The Effect of Social Media Engagement and Understanding on Adolescents' Marriage Attitudes

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Abstract:

The current study is primarily geared towards analyze the impact of social media on adolescents' marriage attitudes and to explore the extent to which these factors affect teenagers. The Media and Technology Usage and Attitudes Scale (MTUAS) was used to measure social media engagement. The New Social Media Context Awareness Scale (SMCA) was the measurement of social media understanding. Marriage attitude was assessed using the General Attitudes Toward Marriage Scale (GAMS). A total of 140 adolescents from 14 to 24 years old were measured. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients demonstrated the acceptable reliability of this study. In conclusion, the correlation between marriage attitudes, social media engagement and social media understanding was significant. Therefore, social media understanding made a negative influence on marriage attitudes. The forecasted outcome carries both theoretical implications and practical relevance, potentially shedding light on the profound impact that social media platforms exert on the perspectives and attitudes of young individuals towards the institution of marriage.

Keywords: Social media engagement; social media understanding; marriage attidtude; adolescent. .

1. Introduction

As of 2023, the marriage rate in China was 5.4‰. Compared to 2019 (6.6‰), the decrease was 1.2‰. In the age distribution of the marriage registration population in 2023, adolescents between 20 and 24 years old accounted for 2.125 million people. In conclusion, China's marriage registration number is showing a continuous downward trend [1].

The thought of "fear of marriage" has become popular among teenagers under the age of 24. Social media, such as Weibo, has the characteristics of low threshold and decentralization. It has become an important platform for teenagers to express their fear of marriage and has also become an important way to observe the marriage attitudes of young netizens. Up to 2021, there were 153 content communities whose topic was "fear of marriage.". These content communities had an average of 17.25 million views and an average of 5,353 discussions [2]. Certainly, the fear of marriage on social media has turned into an obvi-

ous phenomenon.

By 2024, Chinese social media users have exceeded one billion, accounting for one-fifth of the world's social media users [3]. For example, up to the third quarter of 2023, there were more than 130 million Weibo monthly active users aged 16-22. The content pushed on social media will affect the various views of teenagers to a certain extent. Words, images, emotions, and other verbal and non-verbal symbols may cause the emotional impact of the communication participants [4]. Generally, negative emotions spread more strongly and more rapidly than positive emotions [5]. Personal emotions are magnified through the Internet and form a spiral of emotion in mutual infection and feedback cycles [6, 7]. Internet emotions will affect individuals' reactions, attitudes, and behaviors to related events [8]. It not only has an impact on the phased explicit surface, such as audience mentality and cognition, but also has an impact on the hidden deep layer of value and culture in a long-term sense [9].

Adolescents are the main social media participants. In the progress of surfing social media, a large number of contents will subtly affect their attitudes and opinions. Taking fear of marriage as an example, young netizens will go from learning about others' fear to amplifying their inner emotions and joining discussions to spread the phenomenon further. This progress can affect individual behavior and social phenomenon, leading to a decline in marriage rates or a later marriage. There is no doubt that the correlation between marriage attitudes, social media and adolescents, was significant.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

The questionnaire link was published by Wenjuanxing, which is the most common data collection procedure in China. To receive a more variant sample, data were compiled from various WeChat chatting groups over a period of two weeks. Subjects were emphasized that the questionnaire data was for research purposes only, and any answers would be valid. The data collection process was voluntary and anonymous. A total of 140 subjects were tested. There were 46 males, accounting for 33%, and 94 females, accounting for 67%. This study only took 14-24-year-old adolescents as the research object. Excluding subjects under 14 and over 24 years old who do not meet the age conditions, 134 valid subjects were retained.

2.2 Measures

A questionnaire packet that included gender, age range, education degree, social media engagement, social media understanding, and marriage attitudes was created. Basic information, including gender, age range, and education degree, was directly filled in by the subjects.

2.1.1 The Media and Technology Usage and Attitudes Scale (MTUAS)

Social media engagement was assessed using the Media and Technology Usage and Attitudes Scale (MTUAS) [10]. It is a reliable measurement of various items, including a range of present technology and media usages. There are 15 subscales, 11 measuring usage, and four assessing attitudes in the MTUAS includes. The subscales can be used separately because of the reliability. Considering the range of the current study, only the sub-scale of Internet searching and General social media usage were administered and translated into Chinese by the author. The Internet searching subscale ($\alpha = 0.91$) and general social media usage subscale ($\alpha = 0.97$) showed good internal consistency. The Internet searching subscale includes 4 items rated on a scale from 1 (Never) to 10 (All the time) measured the frequency of Internet searching for various content. An item example from the scale reads: "Search the Internet for news on any device." The General social media usage subscale includes 9 items rated on a scale from 1 (Never) to 10 (All the time) measured the frequency of different usages of social media. A representative item from the scale reads: "Check your Facebook page or other social networks." In this study, above sub-scales were combined into one scale to scale social media participation. Averaging the answers of the items, with higher number meaning more frequent social media engagement levels.

