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Expressing Burnout: A Study on Factors Influencing Internet Expression Intentions from a Demand-Oriented Perspective

Ziyu Zhou*
School of Management, Chengdu University Of Information Technology, China
***Corresponding author E-mail: 2297265536@qq.com**

Abstract:
This study aims to explore the phenomenon of internet expression fatigue and its influencing factors. Adopting a demand-oriented perspective, it focuses on the effects of age, gender, and online duration on expression willingness and fatigue. Through questionnaire surveys and interviews, the research analyzes sample characteristics and data structures while examining correlations among different variables. The findings not only deepen understanding of online expression behavior but also provide practical insights for optimizing social platform design and enhancing user experience.

Keywords:
Expressive Fatigue, Orientation Needs, Information Fatigue, Internet Expression Willingness, Public Opinion Structure

1 Introduction

In contemporary society, the proliferation of social media and digital technologies enables individuals to engage in online activities and express personal opinions anytime, anywhere. However, this convenience has also spawned a new social issue: an increasing number of people choose to remain silent online, profoundly impacting the diversity and authenticity of public discourse. Specifically, despite growing opportunities for expression on social media, many users exhibit information fatigue, showing reluctance to participate frequently in online discussions. The distinctiveness of this phenomenon lies in its dual impact: it not only diminishes individual online interaction experiences but also contributes to a decline in overall network traffic and user engagement, gradually transforming the internet into a self-indulgent space. Based on these observations, this study raises several critical questions: How does expression fatigue among online users emerge? What factors underlie this phenomenon? Answers to these questions will not only deepen our understanding of evolving user behavior but also provide theoretical foundations and practical guidance for enhancing the interactive environment of social media platforms.

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2 Literature Review

2.1 Need for orientation theory

The Need for Orientation, proposed by McCombs within agenda-setting theory, explains individuals' motivations for focusing on specific issues within an information environment. McCombs posits that the Need for Orientation is primarily influenced by issue relevance and uncertainty. When users perceive high relevance and strong uncertainty regarding an issue, their Need for Orientation increases, thereby affecting their attention and willingness to express opinions on that topic.

Foreign scholars Baumeister, R.F. and Leary, M.R. (1995) explored how the need for belonging influences individual behavioral choices. Integrating this with Need for Orientation theory, they analyzed motivational drivers in social media expression. Palmgreen and Rayburn (1982) further proposed the Expected Value Model, positing that motivation in media use is driven by the relationship between "expected value" and "actual satisfaction obtained." This explanatory framework helps reveal users' sensitivity to feedback and outcomes in online expression; With the development of the internet and social media, Ruggiero (2000) noted that orientation needs theory remains applicable in digital environments, revealing new research opportunities in real-time interaction and personalized expression; Boyd, D. M. and Ellison, N. B. (2007) examined how social networking platforms influence users' social interactions and expressive behaviors through need orientation. Within the specific context of social media, Bhatiasevi (2024) demonstrated that distinct usage motivations-such as entertainment, information acquisition, and social interaction-significantly impact users' psychological experiences and willingness to express themselves, suggesting that expressive fatigue is closely linked to the degree of need orientation fulfillment.

Domestic scholars Tang Yulong and Li Qinglin (2018) conducted a comprehensive analysis and systematization of orientation needs within agenda-setting theory; Li Anding (2012), integrating social psychology and communication perspectives, explored how "public orientation needs" drive the formation of specific frames through "monologue-type collective memory" in online media events.

2.2 Information fatigue

Information fatigue has emerged as a significant concept gaining attention in recent years within information and communication studies. The advent of the digital age has made information access unprecedentedly convenient, yet it has also led to widespread information overload. Information fatigue refers to the psychological state where individuals, overwhelmed by excessive information, feel disoriented and exhausted, subsequently developing aversion and resistance toward information reception and processing.

