Study on Social Media Burnout from Perspective of Dramaturgical Theory -- Taking WeChat as an Example

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Abstract: Since the outbreak of the COVID-19, social media such as WeChat has gone deeper into daily life, and users' use of social media has been increasing. However, some users have suffered social media burnout because of the continuous penetration of social media into their lives. Based on the dramaturgical theory, this paper conducts research on the influencing factors and formation process of social media burnout through questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The research results show that social media are affected by many factors, such as the gap between social feedback and expectations, the repetition rate of performance content, and worries about background exposure. Whether the WeChat friends in strong-ties or weak-ties will have a certain impact on the gap of users' social feedback and the worries about background exposure. Epidemic factors will lead to an increase in the repetition rate of performance content. However, some extension functions of WeChat reduce the incidence of exit behavior.

Keywords: Social Media Burnout, WeChat, Dramaturgical Theory

1 Introduction

In 2022, the epidemic situation in the country distributed in many places. The regular epidemic prevention and control policies have been deployed and implemented in many places. Affected by the epidemic, the demand for online interpersonal communication continues to expand, and the importance of social media in interpersonal communication continues to increase. Some users have to stay online on social media for a long time.

We have observed that since the epidemic, social media has penetrated into the daily lives of users everywhere, and some social media users have developed social media burnout, fatigue, anxiety, boredom, disappointment and other negative states. Some of them have chosen to set the visible range of Moments, block group chat, or even interrupt the use of social media. However, there are also some users who continuously and frequently publish their Moments and participate in group chat, enjoying social media.

We are very curious about this phenomenon: what factors affect social media burnout? What is the process of social media burnout?

2 Literature Review

2.1 Literature Review on Social Burnout

The phenomenon of social media burnout has been studied from multiple perspectives in the academic world. Bemstein analyzes the phenomenon of social media burnout from the emotional perspective, and believes that the phenomenon of social media burnout is the user's feelings of fatigue, disappointment, loss of interest, etc. (Bemstein, 2009); Ravindran, from the perspective of behavior, believes that users will pause, reduce their use of social media or even quit social media when they have social media burnout (Ravindran, 2014); Zhang explored the process of negative emotions of users caused by information overload by combining emotion and action, and concluded that there is a positive correlation between negative emotions of users and the unsustainable use behavior (Zhang, 2015).

The research on social media burnout was carried out late in China, and mainly focus on the influencing factors and negative use behavior of social media burnout. Among domestic scholars, Liu Luchuan has conducted a detailed study on social media burnout from the perspective of negative emotions and negative use behavior, which has opened up a new research path to study the relationship between negative emotions and negative use behavior (Liu, 2018); Yang Yuanyuan, on the other hand, studies social media burnout from the perspective of influencing factors and social impact. His article maintains a positive view on social media burnout, and believes that social media burnout is a necessary process for human beings to use new things, which can be alleviated in social development (Yang, 2020); Cai Jianfeng and other scholars paid attention to factors such as media richness and self presentation in the study of negative use behavior of media burnout, and concluded that there is a "U" type relationship between media richness and self presentation and negative use behavior of social media, and emotional factors playing a mediating role (Cai, 2022).

It can be seen from those that although there have been relevant studies that have summarized the influencing factors of social media burnout, few studies have taken into account the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic, and few studies have focused on the process of social media burnout.

2.2 Literature Review of Dramaturgical Theory

The dramaturgical theory is developed from the theory of symbolic interaction. Sociologist Goffman is the initiator of this theory. His representative book Self Presentation in Daily Life gives a detailed introduction to dramaturgical theory. He compares people's lives to performances in the theater. Everyone is an actor, and uses performance skills to create a good personal image in front of others (Goffman, 1959). With the continuous development and progress of this theory, it has attracted great attention from scholars at home and abroad, and has

made remarkable achievements in many research fields. This paper focuses on the application of dramaturgical theory in social media research in recent years.

