A Study on the Dilemma of Social Network Duality among University Students and the Way out--from the Perspective of the Relationship

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Abstract: Influenced by the Internet, the socialization of university student groups suffers from the duality of an expanding social network and a shrinking circle of interaction. This paper collects data utilizing questionnaires and in-depth interviews, applies a relational perspective, divides them into strong and weak relationships, dissects the dilemma of collective social alienation and social anxiety brought about by the duality of social networks among university students in China, and makes suggestions at three levels: from individuals, social forces and universities, hoping to provide a new perspective for the study of the social networks of university student groups and promote the cultivation of good social. It is hoped that this will provide a new perspective for the study of social networks among university students and promote the cultivation of good social psychology and social behavior among university students, thus achieving the harmonious dqevelopment of social order.

1. Introduction

The popularity and development of online social media have, on the one hand, met people's various social needs and expanded the spatial and temporal boundaries of communication, but on the other hand, it has also given rise to many psychological problems in interpersonal interactions that affect people's lives. Over the past three years, under the dual influence of the epidemic and the Internet, university students, as very important subjects of social media use, have faced numerous challenges of collective social alienation and social anxiety. This is reflected in the characteristics of the social network of university students in the new era - namely, the shrinking of the "strong ties network - intimate circle" and the expansion of the "weak relationship network - light acquaintance circle" built by the Internet. -The "light acquaintance circle" is expanding. In the modern society with a lot of information, weak relationships are like the tentacles that connect the world, and through many social media such as "We chat", "Tik Tok" and "Wei bo", the students in them seem to be in a "multilingual" state. "At the same time, as the Internet is deeply embedded in their personal lives, communication with family and friends in real life is reduced, resulting in social anxiety and social alienation among university students. "Silencing" and the cascading contraction of strong ties. Taking this as a starting point, this study provides an in-depth analysis of this social network duality characteristic and the dilemma it brings, intending to help university students caught in the social alienation dilemma to find their self-orientation in social networks, alleviating the anxiety in interpersonal communication among university students, and at the same time providing a new perspective for the study of social networks in university student groups, to promote social integration and the sound and coordinated development of socialist society, with certain practical significance.

2. Review of the Literature

There are numerous national and international research studies on youth social networks, which focus on the following specific areas:

2.1 Mechanisms for the Formation of Individual Social Networks in the Online Field

Contemporary Chinese society is showing a growing trend towards individuation [6], with individuals demanding to break free from the constraints of the community to express and develop their personality, values, and purpose. The age of atomization has arrived, with individual isolation and interpersonal alienation [3], and along with the advent of the Internet era , the widespread availability and application of the Internet have caused young people to become more disembedded in real life space, forming a self-extraction from real society and presenting a more individualized state of existence, and the structural individualized society makes it difficult for people to build. The isolation in real life promotes individuals to seek value and emotional identity in the Internet [7], and the 'individuation' in the online realm reflects the independence and autonomy of the subject's consciousness, triggering the publication of private life[11]. However, the more immersed they are, the more isolated they become, the less emotional connectivity they establish, the less satisfaction they have with their intimate relationships, and the less intense their experiences of well-being[3] compared to real social interaction.

2.2 Expansion and Contraction: the Dual Nature of Social Networks

The six degrees of seperation theory proposed by Harvard psychologist Stanley Milgram (1967) suggest that a person can meet any stranger through up to six people on the Internet[8][12].Through the medium of the Internet, individual social networks can be extended and large social networks can be formed. However, the expansion of an individual's social network is only evident when the individual, based on value-based rationality, wishes to gain emotional recognition in the online world [2]. However, some studies also point out that although the use of the Internet reduces the cost of making friends (including time and opportunity costs), the social network shrinks due to the problem of addiction brought about by online games, which squeeze the social time of youth. Based on the use of subcultural symbols, youth groups express their emotions, attitudes, and opinions in a mimetic space utilizing "expression-attraction", attracting peer groups, constructing interesting social relationships, and expanding weak social networks, for reasons such as avoiding the embarrassment of being surrounded by acquaintances. For reasons such as avoiding the embarrassment of being surrounded by acquaintances, young people have to some extent weakened their acquaintances' relationships, showing the characteristics of weak connection construction and strong connection weakening [9].

2.3 Social Dilemma: Social Alienation in Groups

The intimacy of social networks is highly correlated with the overall satisfaction of individuals' interpersonal relationships[10], and social alienation, interpersonal distress, social anxiety and protracted loneliness in the process of individuation trigger an individual's emotional experience of fear[4], while the use of the Internet means an unprecedented expansion of social scope, yet virtual social indicators are multidimensional, and multiple information is pushed together, coupled with rapid information updates, users are too late to obtain accurate emotional perceptions in them, generating trust anxiety and an inability to trust others as well as question themselves, which leads to a sense of loss and unease, ultimately resulting in subjective loneliness, alienation from interpersonal relationships, and reduced desire for social interaction [5], with loneliness stemming from the lack or low quality of interpersonal relationships, which in turn affects healthy interpersonal interactions, forming a vicious circle[1].

