



RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE TRUST OF DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS TO INFORMATION RELEASED BY DIFFERENT AGENCIES ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

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ABSTRACT

In the context of the contemporary information society, social media is an indispensable information tool in daily life. The fluidity and openness of information on social media lead to a mix of information on its platforms, often making it impossible for users to distinguish the authenticity of the information. It is common for false information to be widely spread and official announcements to be questioned by netizens. Studying how people obtain information on social media and the degree of trust in the information released by different platforms is of great significance for strengthening the management of information dissemination, improving the information dissemination mechanism, and promoting the peaceful development of the media. This study will take social media users of different age groups as the research object through case studies, questionnaires, and interviews to explore the differences in the trust degrees of different age groups in various information on social media platforms and to further compare and analyze the differences. On the one hand, it can grasp the current research on the information trust model of social media users of all ages, and on the other hand, it hopes to provide effective countermeasures and suggestions for strengthening new media information management.

KEYWORDS

Social Media, Age Group, Information Trust Degree, Information Dissemination, Social Reversal Events

1. INTRODUCTION

With the rapid development of information technology and smartphones, the Internet has long become an inseparable part of people's lives. As the carrier platform of the Internet, social media has naturally become an important channel for people to obtain information. The Digital 2021 Global Overview Report shows that the number of social media users worldwide will reach 4.2 billion in 2021, and China has 931 million social media users (Jing and Peng, 2017). These users distribute in various age groups, affecting the dissemination process of social media information. Users of each age group are disseminators and receivers of information. However, in the era of the post-truth Internet, social media platforms have mixed information releases, resorting to one-sided information of emotions and personal beliefs, false information and rumors, which can influence public opinion and public opinion more than stating objective facts (Tian, 2013). In the context of the Internet, the widely disseminated and unconfirmed information that has a negative impact on the Internet society by using Internet platforms can be called Internet rumors 2. There have been many public opinion reversal events caused by false information in recent years. Only the China People's Daily Online Public Opinion Data Center sorted out 22 public opinion reversal events that caused substantial repercussions in 2021 (Teng, 2020). Different information agencies publish a large amount of information on social media platforms, requiring users to identify the information's credibility and give feedback. Moreover, because groups of different age groups show different degrees of trust in the information on social media due to the influence of ideas, it often becomes a contradiction and conflict of information: young people feel that the information of the elderly is blocked, older people think young people's news is fake. At the same time, users of different age groups will selectively spread some information according to their own judgment due to the influence of their

characteristics (The SPSSAU project, 2022).

Therefore, this research will base on user groups of different age groups and analyzing the behaviors of users of various age groups in receiving information and the habits of using social media to reconcile the information contradictions caused by the age difference among netizens. Help government departments establish a better Internet platform information supervision mechanism and suggest social media management.

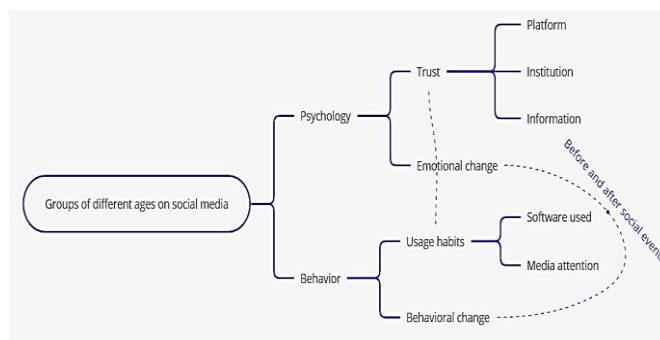


Figure 1

2. RESEARCH DESIGN

2.1 Research Logic Analysis

With the rapid development of Internet technology, more and more users

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regard social media as an indispensable part of life. In reality, the so-called social interaction refers to the communication between people, a social activity that uses a certain method to transmit information and exchange ideas to achieve a certain purpose. Social media is the platform for information exchange in the new era (Zhou, 2017). Information transmission is one of the most important functions of social media. It is precise because social media has the characteristics of information flow that people need to judge the degree of trust in the information obtained on the platform.

This study hopes to study the differences in the trust degree of social media information among different user groups by dividing the age groups of users (Yang et al., 2016). Through the research on the interviewees' psychological, emotional, and user behavior, we hope to explore three aspects: first, the difference in people's trust in different social media platforms, institutions, and information; second, the relationship between people's trust and daily use behavior; the third is the differences in the changes in the psychology and behavior of users of different age groups after being affected by social reversal events.