Foreign scholar Sunil Shweta (2023) conducted a literature review examining the factors influencing information fatigue behavior, categorizing them into four dimensions: cognitive factors (increased fatigue emotions and information overload), self and personality factors (individual and internal factors), environmental factors (parental upbringing), and social factors (social media role conflict).This classification establishes a foundation for subsequent research, highlighting the multifaceted origins of information fatigue. Bawden and Robinson (2009) examined the relationship between information fatigue and digital anxiety from a social psychological perspective. They proposed that information fatigue is not merely a passive response to

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information overload but also an active choice—specifically, users employ self-isolation and avoidance strategies to cope with information overload, a choice that further exacerbates feelings of information fatigue. Amandeep Dhir (2024) empirically identified fear of missing out (FOMO) and compulsive social media use as primary drivers of information fatigue. Their findings indicate that users compulsively engage with media due to anxiety over missing critical information, ultimately leading to information fatigue. The sociocultural implications of information fatigue have also drawn scholarly attention.

Domestic scholars such as Li Qingzhen (2022) examined the determinants of information fatigue from multiple perspectives, concluding that social media factors and individual characteristics primarily drive social media information fatigue behaviors. Zhang Yanfeng (2019) et al. examined the characteristics of information fatigue behavior. Through empirical research, they found variations in user information fatigue patterns and categorized user profiles into four distinct types based on these differences. Zhang Mingmin (2021) et al. proposed that users weigh and compare different feelings arising from social media use; when experiencing information fatigue, users tend to reduce or abandon usage.

Although these studies explore information fatigue from multiple angles, they focus primarily on information consumption rather than specifically examining the expression dimension of information. Overall, research on information fatigue theory holds significant importance for understanding psychological and social challenges in contemporary information societies.

2.3 Research questions

Therefore, this paper draws upon information fatigue theory and orientation needs theory to address the following questions: Why does the specific phenomenon of expressive fatigue emerge? Furthermore, what relationship exists between users' need to express opinions and expressive fatigue?

3 Research Methodology

This study employs questionnaire surveys and interviews to address the aforementioned questions.

3.1 Questionnaire survey method

3.1.1 Hypothesis development

Based on the aforementioned questions, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Significant differences exist in the willingness to express opinions online between audiences of different genders.

H2: Audience members exhibit weaker willingness to express themselves online as their age increases.

H3: Audience members exhibit weaker fatigue toward online expression as they age.

H4: The longer the duration of internet use, the lower the frequency of expressing opinions online.

To test these hypotheses, this study employs a questionnaire survey method, collecting data through sam-

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pling and developing corresponding questionnaires.

3.1.2 Sampling method

The research subjects corresponding to these hypotheses are internet users. The ideal sample size is 1 200. After creating the questionnaire using QWXian, it was distributed on social media platforms using non-random sampling.

First, we conducted representative sampling of this group, selecting residents from different regions as the study population. Second, we compiled a sampling frame for the population based on internet usage habits. Third, under a 95% confidence interval and 3% sampling error, we performed stratified multistage sampling from the sampling frame to select 1 200 internet users as the sample.In cases of refusal to complete the questionnaire, the next eligible user in the sequence was approached as a replacement.

3.1.3 Questionnaire design

This study's questionnaire explores factors influencing internet users' willingness to express themselves on social media, their emotional value experiences, cognitive surplus effects, and expectations regarding expression outcomes. The questionnaire design comprises three main modules:

Part1: Basic Information: Collected respondents' gender, age, region, education level, occupation, daily internet usage duration and frequency for subsequent sample analysis.

Part2: Expression Intentions, Fatigue, Emotional Value, Cognitive Surplus, and Expected Expression Outcomes: Measured using a matrix scale to assess respondents' experiences regarding expression frequency, emotional value acquisition, cognitive surplus influence, and expected expression outcomes. Response options range from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

Part3: Motivation and Challenges: Understand respondents' primary motivations for expression on social media and the main challenges they perceive during the expression process, using multiple-choice questions and open-ended inquiries.

3.2 In-Depth interview method

3.2.1 Interview guide development

Interview questions are primarily divided into three sections.

Part One: To explore complex motivations not fully captured by the questionnaire, this study employs semi-structured interviews. The interview outline expands upon key questionnaire questions to delve deeper into users' underlying thoughts.