Yu Chunsheng analyzes the creators of video weblogs by using the dramaturgical theory. He believes that video weblogs providing a new stage for creators to present themselves. However, because the boundaries between the front and back stages of this stage were blurred, it would also cause the creators to lose themselves, social alienation and privacy exposure (Yu, 2019); Nie Junyao focused on the variability of the performance situation, the mobility of the performance area and the multiplicity of the performers' identities in the era of online celebrity 3.0. She analyzed the self presentation of short video online celebrity by using the dramaturgical theory, and believed that the main self presentation strategies of online celebrity were: writing scripts, focusing on the stage, and breaking the front and back boundaries (Nie, 2021); Ji Jiajia analyzed the behavior of WeChat users by using the mimetic theory, and put forward effective suggestions on the cultivation of WeChat users' healthy behaviors. The research believed that regulating the frontstage behavior of WeChat users requires users to clarify their roles and respect other users (Ji, 2021).

However, few studies have used dramaturgical theory to study the phenomenon of social media burnout, so few studies have used dramaturgical theory to answer questions about the influencing factors and the psychological process of social media burnout.

2.3 Problem Posing

This article will try to answer the following questions based on the dramaturgical theory and the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic:

What factors affect social media burnout? What is the process of social media burnout?

3 Methods

3.1 Questionnaire

3.1.1 Assumption Establishment

Based on the above questions, the following assumptions are proposed:

H1: The wider gap between the received feedback and personal expectations is, the greater social media burnout will be.

H2: The higher repetition rate of performance content is, the greater social media burnout will be.

H3: The deeper worries about exposing backgrounds are, the greater social media burnout will be.

H4: The greater sense of abundance in real life is, the greater social media burnout will be.

In order to prove these hypotheses, this study adopts the questionnaire method to conduct a quantitative study.

3.1.2 Questionnaire Distribution and Collection

The corresponding research object of these hypotheses is WeChat users, which mainly uses online methods to distribute questionnaires through WeChat moments, questionnaire star sample library, etc. The survey mainly focuses on open and closed topics, with the main contents as follows: (1) Confirmation of basic information: including age, gender, etc; (2) The dimension reduction sentence part of the sense of difference between the feedback obtained by the independent variable and personal expectations, the repetition rate of the performance content, the worries about backstage exposure and the sense of abundance in real life; (3) The dimension reduction statement part of the dependent variable social media burnout. The questionnaire contains 26 questions, including 5 single choice questions and 21 scale questions.

This survey finished the process of data collection, sorting and analysis on October 10, 2022.

3.2 In-depth Interview

3.2.1 Preparation of Interview Outline

The interview questions were mainly divided into three parts: the first part mainly involved the basic information of the interviewees, including their age, gender, occupation, etc; In the second part, the research questions were reduced to interview questions, including whether they had developed negative emotions and negative use behaviors in the process of using social media, why such emotions and behaviors occurred, and whether such emotions and behaviors were intensified in the post epidemic era; The third part was prepared to deal with issues that need deeper excavation.

In the process of interview and research, the researchers tried to avoid the four ethical issues and deviant behaviors emphasized by the scholar Alan Breman: causing damage to research participants; do not use informed consent permit documents or materials; infringe the privacy of research participants; deceive research participants. And if the interviewee has any question or dissatisfaction that he/she is unwilling to answer during the interview, he/she can remain silent or withdraw halfway. The interview materials that the interviewees stated that they would not disclose were not included and quoted in this study.

3.2.2 Selection of Interviewees

In this study, 10 WeChat users were interviewed for 20-40 minutes in depth in a semi structured way in October 2022. The users' WeChat friends were firstly involved in as interviewees. Secondly, further WeChat friends were raised as objects with the method of

“Snowball sampling”.

According to the maximum sampling principle of the qualitative research method, when the 10th interviewee was recruited, all the interview content was enough to answer the research questions, and the sample collection was ended. The interviewees are different in gender, occupation, education level, location and other aspects, and the degree of homogeneity is low. The interview was conducted by WeChat call and WeChat text, and the processing of the interview content was completed by the researcher. See Table 1 for the specific information of the interviewees:

Table 1 Basic Information of the Respondents

Number	Gender	Age	Occupation	Region	Education level
1	Male	20-25	Student	Shandong	Master
2	Female	20-25	Student	Shanghai	Doctor
3	Female	20-25	Student	Guangdong	Undergraduate
4	Male	36-40	Bank clerk	Hebei	Bachelor
5	Male	20-25	Student	Henan	Undergraduate
6	Female	20-25	Student	Beijing	Bachelor
7	Male	20-25	Unemployed	Hubei	Bachelor
8	Female	26-30	College Counselor	Shanxi	Master
9	Male	15-20	Student	Beijing	Undergraduate
10	Female	20-25	Unemployed	Beijing	Bachelor

