

Research on Information Anxiety of Users in Social Media Environment

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Abstract

The development of social media enriches people's daily life. Consequently, the information anxiety of users is also becoming a common social phenomenon. This article is structured in four chapters, starts from the research background, classifies the information anxiety of users based on theories, followed by an analysis of user behaviors related to information anxiety, and thus proposes countermeasures to alleviate information anxiety. Lastly, this article provides insights into how users can catch a break in the information flow of social media and how social media can provide better services to users with important practical significance and theoretical value.

Keywords

Social Media; Information Anxiety of Users; Online Environment.

1. Introduction

Over recent decades, social media has been developing rapidly and now has been popularized in almost all households, offering an open and free platform for various users to interact with each other. The Digital 2020 China Report, jointly released by We Are Social, a well-known U.S. survey company, and Hootsuite, shows that there are up to 1.04 billion active users of social media in China as of March 2020. In addition, statistics show that average each Chinese Internet user has up to 9.3 social media accounts. Accordingly, it is clear that the use of social media has become an indispensable part of users' online routines. These activities contribute to the diversity of users' lives while enriching their emotional experience to some extent. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the use of social media can also lead to negative effects on users at the same time. In today's information society, if users cannot get satisfied when seeking information or with the information obtained, it will definitely lead to information anxiety and other situations. [1] With the increasing popularity of social media and the false information constantly affecting users' lives, the information anxiety of users has become a common phenomenon in current society.

2. Theoretical Basis of Information Anxiety of Users in Social Media Environment

2.1 Classification of the Information Anxiety of Users in the Social Media Environment

2.1.1 Information Seeking Anxiety

With the constant development of network technology and the growing diversity of people's information access, information seeking anxiety has gradually become prominent. Scholars have also conducted more and more in-depth research on information seeking anxiety. Currently, researchers define information seeking anxiety as the anxiety resulting from some uncertainty, interference, and other factors that users encounter when seeking information on the Internet or other channels. In the present-day social media environment, the information seeking anxiety of users mainly features the following characteristics.

First, information seeking anxiety is immediately triggered at the scene. Currently, most information seeking anxiety is triggered by some immediate situations and usually features unpredictability and uncontrollability. Nowadays, users usually get information sources through mobile social media on a simultaneous basis, and mobile social media features fast information updates and excessive flow of information. Users who are informed of certain information in the mobile social media environment are likely to develop a need for information seeking, thus being exposed to information seeking risks. Second, there is a wide variety of social media, and different social media platforms are characterized by unique and different functions, and their distinct advantages and disadvantages. Different comments made by different users on social media are bound to affect the efficiency of information seeking by other subsequent users.

Third, the cost of information seeking anxiety has increased. The social media environment in the present era is complex, with huge amounts of false information, harmful information, and low-quality information. In addition, users engage in secondary creation and forwarding of information at no cost to them, which further intensifies the spread of false information in the social media environment. This leads to those other users in need of certain information having to pay extra attention to identify the authenticity and credibility of the information, which actually leads to an increase in the cost of information seeking anxiety.

2.1.2 Information Security Anxiety

Social media generally requires users to bind part of their identity information for registration. Well-known social media owns a massive user base and stores numerous user data. Therefore, personal privacy and information leakage have always been a concern for users. In recent decades, there have been growing attacks on online social media by hackers and increasing risks of information leakage. In March 2018, Facebook, a well-known foreign social media, was reported by the media for its serious incident of massive user information leakage, which greatly affected the personal lives of users. Moreover, this information leakage also resulted in other potential crises. In July 2019, The Guardian reported that the Siri service of Apple's mobile devices is insecure and also one of the tools that caused the leakage of users' information. Some hackers attacked the system and obtained the user's personal medical information and other private information in the service. Moreover, information such as geographic location and contact information mentioned in users' voice messages are at risk of being leaked.

Information security anxiety has undoubtedly become a key issue of concern at this stage. Various sectors of society have been paying close attention to and cautiously dealing with information security issues. [2] In May 2018, the EU formally legislated and implemented the General Data Protection Regulation. This provides a solid barrier to protecting personal data at the legal level, and various social media platforms have made adjustments accordingly. E.g., Twitter, Instagram, and other sites sent informative emails to their user groups in the first instance to update the terms of service and privacy policies of their products.

2.1.3 Information Overload Anxiety

Information overload occurs around everyone who uses social media these days. The excessive flow of information urges users to process information actively or passively. The process of processing information consumes large amounts of cognitive resources. However, the cognitive resources of humans are limited, which means that users are unable to engage in two things at once in the flow of information. The development of online social media has undeniably provided users with abundant information resources, but the overabundance of information resources has also seriously hampered users' access to effective information, leading to delayed access to effective information or a higher possibility for users to be provided with false information. In today's era, the boundary between users and "gatekeepers" is gradually becoming unclear, and the era where users rely on "gatekeepers" to select information for them has passed. In terms of the quality of the information acquired, people will often find it more difficult to obtain quality information when they are exposed to an amount of information far beyond what their recognition capabilities can handle. Users will develop information

overload anxiety when they increasingly gain uncertain information. In addition, from the perspective of information and communication, users are likely to experience selection difficulties when faced with different kinds of applications, and the interference of different information can likewise cause information overload anxiety.