In light of the above research, previous studies have provided experiences and references for this project, but there are shortcomings: firstly, the previous studies have mostly focused on youth groups, covering a wide range of areas, so lacking concrete relevance for university student groups. Secondly, although some studies have introduced the perspective of strong ties and weak ties there are fewer specific discussions and further research is needed. This study uses the relational perspective, divides them into strong and weak ties analyses the predicament of collective social alienation brought about by the duality of social networks among university students in China, and links social work service resources to address this dilemma, resolving it and promoting the shaping

of good social psychology and behavior among university students.

3. Data Sources and Research Methodology

The study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. In terms of semi-structured interview data, the study firstly conducted semi-structured interviews with eight college students to depict the current situation of college students' social networks and their social emotions, extracted the main concepts and key indicators reflecting the current situation of college students' social networks and their social emotions, deeply analyzed college students' social networks and social emotions, further clarified the content and direction of the questionnaire design, and explored the changes and mechanisms of college students' social networks through the obtained first-hand interview. We also explore the changes and mechanisms of social networks of college students through the first-hand interview data. In terms of questionnaire data, the questionnaire was designed by using Questionnaire Star, and then the QR code and related links generated by Questionnaire Star were put on WeChat and other major social platforms, and college students completed the questionnaire through cell phones or web links. The survey lasted for three weeks, and 846 survey responses were collected in total. The overall situation of college students' social networks was depicted by descriptive statistical analysis, and the current situation of their strong and weak relationship networks was analyzed specifically, As shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Interview Data From University Students' Social Network

Coding	Age	Gender	Grade Level	Type of profession	Place of origin	Whether party member	Whether Student cadre
20230205-NMG01	22	Female	Sophomore	Liberal arts	Rural	No	Yes
20220114-NMG02	21	Male	Third Year	Liberal arts	Rural	Yes	Yes
20220127-MNG03	21	Female	Sophomore	Text	Rural	No	No
20220208-NMG04	21	Female	Third Year	Liberal arts	Rural	No	No
20220124-NMG05	22	Female	Sophomore	Science	Rural	No	Yes
20220208-NMG06	21	Female	Third Year	Text	Rural	No	Yes (served)
20220126-NMG07	21	Male	Third Year	Text	Town	Yes	Yes
20220120-NMG08	21	Male	Third Year	engineering course	Cities and towns	No	No

4. Research Findings

4.1 Intimate Social Circles - Weakening of Strong Ties Networks

(1) Virtual interaction squeezes out the time for real interaction, causing the social network to shrink.

Emerging social media have built a brand new interpersonal communication field in the virtual network space, and their discourse style presents the characteristics of anti-rule,fragmentation,and decentralization,which provides a more free, open, and unrestrained social space for college students. Survey data shows that most university students spend a lot of time on online social networking every day. On average, 79.31% of university students spend more than 2 hours on online social networking every day, and 27.78% of them spend more than 6 hours, as shown in Table 2.

"Social stress and social anxiety become lessened by being in a virtual world where there is no face-to-face interaction or communication." (20230330-DXS02)

In addition, 55.32% of university students use mobile phones, computers, and other electronic products for more than four hours a day on average, which indicates

that university students are dependent on electronic products to a certain extent and may unconsciously use their mobile phones for offline real-life social interaction, which risks forming a social intercourse disorder. Spending too much time socializing online can reduce the experience of

real face-to-face emotional interaction, thus neglecting the connection and maintenance of real relationships, and in the long run, strong ties may be weakened.

"When virtual socializing is introduced into reality, there is a lack of face-to-face chatting, emotional connection and empathy. I am prone to some feelings of irritability and anxiety, which may even make me wish to be less connected to others, these may have some adverse effects on my mental health development." (20230330-DXS01).

It is difficult to maintain realistic social interaction with close friends due to geographical constraints

Before entering university, most people have already established close friendships to a greater or lesser extent. As a result, being in different locations, social circles and living environments can place limitations on maintaining these close relationships. Being in different cities can increase the cost of real-life social interaction with close friends, and the decreasing number of common topics can weaken mutual Contact and less common communication.

"Being in different places after going to university, the distance becomes farther, the contact becomes less and the relationship fades" (20230330-DXS04)

"Well … environmental factors mainly manifest themselves in the form of close friends not being in the same place as one's university location, or excessive academic pressure, resulting in less contact. Personal factors are mainly manifested by their perceptions of having fewer common topics and therefore less contact." (20230330-DXS01)

4.2 "Weak Network - Light Circle of Acquaintances" Extension

As can be seen from Table 2, 53% of university students have made new friends on the Internet, while 46.69% have not made new friends on the Internet. Among them, the number of new friends made by university students on the Internet is mainly concentrated in the range of 1 to 5, accounting for 85.81%. 12 university students have made 100 or more new friends on the Internet, and the highest number can reach 150.

With the development of network technology, the social radius of university students has gradually expanded, their social scope is no longer confined to their environment, and the social objects are not only their friends around, more and more university students have started to socialize online and made new friends with the same interests in the network. The Internet has become an important channel for university students to participate in social interactions and to build themselves and their social relationships, and the online circle built up by the social platform has become an important way of life for university students.