2.2 Research Subjects

This study aims to study the habits of different age groups of users using social media. In order to make the following discussion clearer, it is necessary to explain the classification of the research objects.

The United Nations Economic and Social Affairs Agency (1982) issued the Interim Guiding Principles of the International Standard for the Classification of Age Groups, which divided people's age groups into six stages, namely infancy (under 1 year old), juvenile (1-14 years old), youth (15-24 years old), prime-age (25-44 years old), middle age (45-64 years old) and old age (65 years old and above) (Dandeka et al., 2013). In 2015, the World Health Organization under the United Nations officially revised the age standards. According to the new age classification, the young age is from 25 to 44, middle age is 44-60, elderly age is 60-75, senile age is 75-90 and long-livers are after 90.

However, in actual survey research, researchers need to re-divide the age group of the sample according to the research needs. In Living Here - Research Report on Social Networking and Empowerment, the Social Networking and Empowerment Research Group (2017) identified the "post-90s" and "post-80s" who are under the age of 26 and between the ages of 26 and 35 are young people; the "post-70s" and "post-60s" groups between the ages of 36 and 55 are defined as middle-aged; the "post-50s" who are over 55 are old.

Considering that the publication dates of the documents mentioned above are some time ago, the social age division is also changing. Combined with the age distribution of the primary users on the current social media platform, this study will re-divide the age segments: the "Post-00" respondents aged 18-25 are called youth groups, the "post-80s" and "post-90s" respondents aged 26-40 are called middle-aged, and the participants aged 41-55 and above are called old groups (Pavlou and Gefen, 2004).

The 2018 China Social Media Ecology Overview White Paper, released by Kantar Media CIC divides the current social media in China into two categories: core and derivative. Core social media refers to the platform where users communicate, interact and share information with the help of core social media platforms to strengthen interpersonal relationships; derivative social media platforms rely on the content information created by users to obtain traffic. Since this research will mainly take the form of a questionnaire, the social media platforms are divided according to their daily functions to facilitate the respondents to understand the content of the questionnaire better. Split the core social media into chat software and forums; split the derivative social media into video portals, short video software, and social platforms (SNS communities).

3. THEORETICAL BASIS

3.1 The ABC Theory of Emotions

The ABC theory of emotions is a theory created by American psychologist Ellis. A represents an inducing event, and B represents some beliefs of an individual in response to this inducing event, that is, some views and explanations of the event (Hawkins, 2005). C stands for the result produced by itself. That is, human emotion and behavior results (c) are not directly caused by a specific triggering event (a) but are directly caused by the wrong belief (b) generated by the individual experiencing the event's incorrect cognition and evaluation. Applying the theory to this study, B represents the user's trust and attitude towards information, and the user's trust in event information will affect the user's subsequent behavior, resulting in an incorrect cognition of the causative event A.

Social media platforms act as a medium in this process.

3.2 Social Learning Theory

Albert Bandura developed the social learning theory. This theory emphasizes the importance of cognition and combines social cognition with social behavior. He believes that people have cognition and can make behavioral choices, so when people feel the changes in the external environment, they can make their own cognitive choices and then express their cognition and choices through behavior. The theory holds that human behavior can be changed through external learning, learning can be acquired through one's own experience, and cognition can be acquired and applied to oneself through the experience of a third person. The theory believes that human external performance is not only behavior but the result of the combined effect of cognition, behavior, environment and other factors.

4. DATA COLLECTION AND STATISTICS

In this study, a total of 193 people participated. Of these, 187 people filled out the questionnaire, and 6 were interviewed face-to-face. All are over 18 years old.

4.1 Data Analysis of Youth Interviewees

Among the youth group, 50% of the respondents said that they use social media for more than three hours a day, and only 3 people use it for less than an hour. The number of people who use it for 1-2 hours and 2-3 hours each accounts for about 20%. They most frequently use chat software such as WeChat and QQ, followed by video portals such as iQiyi and social platforms (SNS communities) such as Weibo and Xiaohongshu. A few people frequently use forums such as Tieba and Zhihu and short video software such as Kuaishou and Douyin.