2.2 Analysis of User Behaviors Related to Information Anxiety in the Social Media Environment

2.2.1 Compulsive Social Media Use

The emergence of diverse social media Apps enriches people's daily lives and provides users with diversified ways of life. However, the overuse of social media seems to have become a practical issue. Users show a strong dependence on social media, e.g., some users who desire to keep informed of their friends' news will constantly and irregularly open and close social media, refreshing the Moments of WeChat and Weibo. This seriously occupies users' leisure time, and the high frequency of social media push messages also forces users to follow the information all the time. Users have linked their personal lives to social media, while remaining informed about the latest news on the platform, leading to a gradual intertwining of their online lives with their real lives. As a result, the compulsive use of social media has become one of the most important approaches for users to obtain a sense of control and certainty in their real life. If users can rationally control the time and energy they spend on social media, the negative effects brought by social media can be greatly reduced. However, a survey shows that the vast majority of users can hardly take effective control of their social media activities, resulting in a heavy investment of time and energy in social media, which is often referred to as "compulsive social media use". [3].

2.2.2 Social Networking Addiction

Social anxiety refers to people's sense of fearing blame and criticism when they are in a certain social environment where their words and behaviors are always observed by others, intentionally or unintentionally. Hence, the advent of social media has precisely satisfied the social needs of these people. Obviously, there is a positive correlation between social anxiety and social networking addiction, where the higher the degree of social anxiety, the stronger the social networking addiction. Social media, on the one hand, sufficiently satisfies the social needs of users, and on the other hand, greatly avoids the anxiety arising from the real social life of users. With the gradual penetration of social media in social life, the group with social anxiety will become more immersed in online communication, resulting in social networking addiction. Social networking addiction can cause severe disruptions in people's daily lives. The capacity for daily social interaction can be severely weakened as people become immersed in online social chats. At the same time, with increasing levels of social networking addiction, people experience greater negative emotions, which can have a reverse effect on online social communication. There are two main aspects of this reverse effect. One is that the increased user anxiety leads to a worse user experience, and the other is that users are more likely to keep abreast of negative information on the Internet and publish provocative and untrue negative comments to pollute the online social media environment.

2.2.3 Social Media Burnout

Burnout occurs when someone doesn't have their needs satisfied or doesn't have the ability to satisfy their needs. With the development of social media, offline burnout has gradually shifted to online. When users engage in social media, the overload of information, excessive information shares, and maintenance of social relationships can make them feel bored, exhausted, tired, and even have the idea of quitting the social platform. First, social media is an open platform, with a massive amount of information increasing the difficulty and pressure for users to seek information. Second, commercial entities on the platform are over-marketing with real and fake messages mixed and manipulating the awareness of users and consuming their energy. Third, users may be somewhat performer-prone in social media and expect to glorify themselves and reshape their image in an anonymized community. This actually increases and amplifies the social anxiety of users. Finally, the social relationships that users work hard to maintain on social media tend to remain superficial. E.g., the routine of "social

work” (e.g., likes and comments) consumes users’ energy, causes unnecessary burdens, and increases loneliness. Online social media burnout can also cause offline anxiety, resulting in decreased concentration in offline work, reduced motivation in life, and procrastination in daily tasks.

3. Countermeasures to Eliminate Information Anxiety of Users in Social Media Environment

The use of social media has become an indispensable part of the lives of people. In contemporary society, people spend an average of 3 hours a day on social media. Therefore, addressing the social anxiety of users has become the primary issue of the moment. This article provides a detailed analysis of the three issues identified and proposes some measures to address users’ anxiety from three perspectives.

3.1 User Perspective

First of all, users should attach importance to improving their ability of processing information. Information processing ability mainly includes the ability to seek, identify, read, utilize and communicate information. The capability of information processing can be enhanced in certain ways and can constantly help users to occupy an active position when acquiring information and avoid the interference of disturbing information, untrue information, etc.

Secondly, it is necessary for users to continuously strengthen their willpower, improve their self-management ability, maintain critical thinking, and use knowledge systems and cognitive structures with subjective thinking to process and judge external things.

Finally, users should enhance their time management capability and time use efficiency. By using some time management APPs, users can manage their daily time and strictly control the time they spend on social media. [4] Spending less time on social media can effectively avoid the compulsive use of social media, while the remaining time allows users to deal with other issues in their daily lives, thereby increasing the richness of their daily lives and improving their quality of life.

3.2 Information Resources and Information Quality Perspective

Various kinds of social media software are emerging in the market nowadays, with false information and malicious information released everywhere, which seriously threatens the social media network environment. Moreover, the incomplete and ineffective cyber supervision system makes the above problems not effectively solved, making the information resource of good and bad quality to be mixed on the Internet. Therefore, it is recommended to strengthen market control in accordance with the law and regulations to contain the dissemination, spread, and development of malicious information at the source. About containing the source, the main source of information is people, thus users should begin with their own efforts, strictly adhere to laws and regulations, abide by moral concepts when making comments on the Internet, refrain from believing in or disseminating rumors, and strive to prevent the generation of false and fake information. Regarding market control, it is necessary for the cyber security center to focus on supervising the platforms that publish false information, make effective supervision, crackdown, and accountability, and rigorously control the malicious information from network operators and social media platforms. Meanwhile, the cyber security center may use advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence to research and develop a user credit scoring system, so as to purify the online social media environment and provide a green, healthy, and unpolluted social media environment for users.

3.3 Technology Environment Perspective

The performance of mobile devices, the complexity of applications, and the privacy protection schemes of applications all have an effect on information anxiety. In terms of application design, functional usability and privacy protection design are essential factors that software developers need to pay extra attention to. Therefore, it is suggested that the functions of applications should be designed to be as simple and easy to use as possible. [5] With stronger security awareness, users are

attaching greater importance to the protection of personal privacy information. Therefore, improving the privacy protection mechanism in the application is a smart move when social applications seek stronger user stickiness.

4. Conclusion

With social media APPs gaining more and more popularity these days, people are spending quite a lot of their daily time and energy on social networking, and their anxiety is becoming increasingly serious along with this. This article emphatically analyzed the types and causes of information anxiety of users in the social media environment and provided suggestions on alleviating information anxiety of users from several perspectives, hopefully providing insights and references for future related research.

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