Part Two: Participants were selected based on research objectives and questions. By guiding interviewees to focus on specific life situations and genuine experiences, the approach avoided abstract discussions. Interview questions centered on the following core themes:

Q1: Have you ever experienced a discrepancy between the feedback you hoped to receive and the feedback

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you actually received when expressing yourself online? How did this experience affect you?

Q2: Have you ever felt exhausted by online expression? How did this feeling affect your willingness to continue expressing yourself?

Q3: In your past experiences of expression, what situations made you feel your expression was ineffective?

Q4: When you discover your views differ from the majority, how do you typically respond?

Q5: Have your motivations for expressing yourself changed over time-for example, starting with high interest that gradually diminished or shifted? What caused these changes?

Q6: Do you express yourself more or less based on the amount of information available?

3.2.2 Selection of interview participants

This study conducted 45-minute semi-structured in-depth interviews with 15 participants possessing diverse internet usage experiences. Interviews commenced in October 2024 and concluded in November 2024. Initial participants were heavy internet users selected via an online questionnaire, with additional samples recruited through snowball sampling. Following the principle of maximum sampling in qualitative research, data collection ceased after the 15th participant, as the interview content sufficiently addressed the research questions.

Interviewees exhibited diversity in age, occupation, educational attainment, and geographic location, ensuring sample representativeness. Interviews were conducted via WeChat text, telephone, and in-person sessions, with results transcribed verbatim. Basic demographic information is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Basic Information of Respondents

ID	Gender	Age	Occupation	Education Level
S1	Male	23	Student	Undergraduate student
S2	Male	28	Internet professional	Master's graduate
S3	Female	49	Physician	Vocational school graduate
S4	Female	18	Student	Undergraduate student
S5	Female	38	Teacher	College graduate

3.3 Questionnaire results description

3.3.1 Sample characteristics description

The sample comprised equal proportions of male and female participants. By age, the majority were aged 18-24, totaling 125 individuals (39.31%). In terms of education level, most participants held a bachelor's degree, totaling 132 individuals (41.51%). Regarding internet usage frequency, over 70% of participants reported accessing the internet multiple times daily. For daily internet usage duration, over 50% of participants reported spending 5 hours or more online.

H1: Gender and expression willingness

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Independent samples t-test results indicate no significant difference in expression willingness between genders ($p > 0.05$). This suggests that men and women exhibit comparable levels of online expression activity, with gender no longer serving as a decisive factor influencing expression willingness. This finding diverges from some previous studies concluding "women are more active," indicating that converging social media usage habits are diminishing gender differences.

H2: Age and willingness to express

Correlation and regression analysis revealed a significant negative correlation between age and expression willingness ($r = -0.174$; regression coefficient = -0.862, $p = 0.000$). This indicates that users' willingness to express themselves online gradually decreases with age. Younger groups exhibit stronger orientation needs in identity construction and social interaction, making them more inclined to engage in online expression.

H3: Age and expression fatigue

Further analysis revealed a significant negative correlation between age and expression fatigue ($r = -0.132$; regression coefficient = -0.621, $p = 0.000$). That is, older individuals experience weaker fatigue. This suggests that while younger groups engage in expression more frequently, they are also more susceptible to fatigue due to feedback gaps or excessive investment.

H4: Online duration and expression frequency

Correlation analysis revealed no significant relationship between online duration and expression frequency ($r=0.052$, $p>0.05$). This implies that prolonged social media use does not necessarily increase expressive behavior. The occurrence of expression depends more on individual motivation and need fulfillment than on time investment alone.

3.3.2 Data analysis results description

Survey results indicate that gender does not significantly influence willingness to express online, suggesting that expressive motivation primarily depends on whether orientation needs are met, rather than gender differences. Age shows a negative correlation with expressive willingness: younger groups exhibit higher willingness but are also more prone to fatigue; older groups demonstrate lower willingness but experience weaker fatigue. There is no significant correlation between online duration and expression frequency, indicating that expression behavior is influenced by motivational structure rather than mere time investment.

Overall, expression fatigue arises from the unmet fulfillment of multiple orientation needs, manifesting as a loss of emotional value, reduced cognitive surplus, diminished perceived effectiveness, and accumulated external pressure from public opinion.