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Hypothesis Verification

307 questionnaires were collected in this survey. They are mainly female, 16-35 years old, undergraduate or junior college students. From the descriptive analysis, it can be seen that the frequency of respondents updating their WeChat Moments is low, and the proportion of respondents occasionally updating their WeChat Moments is the highest, reaching 33.22%. In addition, nearly 70% of the interviewees visit the WeChat Moments more than 3 times a day, which shows that the use of WeChat Moments by WeChat users is characterized by low publishing frequency and high browsing frequency.

Pearson correlation coefficient analysis found that the gap between users' social media feedback and their social media burnout shows a significant positive correlation (r=0.332, P=0.000), indicating that when individuals use social media, the wide gap between social feedback and expectations is, the more likely they are to experience social media burnout. Therefore the research hypothesis H1 was supported. There is also a significant positive correlation between users' perception of social media performance content repetition rate and their social media burnout (r=0.234, P=0.000), indicating that the higher the content repetition

rate presented by individual social media, the more likely social media burnout will occur. The research hypothesis H2 is supported. There is also a significant positive correlation between users' concerns about personal privacy exposure of social media and their social media burnout (r=0.335, P=0.000), indicating that the more individuals worry about privacy exposure, the more likely they are to experience social media burnout. Research hypothesis H3 is supported. There was no significant correlation between users' sense of life sufficiency and their social media burnout (r=0.087, P=0.128), and the research hypothesis H4 was not supported.

According to the dramaturgical theory, WeChat users will perform according to others' preferences and expectations when publishing their Moments or communicating with their friends on WeChat, because they want to make a good impression on their friends. In this performance, WeChat friends participate as audience members, and actors often have certain expectations for audience feedback. Once the feedback from the audience, such as replies, comments and likes, fails to meet the psychological expectations of the actors, the actors will lose interest in continuing to perform and have a great sense of difference; If the actor's psychological expectation of audience feedback cannot be satisfied for a long time, the actor will often feel low and depressed in the sense of continuous gap, and then reduce or suspend the use of WeChat. It can be seen from this that the gap between audience feedback and expectation will lead to social media burnout.

If the content of an actor's performance at the front stage is often concentrated in a specific field, it is difficult to make the performance innovative, and his performance is often a repetition or partial repetition of previous performances. If the actor's performance content is repeated more, it will not only reduce the appeal to the audience, but also affect the actor's desire to perform, making the actor appear tired, bored and other emotions, thus resulting in reducing the sharing of friends and even reducing the use of WeChat. It can be seen that the repetition of performance content is easy to cause social fatigue.

The actor's performance is performed at the frontstage, and his self presentation at the frontstage is what he hopes the audience can see, while the backstage is in a relatively private state, which is an area that the actor does not want the audience to touch at will. When WeChat users perform in the foreground, that is, on the WeChat platform, they are very concerned about the privacy of background information and do not want the audience to know their background behavior through their performance or the platform's data collection methods. For the exposure of backstage personal information, actors will feel worried, especially for some of the audience's WeChat friends linked by weak relationships. Such backstage exposure concerns are more significant due to the unknown identity. It can be seen that backstage exposure concerns are very likely to cause social media burnout.

4.2 Whether Actors and Audiences are in Strong-ties or Weak-ties Affects Social Media Burnout

In the interview, almost all interviewees believed that they often had different attitudes towards ordinary WeChat friends (weak-ties) and close friends (strong-ties). As for audience feedback, some interviewers believed that the actors were tolerant of the feedback gap of the strong relationship audience. For example, S3 believed that "I generally don't care replies from good friends, and chatting with good friends often ends endlessly. For ordinary friends,when I can't get their feedback, I will think about the reasons and whether they were offended by myself"; Another part of the interviewees thought that the feedback gap of the audience in strong-ties is more likely to cause negative emotions for the actors. For example, S1 said, "I may not care too much about the unimportant people if they do not reply to me. But I will care when the important people don't reply, and I will be disappointed if they don't reply.". The number of respondents with the above two attitudes is almost equal, but there is no doubt that whether the actor and audience are in strong-ties or weak-ties has a greater impact on the gap of social media feedback and the generation of social media burnout.

