

# The Impact of Parental Mediation and Social Media Use Frequency on Adolescent Mental Health in China

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## Abstract:

With the development of the new media era, people have begun to use social media, and teenagers are no exception. The complex and diverse information and content online pique their curiosity, leading them to become immersed in the online world for extended periods, unable to extricate themselves. Furthermore, inappropriate parenting styles have led to an increasing number of adolescents experiencing a range of mental health issues due to social media usage. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the impact and relationship between the frequency of social media use in China and parental mediation on adolescents' mental health. The analysis of adolescents' mental health will be conducted through the lens of parental mediation theory. This study used a survey method for data collection, targeting adolescents aged 10 to 19. At least 30 responses were collected for each age group, with 19 questions. Research has confirmed that the frequency of social media use is negatively correlated with the mental health of adolescents, while parental media restrictions and active mediation are positively correlated with adolescents' mental health. Through this research, it is hoped that parents will remain attentive to their children's physical and mental development recognize the pessimistic consequences that social media can have on their children's overall well-being, and work together to create an environment that promotes both online health and mental well-being, allowing young people to grow in a positive and loving atmosphere.

**Keywords:** Social Media Use Frequency; Parental Mediation; Mental Health

## 1. Introduction

With the rise of social media, Chinese teenagers have gradually begun to rely on online platforms for extensive social interactions and to access various types of information and content, this information can be a double-edged sword for their psychological well-being, reflecting its dual nature. Good social media can help teenagers build confidence and adaptability, enabling them to better face challenges and setbacks.

In recent years, teenagers who frequently use social media have shown different psychological states. Here, the author explores the influence of the frequency of social media use among teenagers and parental mediation on their mental health. The mental health of adolescents is crucial; mentally healthy teenagers can effectively balance the pressures and motivations in their lives, maintain emotional stability, and reduce the occurrence of emotional disorders such as anxiety and depression. Currently, approximately 10%-20% of children and adolescents worldwide suffer from mental health disorders, with anxiety and depression accounting for 43% of these cases.

According to the latest statistics from China, the number of people with depression in China has exceeded 95 million, and among them, 30.28% are children and adolescents under the age of 18. The trends of younger age, widespread occurrence, and severity are currently evident in the psychological issues faced by adolescents in China. Therefore, it is urgent to strengthen and address the mental health work for children and adolescents.

The topic of “adolescent mental health” has become a major focus of attention in society today, in response to this phenomenon. An increasing number of adolescents are dropping out of school and experiencing strained relationships with their parents due to mental health issues, alongside a rise in negative emotions stemming from anxiety and depression. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze in depth the impact of parental mediation and the frequency of social media use on adolescent mental health.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), adolescents are defined as a group of people between the ages of 10 and 19. By examining factors such as age, gender, and the two major personality types of MBTI, adolescents are analyzed to see if their mental health is influenced and shaped in similar ways. Under ideal conditions, most adolescents will have a healthy psychology, i.e. they will use online media to socialise in an online positive environment.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Research on Adolescent Mental Health

In today’s society, with the development of the new media era, the uniqueness of the physical and mental development of individuals at the adolescent stage and their sensitivity to changes in the social and living environment have led to an increase in the number of psychological problems among adolescent groups [1]. Adolescence is a critical period of personality growth and development, and if mental health issues are not prevented and dealt with early, they can lead to many negative consequences.

Using mental health measurement indicators, scholars at home and abroad have found that a large proportion of adolescents have mental health problems. Research on adolescent mental health, including mental health measurement indicators, is also constantly being improved and developed. Scholars such as O’Connor of Griffith University in Australia developed the MHLS scale, which has a stable structure and can measure all psychological attributes in this definition. The scale can not only measure students’ mental health status but also evaluate the effectiveness of an intervention by detecting changes in an individual’s mental health status [2]. Furthermore, Kessler and others from the University of Michigan developed a self-rated scale, known as the Kessler Psychological Scale, which assesses the risk of mental health issues in the population. Based on this scale, Kessler categorizes individual mental health status into four levels, effectively measuring anxiety and depression in the subjects [3]. Wang Jisheng compiled the “China Middle School Student Mental Health Scale (MSSMHS)”, which measures the mental health status of middle school students through 10 factors expressing the negative emotions of middle school students, so as to provide them with targeted help and support [4].