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4 Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Impact of public opinion arena structure and platform mechanisms on expression

4.1.1 Information visibility in public discourse channels diverts expression intentions

The online public sphere is not a completely equal and open space, but a multi-layered structure shaped by algorithmic logic, social relationships, and the distribution of discourse power. Within this structure, young people, due to their high expression frequency and strong media sensitivity, often occupy the visible center of public discourse. Their active voices give online topics a pronounced "youth-oriented" tendency, creating a polarized landscape of opinion leaders and followers. Platform algorithms play a crucial amplifying role in this process-through user profiling and interest-based recommendations, algorithms continuously reinforce specific groups' circles of attention, leading to a stratified and homogenized public opinion structure.

This stratification not only alters the flow of expression but also reshapes the composition of public discourse. High-frequency users and high-reach accounts form the core of public opinion, while low-frequency or silent users become marginalized, creating a "center-periphery" structure for information dissemination. Content originating from the core gains greater exposure and diffusion, further amplifying its influence. This structural bias is particularly pronounced among youth demographics: their frequent expression and mutual engagement earn algorithmic favor, making them core nodes in discourse circulation. Simultaneously, however, this compresses or even renders invisible the voices of middle-aged and elderly groups alongside low-activity users. Consequently, the public sphere appears open in form but remains closed in substance. Diversity in public discourse is constrained, and disparities in information visibility further influence individual expression decisions, leading to a pronounced divergence in the willingness to express among different user groups. On one hand, young people and high-frequency users at the center of discourse gain emotional value and a sense of expressive efficacy through interactions where their voices receive responses and amplification. This positive feedback loop reinforces their willingness to speak out, cementing their status as the platform's primary voices. Conversely, low-frequency users, middle-aged and elderly groups, and ordinary accounts- long marginalized in discourse- struggle to achieve sufficient visibility for their expressions. The uncertainty of feedback and low perceived returns steadily erode their expectations of expression, leading them to gradually reduce posting frequency or even choose silence. Thus, the willingness to express does not decline uniformly but undergoes structural divergence under the influence of visibility mechanisms.

Moreover, the algorithm's tendency toward emotional and fragmented content further weakens the structural integrity of the public discourse space. Platforms favor high-engagement content, and high engagement often correlates directly with emotional intensity. The result is that rational discourse is squeezed out, while emotional expression becomes the algorithm's "staple." Public issues are thus amplified and polarized by emotional drivers, causing public perception to diverge toward extremes. This structural issue shifts online expression from public deliberation to opinion venting, and from rational discussion to attitude performance, trapping young people in a cycle of "information overload and meaning scarcity" amid high-frequency expression.

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4.1.2 Platform mechanisms and public opinion rhythms exacerbate expression fatigue

Platform mechanisms amplify the formation of youth fatigue. Social media's high-intensity push notifications and rapidly shifting trending topics induce a "fear of missing out" (FOMO) among young users, compelling them to remain constantly online and further intensifying their exhaustion. Middle-aged and elderly groups participate less frequently and are better able to avoid this pressure. While high-frequency expression increases users' online visibility, the absorption of vast amounts of fragmented content often results in superficial and emotional discussions. This mechanism not only affects individual psychology but also alters the rhythm of the public opinion arena, weakening the rationality of public discourse and making discussions faster-paced and shallower.

Algorithmic recommendations are a key force shaping contemporary discourse rhythms. By tracking user behavior and building precise models, platforms automatically identify and amplify high-engagement content, accelerating public discussions. On platforms like Weibo, trending topics often complete their lifecycle-from emergence to decline-within a single day. While this boosts dissemination efficiency and concentrates attention, it also creates an information update speed that far outpaces individuals' psychological adjustment capabilities. Short-video platforms' push mechanisms further amplify this acceleration effect. To prolong dwell time, systems continuously recommend thematically and emotionally similar content, trapping users in high-frequency, repetitive information loops.During peak periods of trending events, related videos flood the platform rapidly, amplifying emotional intensity in comment sections and draining users' interest in expressing themselves. Platforms thus create an illusion of "perpetual presence": even without active participation, users are swept along in the accelerating current of public discourse.