At the same time, some interviewees expressed concern about the audience in weak-ties obtaining the actor's personal information through the WeChat platform. As the number of friends in weak-ties among your friends on WeChat has risen, the number of friends in weak-ties in some people's contact list has exceeded the number of their friends in strong-ties. For some weak relationship friends, users can hardly judge their identities. Therefore, we are particularly worried about the weak relationship audience obtaining their personal information through WeChat platform. S2 represented, "I have seen some malicious people on the Internet who can infer your home location, name and other information through some photos and words shared on the social platform before. Now more and more people's WeChat need to be added due to work and learning, including many people who are not familiar with at all, so I am also worried that there will be such malicious people in the Moments. I will take care not to expose too much information when sharing in the WeChat Moments ".

4.3 The Social Extension Function of WeChat Reduces Users' Exit Behavior

The ten most frequently used WeChat functions include the WeChat payment. The interviewees believed that WeChat is becoming increasingly indispensable in daily life. Therefore, although some users develop Social Media Burnout, few users choose to quit the WeChat platform. S5 said, "I can't live a day without WeChat. I don't have the habit of carrying cash. If I don't have WeChat, I can't even pay"; S4 said that "During the epidemic, there was no way to go out of the community, so we had to buy some necessities in WeChat groups". S6 talked about the necessity of using WeChat to show the health code. She said that "After the outbreak of the epidemic, scanning the health code with WeChat is also indispensable for going outside".

As a social software, WeChat payment, health code applet and other usage methods are actually just extensions of its social functions. However, since the emergence of WeChat

payment, code scanning and other extension functions, have been accepted and used by more and more users, greatly facilitating users' daily life, and even becoming an indispensable part of life. S7 said that "WeChat functions are becoming more and more powerful, from chat to payment to takeout, extending to all aspects of life, making me feel that is more and more irreplaceable". Obviously, some functions that originally appeared as extensions have become as important as social functions in the process of users' use. Important functions such as WeChat payment have even begun to have a certain impact on the use of social functions. Even though WeChat users have experienced serious social media burnout during their use of WeChat, due to their dependence on extended functions such as WeChat payment and health code, users cannot really quit the WeChat platform, instead most social media burnout behaviors focus on reducing use and shielding some messages. It can be said that it is the frequent use of these extended functions that reduces the withdrawal behavior of WeChat users under the social media burnout.

4.4 Epidemic Factors Affect the Repetition Rate of Performance Content

Some interviewees said that due to the impact of the epidemic, they had reduced the frequency of playing, traveling and eating out, which made it difficult for them to find fresh content to update their Moments or official account. S10 said that "I have been running my own official account, releasing some daily or delicious food. After the epidemic, there are obviously few updates, and there is nothing new to release. Sometimes, I just release the previous inventory in the form of a collection". Epidemic factors focus part of the actors' performances on home life, which greatly increases the repetition rate, making actors often choose to reduce their performances.

5 Summary and Reflection

This research has studied the social media burnout phenomenon through questionnaire survey and in-depth interview using the dramaturgical theory, trying to answer the question of which factors affect the social media burnout phenomenon and how the social media burnout phenomenon is generated. The study found that the wider gap between the received feedback and personal expectations is, the greater social media burnout will be. The higher repetition rate of performance content is, the greater social media burnout will be. The deeper worries about exposing backgrounds are, the greater social media burnout will be. In order to prove these hypotheses, this study adopts the questionnaire method to conduct a quantitative study. However the greater sense of abundance in real life is, the greater social media burnout will be is not established. This is mainly because the use reduction caused by busy real life is temporary, mainly when users participate in the performance of other actors as audiences. The temporary use reduction will not affect users' return to the WeChat platform as actors after passing the busy stage.

This study proposed a variety of influencing factors of social media burnout, explored the influence of extended functions such as WeChat friends' strong-ties and weak-ties, WeChat payment, etc. on social media burnout, and explored some changes in social media burnout as WeChat became more and more involved in users' lives. On the other hand, it also explored some new features of social media burnout in the epidemic era, such as the increase in the repetition rate of performance content.

However, the respondents and participants of this research questionnaire are mainly young people, and their representativeness is insufficient. In future research, researchers need to pay more attention to the social media burnout phenomenon, as well as its new characteristics and changes in the epidemic era.

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