"Making friends with similar interests on the internet has widened my social circle." (20230330-DXS04)

"I think it's widened the social circle." (20230330-DXS07)

However, this type of social interaction is individualized for the times, i.e. the relationship is relatively loose and although the frequency of social interaction may have increased, the strength and tightness of the relationship is relatively loose. This is because this type of social relationship is less expensive to establish and maintain and is based on a common interest, behavioral purpose, etc. Once this foundation is left or influenced by other external factors, such as a busy study schedule, the social relationship may be difficult to maintain.

"Yes, but no contact anymore. Probably just two" "because they don't play games anymore." (20230330-DXS03)

"Frequency of chatting is variably Influenced by study and work" (20230330-DXS04)

4.3 Social Dilemma - Group Social Anxiety

Table 2 shows that in an increasingly complex social environment, a significant proportion of university students have a low level of trust in unfamiliar groups on the internet, with only 19.07% of the total number of individuals choosing 'very trusting'.

At the same time, the uncertainty of life for individuals has increased dramatically, and their values and self-perceptions have changed simultaneously. As part of a social network, the public in the Internet era is forming a collective identity, which is being catalyzed by a shared consciousness,

and is manifesting itself in a characteristic 'group anxiety'. The images of role models shown in weak networks are constantly shaking the self-concept of university students, making them constantly re-examine their daily actions.

"Socialization is inherently complicated. For example, it can be exhausting to see someone else living a particularly good life when you're still sad, or to see someone else still struggling when you're not studying, for example." (20230330-DXS03)

The lack of immediate, non-intuitive communication can also make normal interactions more uncomfortable, with delayed feedback driving some groups into self-doubt, and the 'echo chamber effect' of the internet can also give weak relationships another layer of negative impact from real social interaction. The "echo chamber effect" can reinforce the voices that populate the internet. This effect is especially evident in the formation of hostile voices.

"It increases my social anxiety to a certain extent. Because I need to get reactions from people in a chat to judge the appropriateness of what I say, but online social interaction cannot provide this reaction and can cause me to ramble about what I have just said and create a certain amount of social anxiety." (20230330-DXS04)

Weak ties networks provide a virtual platform for university students to reinvent themselves, and in their weak connection, they do not show all of their real selves, so this "self" image often shows a desire to express oneself and a desire for approval, and at the same time, it teases the rules while emphasizing daily life.

The interviews revealed that within this group of people with social anxiety, there are two different factions depending on the nature of the anxiety. online or offline.

"For me, just being in contact with people is stressful because it all consumes energy, no matter what form it takes." (20230330-DXS05)

Another type of anxiety stems from the wariness that accompanies an ever-expanding network of weak ties, which they perceive not as definite, real connections but as the illusion of friendship that occupies their social space. In the absence of a realistic basis, deeper expansion with weak ties can be anxiety-provoking and even frightening.

"I don't like chatting online, it feels weird and I've been a little defensive these past few years." (20230330-DXS05)

Table 2 Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Variables

Variables		Percentage (%)
Average daily online social time	Less than 2 hours	20.59
	2 to 4 hours	24.00
	4 to 6 hours	27.54
	More than 6 hours	27.78
Average daily time spent on electronic entertainment	Less than 1 hour	26.24
	1 to 3 hours	26.83
	3 to 5 hours	24.47
	5 hours and above	22.46
Whether to make new friends on the internet	No	46.69
	Yes	53.31
Trust in net friend	Total mistrust	20.62
	Not very trusting	29.93
	Relative trust	30.38
	Great trust	19.07

5. Conclusions

Based on the results of the interviews and empirical research, the following recommendations are made in this study.

Firstly, individuals with social anxiety can adopt positive psychological cues and coping with strategies to give themselves positive affirmations, such as focusing on the positive aspects of social interaction, and developing their hobbies to enhance their strengths, thereby affirming themselves more positively and thus alleviating their negative emotions; In the process of social interaction, we

should increase interaction with friends and relatives in real life, reduce the frequency of contact in virtual network platforms such as We chat, and enhance the depth of friendships, to enhance the role of strong ties in emotional support, reduce negative social emotions and improve mental health.

Secondly, when intervening in services for the treatment of socially anxious university students, researchers, psychotherapists and social workers, and other social forces should see both the social cognitive problems that exist in the university student population itself and the factors in the social environment, help the clients build social trust, develop their social skills, clarify their misconceptions, and encourage socially anxious and the program encourages socially anxious and socially fearful people to be self-compassionate, improve their social skills, alleviate their social anxiety and establish a correct social-emotional perception.

Thirdly, universities should regularly carry out mental health education and publicity activities, encourage university students to learn to face social anxiety, prevent the occurrence of deep anxiety and depression promptly, take measures to intervene on time, and conduct timely follow-up for students who have already have psychological problems. It is also important to provide resources to meet the needs of students with social anxiety and to avoid the formalization of activities such as psychological lectures, on-campus counseling, and mental health courses.

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