Simultaneously, the visual design of interaction metrics subtly reinforces this fast-paced mentality. Metrics like likes, shares, and views form a digital competitive ecosystem, trapping user expressions within a cycle of constant comparison and feedback. Some young users interviewed mentioned feeling discouraged by "unengaged posts" or "low metrics," gradually reducing their willingness to express themselves. Within this structure, the velocity of public discourse is tightly controlled by platform logic. Emotional contagion supplants rational debate, and the rise and fall of trending topics are no longer determined by public concern but driven by algorithmic calculations. Consequently, the accelerated pace of public opinion not only reshapes the form of public discourse but also becomes a key external factor contributing to expression fatigue.

As the primary force in generating and discussing issues, the youth demographic's contradictory structure of high willingness coupled with high fatigue reflects the dual predicament of the fast-paced public opinion arena: public discourse becomes markedly emotional while rational exchange diminishes, potentially eroding the rational foundation of public opinion over time. Simultaneously, psychological pressure and the burden of constant online presence may also impact the mental health of young people.

4.2 Expressive motivation and fatigue mechanisms across age groups

4.2.1 Youth group: high expression frequency and prone to fatigue

Although young people demonstrate greater willingness to express themselves, their motivation fluctuates far more significantly than that of middle-aged and older groups due to external influences. Behind online ex-

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pression lies an individual's constant balancing act between social relationships and psychological needs. Cyberspace grants unprecedented freedom of voice, yet this freedom is not an innate motivator. Rather, it stems from individuals' intrinsic drive to seek recognition, interaction, and value realization. As social platforms become primary arenas for interpersonal engagement, expressive behavior itself gradually shifts from "information sharing" to "self-presentation." This is particularly true for youth, who utilize online expression as a vital channel for emotional output and social belonging during identity construction and social connection.

The desire to express is closely tied to orientation needs. Orientation needs theory posits that when faced with informational uncertainty, individuals reduce cognitive anxiety and enhance self-efficacy through expression and interaction. Young users exhibit heightened participation tendencies within this process—seeking feedback through expression to validate their existence and social worth. Survey data reveals a significant negative correlation between age and expression willingness ($r = -0.174$, $p < 0.01$; regression coefficient = -0.862, $p < 0.01$), indicating younger demographics post more frequently. In interviews, a 23-year-old college student remarked: "If I don't post something on WeChat Moments or Weibo, I feel like I'm not participating in the world." This urge to speak out reflects a psychological fulfillment mechanism driven by need orientation.

However, this interaction pattern, highly dependent on external feedback, can easily lead to exhaustion. Young people constantly adjust their emotions and image through continuous expression, and fluctuations in likes and comments can easily cause psychological disappointment. When feedback falls short of expectations, feelings of recognition are frustrated, and emotions accumulate into burnout. In contrast, middle-aged and older adults possess more stable social identities. Their expressions primarily serve to share experiences or maintain relationships, with lower dependency on feedback. Consequently, they exhibit lower expression frequency and weaker feelings of burnout. A 40-year-old respondent remarked, "I'm reluctant to say too much online, fearing it might cause trouble." This reflects differences in psychological motivation and risk perception across age groups.

Table 2 Correlation

		Q2 Age	SumQ11
Q2 Age	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.174**
	Significance (two-tailed)		0.002
	Number of Cases	318	318
SumQ11	Pearson Correlation	-0.174**	1
	Significance (two-tailed)	0.002	
	Number of Cases	318	318

*Significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)

Table 3 Coefficient a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient		
		B	Standard Error	Beta	t	Significance
1	(Constant)	17.086	0.698		24.487	0.000
	Q2 Age	-0.862	0.274	-0.174	-3.143	0.002

* a. Dependent variable: sumQ11

Every instance of online expression constitutes a practice of self-symbolization, forming an interactive

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bond between individuals and communities. Differences in motivational drivers for interaction are not coincidental but stem from divergent psychological needs and media usage objectives across distinct groups. The online expressions of young people exhibit distinct social and emotional characteristics, often serving to strengthen social connections and construct self-identity. Survey data indicates that young users are more inclined to view online expression as a means of emotional regulation and social maintenance rather than mere information dissemination. This is closely tied to their position in the "identity construction phase" of real-world society-where the internet becomes an extended space for self-exploration and seeking belonging.