88% of young respondents believe that different information release channels will affect their judgment of information trust, but they have no apparent preference for platforms that obtain trust information, and some of the above social media platforms choose to trust them. They believe that official media information is the most credible on social media platforms. 27% of young people trust content from the media, and 25% trust their friends (moments, people they follow) and judge the actual situation themselves. When judging the credibility of an information source, they will first pay attention to the organization that issued the information and the degree to which the information is related to recent hot events, and secondly pay attention to the social media platform where the organization is located. As for the time of information release, the number of comments and forwarding of information, and the length of articles or videos, they think that the importance of these three factors is general or even not very important. In participating in public social events, 52.78% of the young respondents experienced a reversal of public opinion, the so-called "face slap" incident.

4.2 Data Analysis of Middle-Aged Interviewees

For middle-aged groups, most people use social media for 1-2 hours a day, accounting for 45.65%, but 21.74% of the respondents still use social media for more than three hours a day. The most frequently used social media platforms are still chat software such as WeChat and QQ, followed by short video software such as Kuaishou and Douyin, but other software is not commonly used by young and middle-aged groups.

78% of the respondents believe that different information release channels will affect their judgment on the degree of information trust. Most people trust the information they get on chat software and social platforms, but 32.61% doubt the information on all platforms. 91.3% of the respondents expressed their trust in the information of the official media, and 23% of the respondents trusted their own judgment on the actual situation. They generally agree with the youth group regarding judging the credibility of information sources. In the process of participating in public social events, only 34.78% of the middle-aged respondents have experienced public opinion reversal events.

4.3 Data Analysis of Old Interviewees

Among the elderly respondents, whether the time spent using social media is within 1 hour, 1-2 hours, 2-3 hours, or more than 3 hours, the proportion of composite respondents is about 20%. Their habit of using social media platforms is similar to that of middle-aged people. They are all commonly used chat software, followed by short video software. At the same time, they believe that most of the information from chat software is credible. The old groups also trust the state media as an information release agency, but unlike the middle-aged groups, 26% also believe that information

obtained from friends is equally credible. When judging the credibility of an information source, they will first pay attention to the information publishing agency and publishing platform and then pay attention to the time when the information was released and the degree of connection between the information and recent hot events. In the process of participating in public social events, only 31.25% of the old respondents have experienced public opinion reversal events.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

5.1 Cause Analysis of Characteristic Data

Youth group: The young group is a group that grew up in the Internet age. They have a solid ability to accept new things and are very familiar with social media. In addition to the daily chat software, the social media software they use daily prefers video portals and social communities, which is also in line with the current social trend of young people.

There is a big difference between the information organizations that young people follow and the ones they trust. They often pay attention to the content from the media and the news forwarded by friends, but they trust the information from the official media, which is usually less concerned. This is because young people mostly pay attention to personal hobbies and entertainment news on social media and usually use self-media videos as a pastime, but they still trust official news for major social events. At the same time, after experiencing the reversal of public opinion, the youth group is more alert to the acquisition of information, and they often choose to check the authenticity of the information through various channels. Most respondents believe they can better distinguish the authenticity of social media information, so they often have their own judgments about the degree of trust in the information. On the one hand, they trust official news the most, but on the other hand, they choose to trust information from other channels based on their own experience.

Most of the young respondents have experienced public opinion reversal events. It can be seen that the youth group sometimes accelerates the fermentation of such events.

Middle-aged groups: Most of the middle-aged groups participating in this survey are born in the 1980s, and they have strong critical thinking and questioning spirit. Most middle-aged groups trust the information transmitted by friends, so they trust the information obtained by the intensive chat software of friends. At the same time, their most commonly used social media platforms are chat software such as WeChat.

They also use other social media software but are more or less suspicious of information. Middle-aged groups only trust important information from particular institutions and certain social media, but they also hope to verify the authenticity of the information through multi-channel verification. As a result, most of the information flow of this group of people occurs between relatives and friends. Different friends bring different news and then share their understanding with each other, forming a closed loop. Unless it is some significant social event, this method will only limit the user's information to some areas of their concern. Most of these messages are about personal lives, and events are rarely reversed. Therefore, about 50% of the respondents have experienced a public opinion reversal event, and 50% of the respondents have not experienced it.

Old groups: The channels for the middle-aged and elderly groups to obtain news are relatively simple. The social media platforms they frequently use are chat software and short video software. It can be seen that the main purpose of older people using social media is leisure and entertainment. Since they have less exposure to social media platforms, differences between platforms hardly affect their trust in information. Their way of contacting social information is more traditional, usually through print

media (newspapers) or news from TV stations, so they have great trust in official media information.