2.1.2 New Social Media Context Awareness Scale (SMCA)

Social media understanding was measured on the Statistical Properties of a New Social Media Context Awareness Scale (SMCA), whose Cronbach's alpha coefficient ($\alpha = 0.87$). Four items are contained in the SMCA [11]. One of the items reads: "I am able to access the information and content I want on social media." Subjects scored their agreement degree with the four items on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). In this study, marks were calculated by averaging the items. Higher scores pointing better understanding of social media.

2.1.3 General Attitudes Toward Marriage Scale (GAMS)

In this study, the sub-scale General Attitudes Toward Marriage Scale (GAMS) from The Marital Scales: Measurement of Intent, Attitudes, and Aspects Regarding Marital Relationship was used to measure marriage attitudes [12].

There are 10 items divided into two scoring algorithms in the GAMS. An example of forward scoring reads: "Marriage is beneficial." An example of reverse scoring reads: "I am fearful of marriage." 10 items can also measure three attitudes: active attitudes, passive attitudes, and fears or doubts. A sample of active attitudes reads: "Marriage is a 'good idea.'" A sample of passive attitudes reads: "People should not marry." A sample of fears or doubts reads: "I have doubts about marriage." Every item is scored through seven-point scale from 0 (Strongly disagree) to 6 (Strongly agree). Results revealed that Cronbach's alpha was 0.84 which showed good internal consistency for the GAMS items. In this study, the fearful and doubtful attitudes were classified as negative attitudes. Scores were processed and computed, with bigger number meaning more active attitudes toward marriage.

2.3 Data Analysis

Social media engage degree, marriage attitude and social media understanding were assumed to be highly correlated. To be specific, the correlation between engagement of social media and social media understanding was positive. Engagement and marriage attitudes were negatively

correlated. Social media understanding and marriage attitudes showed a negative correlation. To verify the assumption, descriptive statistics were computed by SPSS 30.0.0. Calculating Cronbach's alpha to point the internal reliability of each measure according to the cut-off levels [13]. The Pearson correlation index was used to estimate the strength of the association between the variables. According to the correlation, marriage attitudes was set as the dependent variable, engagement and understanding of social media were set as independent variables. Establishing a linear regression to explore the relationship between the factors in depth.

3. Results

3.1 Preliminary Analysis

Computing the reliability of three items referring to social media engagement ($\alpha = 0.82$), social media understanding ($\alpha = 0.77$), and marriage attitudes ($\alpha = 0.87$). In summary, above three items' Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was greater than 0.7, indicating that the questionnaire and the data's reliability was up to an acceptable standard (see Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of reliability analysis results

Items	Subitems	Sample size	Cronbach's Alpha
Social media engagement	11	134	0.82
Social media understanding	3	134	0.77
Marriage attitudes	8	134	0.87

Based on the correlation analysis results, there was a positive significant correlation between social media engagement and social media understanding ($r = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$). Social media engagement and marriage attitudes were significantly negatively correlated ($r = -0.173$, $p = 0.046 < 0.05$). Social media understanding and marriage attitudes

also showed a passive significant correlation ($r = -0.25$, $p = 0.004 < 0.05$) (see Table 2). In other words, the more engagement, the deeper understanding of social media and the more negative attitudes toward marriage. Social media engagement and understanding have a negative influence on marriage attitudes.

Table 2. Correlation analysis of the main variables of this study

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1.Gender	-				
2.Education	-0.14	-			
3.Social media engagement	0.13	-0.10	-		
4.Social media understanding	5.05	0.01	-.29**	-	
5.Marriage attitudes	-0.17	-0.03	-0.17*	-0.25**	-
Notes: ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.					