Simultaneously, platform mechanisms shape this motivational structure. Social media's likes, comments, and shares form an instant feedback system that continuously reinforces expressive behavior. Young users derive psychological satisfaction from this immediate cycle, creating a "expression-feedback-re-expression" loop. High-frequency interaction delivers fleeting pleasure and social validation, yet simultaneously deepens their dependency on feedback. One interviewee remarked: "Sometimes when I post something and get no likes, I wonder if I said something wrong." This heightened sensitivity to feedback drives young people to continually adjust their communication strategies during expression, prioritizing others' approval over straightforward information sharing.

In contrast, the interaction motivations of middle-aged and older adults are more functional and utilitarian. They use social platforms primarily for information gathering, connecting with friends and family, or maintaining real-world relationships. With more stable social roles, they exhibit greater self-restraint and risk awareness in their expressions. For them, expression serves to maintain the equilibrium of their relational networks rather than seek frequent external validation. This psychological pattern explains why, with age, both the frequency of expression and feelings of fatigue diminish.

From a social-psychological perspective, the formation of different interaction motivations essentially reflects the dual processes of "identity anxiety" and "self-affirmation" within the online environment. The high expression frequency among young people stems from proactive output driven by identity anxiety, while the low-frequency expression among middle-aged and older adults manifests as the internal stability of self-affirmation.

4.2.2 Psychological mechanisms and information fatigue

Online expression is not merely an informational act but also a psychological regulation process. Individuals continuously seek equilibrium between "expression desire" and "psychological burden" amid sustained information exposure and emotional interaction. Distinct differences emerge across age groups: younger users exhibit more active expression but also heightened fatigue, while older groups maintain relatively restrained expression yet better emotional stability. Survey results indicate a significant negative correlation between age and expression fatigue ($r = -0.132$, $p < 0.05$; regression coefficient = -0.621, $p < 0.05$). This suggests that while younger groups exhibit higher expression willingness, they are more prone to fatigue, whereas middle-aged and older groups experience less fatigue.

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Table 4 Correlation

		Q2 Age	SumQ12
Q2 Age	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.132**
	Significance (two-tailed)		0.018
	Number of Cases	318	318
SumQ12	Pearson Correlation	-0.1732**	1
	Significance (two-tailed)	0.018	
	Number of Cases	318	318

*Significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed)

Table 5 Coefficient a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient		
		B	Standard Error	Beta	t	Significance
1	(Constant)	15.813	0.667		23.711	0.000
	Q2 Age	-0.621	0.262	-0.132	-2.371	0.018

a. Dependent variable: sumQ12

High-frequency expression demands that young users invest substantial attention and cognitive resources to manage information, engage in interactions, and monitor feedback. When actual feedback diverges from expectations, psychological exhaustion increases accordingly. With the rise of online communities, the traditional Schrammian "one-to-many" mass media model has been fundamentally disrupted by interactive information-sharing platforms like Weibo and Xiaohongshu. A new platform-based "spectate-perform" model centered on user "communication and sharing" has rapidly emerged. This means users are not only information recipients but also performers, requiring continuous content output and maintenance of online presence. This dual identity intensifies psychological strain and fatigue. Directed Need Theory posits that individuals seek recognition and response through expression. When feedback is insufficient or the gap widens, psychological fulfillment diminishes. In contrast, middle-aged and older users exhibit more instrumental and goal-oriented expression. They tend to focus on real-world issues or practical information, with relatively stable expression motives less susceptible to external feedback fluctuations. Mature social role identity and stronger emotional regulation enable them to actively filter and select information amid overload.

It is evident that age differences do not simply correlate with expression frequency but reflect variations in psychological maturity and emotional regulation capabilities. Younger groups rely more heavily on external responses within information cycles, while older groups are better equipped to maintain emotional stability through internal judgment.