There are many factors that lead to mental health problems in teenagers, including family environment factors, parental relationships, and personal personality characteristics. So far, most of the existing studies have explored the factors affecting adolescents’ mental health in terms of individual characteristics, family characteristics, and external environmental characteristics. Among individual characteristics, adolescents’ mental health is affected by factors such as gender, age, and personality. Xi Wei and Ma Liping found that in adolescence, girls are more likely to experience mood swings and show negative emotions than boys, which may be attributed to girls being more sensitive to emotions at this stage [5]. Scholars such as Zhong and Ding found that adolescents face more life and academic pressures as they grow older, which can lead to a decline in psychological well-being [6].

## 2.2 Research on Social Media Usage Frequency

The impact of the frequency of social media use on teenagers is multi-faceted, the most important of which is mental health. Excessive use of online social networks among teenagers may lead to a decline in self-control, feelings of depression, lack of energy, and a disinterest in activities and perseverance, resulting in frequent arguments with parents and disharmony in family relationships. Long-term addiction to online social networking may also induce psychological diseases such as autism and anxiety disorders, leading to a withdrawn personality and unwillingness to interact with the outside world. High-frequency Internet use has a negative impact on the health of the population, Mathers et al. examined the relationship between time spent using electronic media (television, computers, video games, and telephones) and self-assessed health (depression, anxiety, etc.) among adolescents based on survey data from 925 adolescents from a school in Australia, and concluded that high-frequency use of online media leads to poorer health status.

## 2.3 Related Research on Parental Media Mediation

### 2.3.1 Definition of Parental Mediation

Parental intervention/mediation refers to the actions taken by parents to harness the positive effects of media on their children while avoiding the negative impacts. It encompasses all methods by which parents manage, supervise, and guide the media resources and content their children are exposed to. The concept first appeared in the 1980s. Due to the deregulation of television in the United States at that time, there were few regulations on children's television viewing, and it was mainly formed for the television medium. However, with the advent of the Internet and emerging social media, times are changing and parental mediation is changing with them, parent-child interactions and media use have been a common focus in family and media research. Therefore, parental mediation theory includes the following two major models of mediation: restrictive mediation, and active mediation.

### 2.3.2 Types of Parental Mediation

Restrictive mediation consists of rules or restrictions designed to protect children from negative media influences. For example, rules might include the times their children are allowed to watch television or the specific television programs they can watch. In the research on television conducted by scholars such as Valkenburg et al. [7], it was found that restrictive mediation is the primary mediation strategy adopted by families with young children, as parents fear that negative media content may affect their

children's healthy development. Restrictive mediation based on mobile phones involves implementing rules to manage children's usage behavior. Parents can set time limits for mobile phone use; specify what content on the phone is allowed (including installing filtering or blocking software); or require that children complete certain goals before using the phone (for example, the child has completed schoolwork or chores).

Active mediation refers to parents explaining and discussing media or specific media content with their children, such as news reports, advertisements, or information related to online games. It may also include parents' explanations of the differences between media and reality. As a result, many parents are concerned about the negative impact of media content on their children, prompting them to engage in discussions about media use with their children and to approach the topic with a positive attitude.

### 2.3.3 Parental mediation affects adolescents' mental health

In response to different forms of media mediation, it is limited to verifying that mediation can effectively reduce the negative impact of media on children. Restrictive mediation can reduce the time spent using social media, reduce the chance of children being addicted to the Internet, and is effective in preventing children from being exposed to violence and pornographic content; Active mediation reduces children's exposure to undesirable social media, strengthens children's privacy protection on online media, and for younger adolescents, parents stimulate children's attention while watching videos/films, asking questions or commenting on what they are watching, and provide children with linguistic, cognitive and digital learning opportunities; Parental mediation can effectively reduce the negative impact of media on teenagers. In terms of age differences among children, previous studies have found that the younger the children, the more parental intervention they will receive. On the contrary, the older the children, the greater the degree of parental intervention. It will decrease [8, 9]. For teenagers aged 10-19 years old, we found that early adolescents are more likely to listen to their parents' management and education. While late teenagers are in adolescence and gradually have their own independent thoughts, so some teenagers will violate the constraints of their parents. Being in a rebellious state for a long time, mental health problems are more frequent.