Moreover, because the old groups pay less attention to online information, they usually only browse the information from officials and friends. Therefore, when some public opinion events occur, the elderly groups are often the latest groups to get access to information. Usually, they can understand hot social issues only after the official media report them. It can be seen that there will be an inevitable time delay in the information received by the elderly groups.

5.2 Behavior Comparison by Age Group

First of all, it can be seen that checking social media software is what the vast majority of people will do every day. Among the respondents, only 24 people said that they do not necessarily check social media every day. This part of the population is evenly distributed across all age groups, and overall it can be seen that age does not affect whether a person has the habit of checking social media every day. The current Internet socialization has indeed penetrated users of all ages.

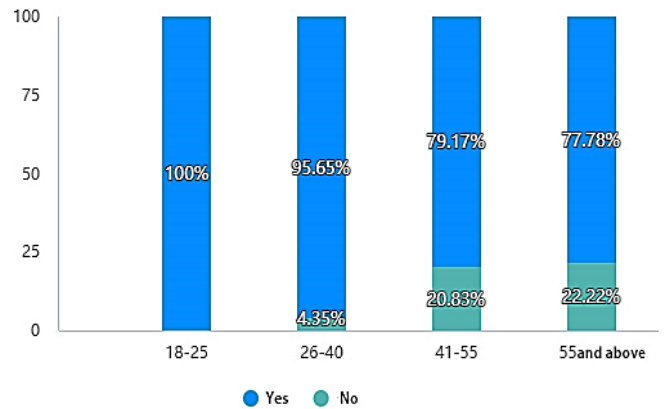


Figure 2

It can be seen from Table 1 that the relationship between age and the choice of commonly used social media platforms is significant at the 0.01 level ($\chi^2=48.749, p=0.000<0.01$), and the youth group of 18-25 chooses Zhihu, Douban and Tieba. The proportion of other forums is 33.33%, which will be significantly higher than the average level of 13.90%, and the proportion of video portals such as Bilibili and iQiyi is 63.89%, which will be significantly higher than the average level of 19.79%; those over 55 choose Douyin and Kuaishou. The proportion of short video software is 55.56%, which will be significantly higher than the average level of 42.25%.

Youth use the most social media platforms among the three age groups. More than 30% of the respondents choose the typical social media software on the market. Young people use almost every type of social media. The types of software used by the middle-aged and old groups are relatively similar, with chat software accounting for about 95% and short video software accounting for about 43%. As the age group grows, people put less and less energy into social media, and their ability to accept new things declines, so they are more focused on specific commonly used and familiar software.

Different social media software has its own age positioning. It can be found that chat software is basically used by all ages as a modern social means, while Xiaohongshu, Bilibili, and other software are obviously positioned to be younger.

Table 1: Cross summary					
Term	What is your age (%)				Total (n=187)
	18-25 (n=36)	26-40 (n=46)	41-55 (n=96)	55 and above (n=9)	
Chat software such as wechat and QQ	34 (94.44)	44 (95.65)	92 (95.83)	(100.00)	179 (95.72)
Zhihu, Douban, tieba and other forums	12 (33.33)	3 (6.52)	11 (11.46)	0 (0.00)	26 (13.90)
B station, iqiyi and other video portals	23 (63.89)	7 (15.22)	7 (7.29)	0 (0.00)	37 (19.79)
Short video software such as Tiktok and Kwai	13 (36.11)	20 (43.48)	41 (42.71)	5 (55.56)	79 (42.25)
Social platforms such as Weibo and xiaohongshu	22 (61.11)	13 (28.26)	19 (19.79)	0 (0.00)	54 (28.88)

Chi square test : $\chi^2=48.749, p=0.000$

By comparison, it can be seen that the type of social media platform does not impact people's trust in information. Regardless of age, the social media people use frequently and the social media they trust are the same. This indicates that it is because users trust the platform's information that they use frequently. Users who do not trust the platform will be screened. This filtering behavior is only determined based on the user's impression of a particular social media platform, and the trust level will change according to the specific information. Some of the middle-aged groups express that they do not trust the information on these platforms, and at the same time, they are also skeptical of different information publishing agencies.