Taking social media engagement and understanding as independent variables and marriage attitudes as the dependent variable and conducted a linear regression. According to the linear regression analysis results, the social media

engagement's regression coefficient was -0.09 (t = -1.26, p = 0.210>0.05), meaning social media engagement did not affect marriage attitudes. Social media understanding's regression coefficient of was -0.35 (t = -2.44, p = 0.016 < 0.05), which indicates social media understanding had a negative influence on marriage attitudes, and social media understanding negatively affected marriage attitudes (see Table 3). The deeper understanding the participants had on social media, the more negative attitudes toward marriage attitudes were.

Table 3. Regression of social media engagement and understanding on marriage attitudes

	B	SE	t	p
Social media engagement	-0.09	0.07	-1.26	0.210
Social media understanding	-0.35	0.14	-2.44	0.016
R^2	0.072			
F	$F = 5.10, p = 0.007$			

Notes: a. Dependent variable: marriage attitudes. b. Predictors: social media engagement, social media understanding. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

4. Discussion

The results showed that deep social media engagement and understanding leads to passive feelings towards marriage, regardless of gender. These gender-neutral results had slight differences with the most recent research about social media. From the perspective of algorithms, the content pushed by social media to different groups is different. The most basic is gender [14]. From the gender perspective, females are more engaged in social media usage and are more likely to be influenced [15]. For example, based on the relevant research, females are more likely to suffer negative body image compared to males on social media, which includes three parts pe: reception, attitude, and behavioral tendency [16]. In this study, there was no difference in marriage attitudes for both genders. It is hard to determine whether this result was due to the peculiarity of marriage attitudes or the small sample of males. At least females' attitudes toward marriage were clear.

The positive effect of engage degree of social media on understanding degree of social media was also obvious. The more time users spend on cyberspace, the easier it is to get the information they want and feel about the social media's shaping role.

Role of social media in shaping marriage attitudes can also divided into two categories. The first category is the pushed content. The content that leads to marriage fear can be divided into three levels. First, the macro-level, such as laws and policies directly or indirectly related to marriage, including marriage law, cooling-off period before divorce, and pension protection. Second, the meso-level, mainly social factors, including the cost of marriage, interpersonal relations, and negative reports, such as bride price, conjugal relationships, and wife-killing news.

Third, the micro-level, that is, personal factors, including childhood experiences, excessive expectations, and independent consciousness, such as an unhappy childhood, expectations of true love, and desire for freedom [2]. All of the above are related to the fear of marriage.

The second category is the idealized self. According to the Dramaturgy proposed by Erving Goffman, people's daily life and communication activities can be regarded as dramatic performances [17]. This performance carries over to social media platforms, such as Weibo. In continuous interaction, performers adjust their performance behavior by focusing on the role-shaping of others. The self-role, in turn, reacts to the real character and behavior and tends to idealize [18]. Excessive idealization of self distorts mate selection criteria [19].

5. Limitations

Although the study results have verified the hypothesis, some limitations need to be taken into the account. First, the sample did not show high diversification. In particular, there were twice as many females as males. Most participants had bachelor's degrees. High school, junior college, and graduate students were rare. This may make it difficult to analyze the differences in thoughts and behaviors due to gender and education level.

Moreover, the current study did not investigate which social media apps or websites are the leading platforms for marriage fear. Individuals may use more than one social media, and their understanding of social media and marriage attitudes may be influenced by a single or multiple social media. Some social media that made a weak influence on the subjects may have been considered in this study.

In addition, social media is not the only factor contributing to fear of marriage. The fear of marriage is comprehensive. Family, policy, or financial pressure is also one of the reasons for fear of marriage. In today's Chinese Internet environment, the gender antagonism is also serious, the fear of marriage is largely an extension of misandry or misogyny. In the present study, there is difficulty to define the extent to which social media contributes to the marriage fear and the social media contents which actually lead to this psychology [20].

Altogether, the present study can be seen as an exploratory research into social media and marriage attitudes among the Chinese adolescents, aiming at accelerating further investigations in this field and breaking the above limitations.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrated an explorative model that delineates the link existing between social media engagement, a profound comprehension about social media dynamics, and marriage attitudes. This study's findings indicated that when individuals, particularly adolescents, possess a deep and nuanced understanding of the workings and implications of social media, they tend to exhibit a more negative or skeptical stance toward the institution of marriage. This reaction is not merely superficial but is rooted in a more informed and critical perspective on how social media influences interpersonal relationships and societal norms. The study thus underscores the significance of knowing the impact that a well-informed grasp of social media can have on shaping the views of young individuals regarding long-term commitments such as marriage.

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