While this area has been studied by many scholars, few articles have examined the effects of social media usage frequency and parental mediation on adolescent mental health in the new media age. Parental mediation was proposed in the era of television, nowadays it is the new media era and most people are socialising through social

media. Therefore, in the era of new media, there is a lack of sufficient empirical data and thorough research evidence regarding parental mediation and its effect on the psychological health of teenagers.

### 3. Research Method

This study uses a survey method to conduct research on the current situation of the frequency of using social media and the impact of parental mediation on adolescent mental health. Based on the object of this study, the author used questionnaires to conduct research on social software such as Weibo and Xiaohongshu. The distribution of questionnaire stars took a total of 7 days, when the questionnaires were distributed, a random sampling survey was conducted on relevant personnel, and a total of 320 questionnaires were recovered. Questionnaires with short answering times and incomplete information were deleted, and a total of 270 valid questionnaires were recovered.

First, the related scales of social media usage frequency, parental mediation, and adolescent mental health were queried. The survey is divided into three sections: the first part includes personal information and basic details about the youth, consisting of a total of 4 questions.; the second part is the situation survey, including the social software that teenagers often use and the reasons for use, with a total of 10 questions; the third part is the matrix scale. There are 5 questions in total, focusing on the two independent variables of frequency of social media use and parental adjustment (restrictive adjustment and positive adjustment). In order to facilitate calculations in this section, each question is assigned a 5-point scale. Scoring instructions: Each question has 5 options and is scored from 1 to 5.

### 4. Result

Through data analysis, the independent variables are input into the regression model based on the hypothesized causal order. First, all study variables are normally distributed. Secondly, based on the scatter plot, it can be seen that there is a linear relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The author examined the multicollinearity of the model, and the data derived from the model shows that all VIF values are less than 5, with the D-W value being around 2. This indicates that there is no autocorrelation among the models, suggesting that they are independent and completely uncorrelated. Additionally, statistical analysis shows that all reliability coefficients are greater than 0.7. According to the regression analysis, the R-square value is 0.546, which means that the frequency of social media use, parental restriction mediation,

and parental positive mediation can explain 54.6% of the variation in mental health. When asked about the frequency with which teenagers use social media over the course of a day and a week, data analysis shows that the regression coefficient for social media usage frequency is -0.307 ( $t=-7.841$ ,  $p=0.000<0.01$ ), which is sufficient to indicate that higher usage frequency of social media can impact the mental health of adolescents. When asked about a series of behaviors regulated by parents' restrictions on adolescents' use of online social media, the regression coefficient value of parental restriction mediation was 0.255 ( $t=6.616$ ,  $p=0.000<0.01$ ), which means that parental restriction mediation will have a negative impact on mental health. Significant positive relationship. When asked about a series of behaviors that parents actively mediate regarding adolescents' use of online social media, the regression coefficient value of parents' active mediation is 0.220 ( $t=5.800$ ,  $p=0.000<0.01$ ), which means that parents' active mediation will have a negative impact on mental health. Significant positive relationship.

### 5. Discussion

Regarding the impact of the frequency of social media use on the mental health of teenagers, with the development of the new media era, mobile phones have become indispensable items in the lives. No matter what age group uses mobile phones, for today's teenagers, the Daily study pressure is high, and both school and family put a certain amount of pressure on them. Furthermore, with the prevalence of new media software nowadays, students will always discuss the topic among themselves, and in order to keep up with the times as well as to have a common topic with their classmates, which leads to a herd mentality, therefore, they devote a lot of their minds to social media. While the quality of information in social media inevitably varies between good and bad, young people are not yet mentally mature and find it difficult to distinguish between what is true and good and what is false and ugly. Some negative and unsafe behaviours in social media may lead to blind group imitation. Since social media has the characteristics of strong interactivity, high audience participation, timely dissemination, and two-way feedback, it breaks the singleness of traditional media. Therefore, if they are immersed in social media for a long time, young people's thoughts will be biased, which is not good for their mental health development. So teenagers should go to use social media in a positive and healthy environment to use social media wisely and play the role of social media, instead of being addicted to it, as a teenager, the assignment is to study, and using social media is only used to connect with other people and relax for a short period

of time.