4.2.3 Non-Significant Differences in Gender and Online Duration

4.2.3.1 Disappearing Gender Differences and Behavioral Convergence

Gender boundaries in online expression are gradually dissolving. As social media becomes a primary arena for daily communication, men and women's usage habits and expression styles are converging, rendering gender an insignificant behavioral differentiator. Research findings indicate no significant difference in expression willingness between genders ($p>0.05$). This discovery suggests that traditional assumptions about "women being more active and men more reserved" no longer apply to contemporary online environments.

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Table 6 Group Statistics

	Q1 Gender	Number of Cases	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean
SumQ11	1 male	159	15.4906	6.39805	0.50740
	2 female	159	14.7799	5.04367	0.39999

Table 7 Independent samples test

		Levene's Test for Homogeneity of Variances		t-test for equality of means						
		F	Significance	t	Degrees of Freedom	Significance (two-tailed)	Mean Difference	Standard Error of Difference	95% Confidence Interval for Difference Lower Bound	Upper Limit
Sum Q11	Assuming equal variance	26.014	0.000	1.100	316	0.272	0.71069	0.64610	-0.56051	1.98189
	Assuming no equal variance			1.100	299.665	0.272	0.71069	0.64610	-0.56077	1.98216

This shift is closely tied to the democratization of online communication structures. Social media algorithms prioritize interests and content over gender identity, thereby diminishing the prominence of gender attributes in expressive spaces. Interviews and observations further indicate that the willingness to express oneself is driven more by individual needs fulfillment and topic relevance than by gender identity. Female users are no longer the sole group of frequent voices; males also demonstrate active participation. This indicates that cyberspace has, to some extent, blurred gender boundaries, creating possibilities for diverse expression.

From the perspective of orientation needs theory, users-regardless of gender-seek psychological fulfillment through understanding and recognition in information interactions, diminishing gender's influence within motivational structures. Orientation needs shift from external characteristics to internal psychological dimensions, rendering gender no longer a key variable in explaining expression willingness. Thus, the disappearance of gender differences does not signify the dissolution of individual variation but rather reflects how psychological motivations dominate expressive behavior in cyberspace.

4.2.3.2 Nonlinear Relationship Between Online Duration and Expression Frequency

The duration of internet usage does not directly predict an individual's expression frequency. Research findings indicate that the correlation between online time and expression frequency is insignificant ($r = 0.052$, $p>0.05$), suggesting that time spent online is not a primary factor influencing expressive behavior. Users' willingness to voice opinions is driven more by psychological motivation, perceived expressive efficacy, and topic identification than by mere presence duration. During interviews, multiple users mentioned that they tend to speak frequently on specific topics or in particular scenarios, while spending most of their daily time browsing or remaining silent. In other words, online presence does not equate to active expression; there exists a disconnect between time invested and psychological engagement.

Table 8 Correlation

		Q5 Daily Internet Usage Duration	Q7 Frequency of expressing opinions on social media
Q5 Daily Internet Usage Duration	Pearson Correlation	1	0.052
	Significance (two-tailed)		0.351
	Number of Cases	318	318

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Q7 Frequency of expressing opinions on social media	Pearson Correlation	-0.052	1
	Significance (two-tailed)	0.351	
	Number of Cases	318	318

Table 9 Correlation

		Q2 Frequency of Internet Use	Q7 Frequency of expressing opinions on social media
Q6 Frequency of Internet Use	Pearson Correlation	1	0.064
	Significance (two-tailed)		0.257
	Number of Cases	318	318
Q7 Frequency of expressing opinions on social media	Pearson Correlation	-0.064	1
	Significance (two-tailed)	0.257	
	Number of Cases	318	318

This phenomenon reflects the complexity of expressive behavior: users prioritize expressive efficacy, topic relevance, and social feedback over mere dwell time. From a media studies perspective, this indicates the enduring existence of the "silent majority"-their presence in cyberspace does not equate to active participation. Platform mechanisms extend users' online time but cannot guarantee sustained emotional and cognitive engagement. Increased time spent on no longer equates to deeper participation; what truly influences expression is how individuals balance information density with psychological energy.