In terms of the information institutions they follow, young and middle-aged people will pay attention to some content from the media as entertainment, while middle-aged and old people will pay attention to information among friends. At the same time, regardless of age, people have the highest level of trust in the state media. Young people will selectively believe some self-media content because of their preferences, while middle-aged and older people will trust the information their friends share. At the same time, as mentioned above, a small number of middle-aged groups are very cautious and think they will judge the credibility of information based on the actual situation.

It is worth noting that increasing age is inversely proportional to the odds of participating in a public event reversal. Among the young group, 52.78% of the respondents have experienced a reversal, followed by the middle-aged group. Objectively speaking, the ability of young people to receive and transmit information is much more vital among middle-aged and elderly groups, so they can grasp the whole process of hot events and actively participate in it, including the rumor stage before the information begins and the confirmation stage of official information. However, elderly users are not familiar with social media software and participate in less discussion of social events, and the information they receive is often confirmed and confirmed official information, so the possibility of reversal is unlikely. From a subjective point of view, young people, especially the youth group, are mainly students and young workers who have just entered society. They are often energetic and responsible and are willing and able to participate in event discussions actively. Relatively, the energy and physical strength of the middle-aged groups have declined. They may pay attention to hot social events but seldom participate in discussions and dissemination. Therefore, older users tend not to participate in

reverse public events, while younger users will actively or passively participate in these events.

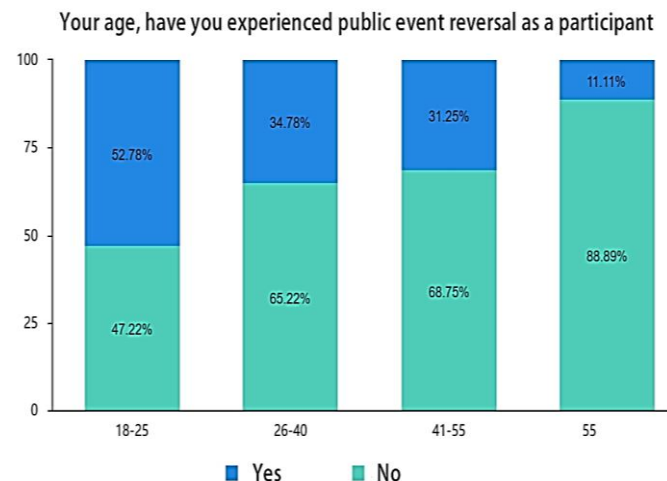


Figure 3

At the same time, although user groups of different age groups have experienced social inversion events more or less, few people choose to change their habits of receiving information. Among all the respondents who have experienced reversal events, 50.8% of the users said that they would only become more alert and that other habits remain unchanged. In comparison, 41.71% and 33.69% of the respondents said that they would start to pay attention to the information released by multiple institutions and confirm the credibility of the information issuing institutions in advance. Only 24.06% of the respondents said they had changed their usual social media platforms. It can be seen that people's habits will not be easily changed. They are accustomed to specific software and platforms and continue to use them. Considering the sunk costs of registering an account and adding friends, most users will choose to expand their sources of information to judge the authenticity of the information but will not change the social media platform.