Teenagers are the audience. Their interests and information usage habits are showing a trend of diversification, differentiation, and segmentation. Various information services with big data as the underlying logic are competing for the audience's attention. The selectivity of the audience has increased, and the accessible Media content has also increased, and interpretations of social reality have become more diverse. In order to effectively guide them to use social media, and secondly, to prevent children from being negatively affected cognitively and psychologically by being mixed up with good and bad people on the Internet, parents will adopt a restrictive mediation approach to educate their children. This method is the most common mediation method used by families with early adolescents and parents who fear the influence of negative media. Parents will take restrictive measures to manage their children's social media usage, and parents will reasonably regulate the time for children use mobile phones based on their children's learning situation and daily schedule, children will be designated to play specific social media content (including installing filtering or blocking software), and some negative content will be eliminated for them in advance, so that children can use social media with confidence; learning tasks must be completed before asking children to play on mobile phones (such as, the children have completed their school homework), which not only allows teenagers to relax and unwind through social media, but also provides them with a safe online environment.

The impact of parents' active mediation on adolescents' mental health. First, active mediation refers to the interaction and discussion between parents and children regarding the content in online media. Active mediation provided by parents can effectively reduce the possible negative impact of violent content. Secondly, active mediation can help children identify the differences between social media content and the real world, thereby improving children's ability to judge and distinguish media content. Positive mediation used by parents can reduce some of the online risks that adolescents may encounter. For children aged 10 to 12, online information disclosure can be reduced to some extent by both active mediation and restrictive mediation from parents, but the impact of active mediation is more pronounced. For adolescents aged 13-17, only active mediation is effective. As the child grows older, active mediation is consistently effective in reducing the risk of adolescents' online disclosures. Parents adopt an active mediation approach to allow their children to have a certain degree of correct judgment. As children grow older, their skills in using media become more advanced and proficient, and parents perceive that

children have a certain level of control and resistance to the negative effects of social media, thus reducing their worries about their use of social media. Parents combine positive mediation with less restrictive mediation to allow older adolescents to have more autonomy while using social media safely.

For teenagers, parental mediation can help them improve their concentration and independent thinking skills, and teenagers can use relevant learning applications on social media to help with learning difficulties and follow up on learning progress. Social media provides teenagers with opportunities to communicate with people from different backgrounds and regions, which helps them develop cross-cultural communication skills. Cultivate young people's critical thinking skills and information literacy so that they can think independently and judge the authenticity of information.

From the perspective of media content design, if parents lack intervention time or teenagers are in an unsupervised state, how to ensure the reduction of potentially harmful consequences of online content exposure on the overall well-being of adolescents is also a matter that needs to be considered. Parents need to maintain communication with their children and pay attention to their mental state at all times. Therefore, parents need to adopt appropriate mediation methods based on their children's actual situation to encourage their children to use social media appropriately and maximize the positive role of social media.

## 6. Conclusion

By addressing the issue of adolescent mental health, this research examined its related factors. In summary, this study revealed two key aspects: the frequency of social media use and parental media mediation. Through the lens of parental media mediation theory, this research has advanced the understanding of adolescent mental health. It provides valuable insights for creating a mental health-friendly environment.

This research has the potential to influence the understanding and management of adolescent mental health. Overall, this study not only advances theoretical understanding but also provides practical insights that can be utilized for the mental health of teenagers. The author has achieved the goals set at the beginning of the research, and this investigation successfully answered the initial research question. In summary, this study validates the impact and relationship between the frequency of social media use in China, parental mediation (both restrictive and active mediation), and adolescent mental health, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of mental health. Given this research findings, the frequency of social me-

dia use and parental mediation factors are closely related to the mental health of adolescents. Specifically, there is a negative correlation between social media use frequency and adolescents' mental health, while parental restrictive mediation and active mediation are positively correlated.

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