4.3 Impact

The structural shifts in the public opinion arena have not only reshaped the ecosystem of online communication but also profoundly impacted the formation of social sentiment and public discourse.First, the high-frequency expression of youth groups has created a pronounced "youth bias" in public discourse. Public attention tends to focus on entertainment, consumption, and personal emotions, while rational discussions on public affairs and policy become marginalized. This shift in topics has weakened the public nature of cyberspace, transforming social media from a platform for public discourse into a stage for emotional venting and identity display.

Second, algorithm-driven discourse structures amplify the echo chamber effect. Users trapped in homogeneous information environments are prone to "opinion bubbles," continuously consuming content that reinforces their existing positions, thereby deepening biases and intensifying group polarization. Young people in this process often mistakenly believe their views represent the mainstream, further amplifying antagonistic sentiments and "camp-based identification." This not only undermines the diversity of public discourse but also weakens the overall atmosphere of rational discussion in society.

From a social psychology perspective, this discourse structure also fuels the spread of "expression anxiety." Frequent expression leads young people to increasingly perceive public pressure and the risk of judgment, resulting in psychological burdens like "fear of saying the wrong thing" and "fear of being misunderstood." Some users consequently avoid public discourse or retreat to private expression spaces, creating a contradictory state of "high presence, low expression." This state reflects both expression fatigue in online communities and reveals the widespread perception of risk in digital public spheres.

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5 Summary and Discussion

This study employs the Orientation Needs Theory as an analytical framework to explore the formation mechanisms and influencing factors of expression fatigue among internet users. Through a combination of questionnaire surveys and in-depth interviews, the research finds: Younger groups, driven by higher orientation needs, express more actively but are also more susceptible to fatigue arising from feedback gaps and pressure; older groups exhibit lower expression willingness but, due to limited expectations, are relatively spared from intense fatigue. Gender differences and online duration showed no significant impact on expression willingness, indicating that expressive behavior depends more on whether needs are met than on personal characteristics or time spent online.

The lack of significant gender and online duration effects also holds implications. At the research level, it suggests scholars should incorporate more complex mediating and moderating variables-such as guidance need levels, platform types, or issue sensitivity—when examining expression willingness, rather than relying solely on demographic or behavioral indicators like gender or online duration. Practically, it cautions platforms and society against simplistically categorizing users or predicting speech behavior based on "gender" or "duration," as this risks stereotypical understanding. More importantly, this finding suggests platforms should focus on stimulating the motivation of "silent users" to express themselves. By optimizing topic recommendations, providing secure feedback mechanisms, and lowering barriers to expression, potential participants can be encouraged to speak up more actively, thereby enhancing the diversity of the public discourse arena and the quality of rational discussion.

The emergence of expression fatigue stems not from a single variable but reflects the collective manifestation of unmet needs. The psychological foundation of online silence is built upon the absence of emotional value, diminished cognitive surplus, mismatched expectations of impact, and pressures from the discourse environment. Understanding this mechanism helps explain the widespread phenomenon of "high presence, low expression" in contemporary social media and offers insights for improving the online discourse environment: platforms can enhance users' psychological satisfaction by optimizing feedback systems, balancing algorithmic recommendations with diverse voice displays, and lowering barriers to expression, thereby delaying the onset of fatigue.

However, this study has certain limitations. First, the non-random sampling of the questionnaire may introduce selection bias, affecting the generalizability of conclusions. Second, while employing a mixed-methods design combining questionnaires and interviews, the integration between the two remains limited. Questionnaire results reveal overall trends, but the small sample size and insufficient representativeness of interview data weaken the explanatory power of qualitative analysis.Finally, this study primarily relied on cross-sectional data, failing to dynamically examine the temporal evolution of expressive fatigue. Future research could incorporate longitudinal designs or experimental methods to better elucidate causal relationships among variables.

Overall, this study holds value both theoretically and practically: theoretically, it combines orientation needs with information fatigue to broaden understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying online expression; practically, it offers insights for social media platforms to optimize interaction mechanisms and

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promote rational expression. Future research could further refine sample structure, data acquisition, and methodological integration to more comprehensively reveal the complex relationship between internet expression willingness and fatigue.

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