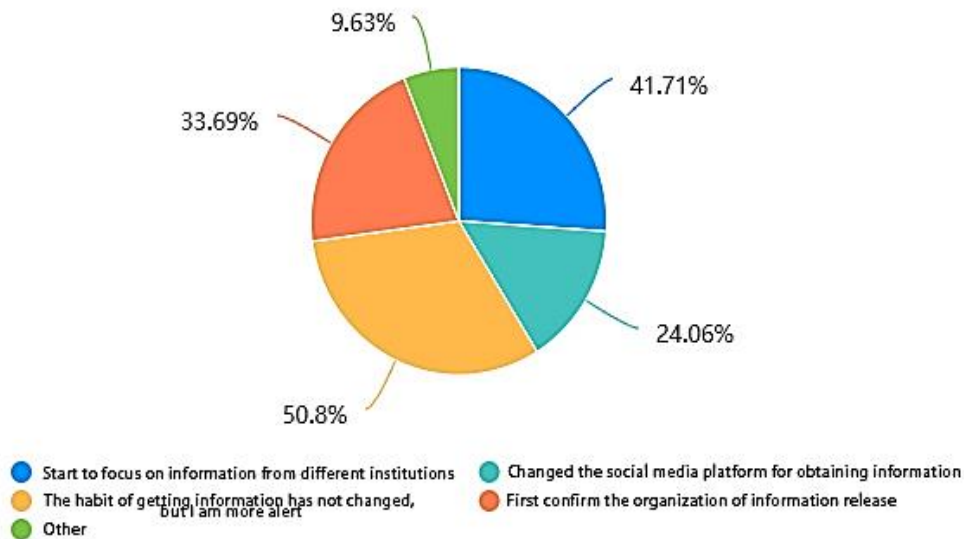


Figure 4

6. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

6.1 Summary

In general, youth groups are very active on social media platforms and are often the first transmitters and receivers of news. Because they are very familiar with the Internet, young people have a high degree of trust in information. They do not have a specific trust model. They believe they can judge whether the information is true or false and are constantly chasing information about hot spots. The middle-aged groups have the characteristics of questioning information. They will pay attention to the news of specific media organizations according to their own experience and summary and share it with their friends. Therefore, the information

transmission of middle-aged people is mainly limited to sharing among acquaintances. Most people are more or less skeptical, except for news from the official media. The characteristics of the elderly groups are that the way of receiving information is relatively simple, they trust the official media very much, and their information often lags behind. The use of social media by middle-aged and elderly groups is more for entertainment, so they often do not participate in the dissemination of online information. After the information developed into a social event and was reported by the official media, the elderly groups received this part of the news, so they hardly experienced a reversal event.

The relationship between users of different age groups and trust in information on social media platforms aligns with the ABC theory of

emotions. The user's trust and attitude towards information (B) are affected by age differences, resulting in incorrect cognition of the triggering event A and the formation of a series of personalized social media usage habits (C).

6.2 Policy Recommendations

Strengthening information auditing and supervision is the most important for social media platforms. Any information flow needs to be controlled at the source, and social media platforms should actively rectify with national government departments. On the one hand, social media platforms should strengthen their own market positioning, and social media platforms for young people should strengthen the forwarding review mechanism. Social media platforms sometimes become a tool for vulnerable groups to speak out, but younger platforms must control the dissemination of information before the information is confirmed and can use likes and drainage instead of forwarding to prevent the spread of rumors. Social chat software with a majority of middle-aged groups should strengthen the review of the qualifications of information institutions. For example, official accounts need to have certain professional qualifications before they can write articles so as to prevent users from affecting users trust in platform information.

On the other hand, social media platforms should actively introduce official information agencies and give them enough attention and traffic. Users of all ages expressed that they would trust the information released by official government information agencies. Social media platforms need to give officials a chance to speak about the occurrence of a reversal event.

Social media platforms should amplify their sense of social responsibility and integrate themselves into social development. There are mature algorithms based on user trust, and social media platforms can use research results to develop relevant algorithms combined with additional information to predict and identify information in social media and screen and investigate on time. At the same time, it is also possible to regularly carry out user education activities based on market user characteristics in line with users' trust habits to achieve standardized network information governance.

For government departments, it is essential to strengthen the supervision and review of online information transmission paths and formulate relevant rules to punish those who maliciously spread rumors. Through this research, it can be found that, like some users in the middle-aged group, the official media has lost its credibility among users. In order to deal with this, first of all, government departments should make full use of people's trust in official media, let official news organizations actively speak out on various social media platforms, face social hotspot events and disseminate accurate information at the first time, and restore people's trust in official media. Trust in official media information. The second is to block information that maliciously smears the official media to reduce people's panic and suspicion about the event as much as possible before the information is reviewed. The last is to establish a complete self-monitoring and error correction mechanism. When there are errors and omissions in the official media information, they will correct and state promptly, which will help build the official media's trust level in the users' hearts.

Through the social learning theory, we know that people's external performance is not only the behavior but the result of the joint action of cognition, behavior, environment and other factors. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the education and guidance of the social atmosphere. Combine mainstream values to guide people to participate in

network information dissemination. The regulatory authorities should also strengthen the review of false rumors, improve the law and incorporate it into the punishment system to regulate the atmosphere and environment of social media.

6.3 Limitations of This Study

For the research subjects, this article only discusses the behavior of users of some age groups on some social media platforms. The experimental sample base is small, and there may be exceptional circumstances.

For the research content, this paper focuses on the behavior of users on social media for different information in different years, and there is still a lack of psychological research on users;

As for the research methods, the questionnaire interviews used in this paper are only limited to qualitative analysis, and no specific numerical variables are introduced as auxiliary. Future research can expand the sample size, combine simple social media rumor data sets, and build models through social psychology to analyze users' trust scores for different information.

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