors to go online properly. For the problems of minors surfing the Internet, if schools and parents adopt an absolute prohibition method, it will aggravate the children's rebellious psychology, which will backfire and play a "catalyst" role. Therefore, parents and teachers should communicate with students at any time and provide psychological counseling to minors so that they can learn to distinguish the boundary between the online world and the whole society so that they can get out of the illusory online world. Schools can set up websites suitable for students' development, which can not only meet the needs of students to surf the Internet but also ensure their safety. They must develop good Internet habits to avoid psychological and physical problems caused by their obsession with the Internet.

Fourth, patents and teachers shoud guide students to enhance their awareness of online self-protection consciously. For unsupervised teenagers, the Internet is a perilous place. Internet, deception, violence, etc., and all kinds of information spam can hurt young people. In our country, there have been a lot of vicious incidents such as fraud and murder on the Internet. Therefore, schools must educate students about network

security, learn more about some network cases, and let them be more vigilant to learn to protect themselves in a complex network environment, consciously resist insufficient information and behaviors, and avoid tragedies.

Fifth, the authorities should publicize the norms of online behavior to minors. It enables them to enhance their consciousness, improve their self-control, consciously abide by network norms, and strictly control their online behaviors, to protect their interests from harm. At the same time, their network behaviors do not infringe on others. At the same time, it is necessary to educate juveniles not to spread false and filthy information online, not to infringe on the privacy of others, and not to misappropriate other people's online resources and other destructive behaviors or even criminal acts.

Sixth, relevant bodies should educate young people to take adequate measures to control Internet addiction reasonably. By controlling the time spent on the Internet, using the system desensitization method to reduce the amount gradually, and finding other hobbies to replace the virtual simulation of the Internet, a good Internet usage habit is formed.

6   Conclusion

Teens are more likely to share details of their lives and intimate photos on social media, which is also a source of bullying, harassment, and even blackmail. Based on their growth characteristics, this phenomenon is difficult to avoid. Because of their impulsive nature, teens tend to have fewer privacy concerns. Social media is not the only way to socialize; minors should not rely so much on software socialization. Instead, they should interact and connect more face-to-face, which is more conducive to relationship development, and not let online participation get in the way of good mental health and well-being. Media technology builds a new media concept system, from content, operation, and industry to technology. Students should have a more comprehensive understanding of the current development status of new media technology and gradually integrate new media technology knowledge into their existing knowledge system. In this way, students can better use the development trend and forward-looking content of new media technology integration for a better creation.

Although this article combines practice and summarizes basic theoretical knowledge, there are still some limitations. In the literature analysis method, the data processing method is relatively simple. The results we have now are based on research by other authors. The authors of many works of literature have certain ideological tendencies; the remaining literature has been selected in a certain way, or the views are not general enough. In future research, more scientific and reasonable research methods should be sought, such as questionnaires and data analysis, to improve data processing ability and enhance the scientificity and effectiveness of data processing.

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