THE EFFECT OF PARENTING STYLES ON TEENAGERS' SOCIAL INTERACTION WITHIN SOCIAL MEDIA IN CHINA

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Abstract— As information technology develops with a formidable speed in China, social media such as QQ and Wechat are becoming more widespread than ever and are comparable with the dominance of Facebook and Twitter in other countries. With teenagers usually being the majority of users, there are parents worrying about the negative effects of social media. Many parents posed restrictions on their children's use of social media which lead to conflicts that undermined parent-child relationship. Addressing this increasingly urgent problem, this study discusses the effect of different parenting styles on teenagers' social interaction within social media in a Chinese context. The parenting styles were mainly measured by Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ); teenagers' social interactions within social media were measured by the number of "close friends" they have in social media accounts. Surveys were distributed in a six-year system high school in Northeastern China, in the city of Shenyang. There were 131 participants in the survey with ages ranging from 11 to 18. The results confirmed that more Authoritarian parents posed more restrictions on children's use of social media, but rejected the hypothesis that teenagers with more authoritative parents have more close friend online. Instead, it is found that participants with more permissive parents have significantly more close friends online. It is also found that female participants were generally more satisfied with their parent-child relationships, and that there were generally more Permissive fathers than Permissive mothers. Possible causes are the influence of traditional Chinese values(e.g. gender roles, pedagogy) and the collision of traditional values and westernized thoughts, which is characteristic of contemporary China.

Keyword—Parenting Style, Social Media, Teenager, Parental Authority Questionnaire.

I. INTRODUCTION

It is a fact that the use of social media is becoming more widespread than ever, and that teenagers are a majority among users of social media [1]. Social media conveys a great deal about a certain individual, and among those information revealed, a large part comes from one's parents and parenting style under which the individual was raised.

This is especially true for teenagers in China: due to the traditional Chinese values of family integrity and group hierarchy [2], most teenagers derive a lot of influence from their parents. This special social background makes teenagers in China different from students of other ethnic groups in regard to social media, and also grants the present study of necessity.

As social media becomes more omnipresent, the attitude towards it has changed [1]. In the past decade, some believed that the social media hinders social connectedness and well-being, for they consider social media capable of doing harm by encouraging adolescents to develop relationships with strangers (e.g., Nie [3])and taking time away from intimate relationships in real life [4]. But since adolescents now predominantly use the internet to maintain friendships, many recent studies have shown that adolescents' online communication enhances rather than harms social connectedness and well-being (e.g., Bessière et al [5]; Valkenburg & Peter [6]). While this change of attitude is taking place, many parents are still concerned about the potential dangers social media can bring, and self-disclosure on the social media is sometimes considered inappropriate, which leads to a standoff between parents and teenagers regarding the use of social media, and this topic constitutes a large part of this study.

Building on previous researches on the attitudes toward social media and parenting styles, this study discusses the relationship between parents' parenting styles and teenagers' social interactions on social media such as Wechat and QQ in the context of a Chinese cultural background. The parenting styles will be mainly measured by Parental Authority Questionnaire(PAQ) and Perceived Control, Perceived Parenting Style, and Perceived Satisfaction questionnaire. Teenagers' social interactions on social media will be measured by how many "close friends" they have in social media.

A. Parenting Styles

According to Baumrind [7], there are three types of parenting styles, including Authoritarian Parenting, Permissive Parenting, and Authoritative Parenting.

Authoritarian parents are demanding as well as directing, and are known for their lack of warmth [6]. Authoritarian parents want to control their children's behavior in fixed standards, and when children disobey their will, they would take forceful measures to restrict children's autonomy [9]. Authoritarian parents pose absolute restrictions on the children, and children are not allowed to act under the guidance of their own will [8]. Since children are tightly controlled, parents may pose restrictions on their use of social media, as they do on most other parts of children's lives.

In contrast, parents with permissive parenting are not nearly as demanding, and are known for loose limits, if any [6]. In other words, permissive parents give their children as much autonomy as possible [9]. Children raised by permissive parents are allowed to explore their environment and limits of their self-discipline freely on their own, and are often capable of making decisions independently [6]. For children raised under such parenting, it is easier for them to spend more time online to maintain friendships.

Between these two extremes lies the more reasonable authoritative parenting style. Authoritative parents are as responsible as demanding. They actively take responsibility as parents, set reasonable, consistent demands for children's behavior, and supervise their children according to this set of conduct [6]. Authoritative parents guide children in a reasonable way and are open to communication and negotiation [9]. Children raised by authoritative parents are encouraged to choose for themselves in the set of reasonable boundaries made by parents [8]. Parents who belong to this parenting style may pose some restrictions on the use of social media, but not before they have explained to children the reasons for doing so.

B. Parents in Context of Traditional Chinese Culture

Due to geographical, historical, political and many other differences, Asians have developed a unique culture that emphasizes interdependence and group solidarity [9], which influenced Chinese traditional values to a great extent. Due to the emphasis of interdependence, Asian (including Chinese) parents always demand a sense of connectedness with families [9], while often ignoring personal autonomy as they place emphasis on filial piety, social responsibility, as well as group achievement. In this context, children are expected to obey the wishes of the elderly and filial piety is considered as a main characteristic of a "good child" [8].

C. Parents & Social Media

There are some other arguments that almost all parents give for restricting their children's use of social media. According to some studies conducted in the earlier stage of Internet development (e.g. Nie [3], Kraut et al [4]), parents often assume that the Internet encourages teenagers to establish harmful relationships with strangers, and teenagers tend to spend time communicating with strangers online instead of making real-life interactions, therefore undermining teenager's social connectedness and well-being [11]. As social media develops, more parents also start worrying about privacy, cyber bullying and online safety [12].

Among the worries of the parents mentioned above, many family-oriented Chinese parents hold even stronger opinions in the case of teenagers' usage of social media. In a Chinese cultural background, most parents are very concerned about the family's integrity as a whole, and are very likely to teach their children to refrain from addressing sensitive topics and personal issues openly in order to avoid undermining the family's reputation.

D. Adolescents & Social Media

It is well acknowledged that adolescence is a critical period in life, and the parent-child relationship in this stage is especially important in forming the children's personality and behavior. During this period, adolescents feel that they have become more independent and that they are ready to take on the world by themselves, which can lead to their breaching of the control that their parents has always exerted on them. However, dependency on their parents for some basic needs such as shelter, money and food could be a potential obstacle to their pursuit of complete independence, and therefore parents and children may be involved in all sorts of conflict because the difference in wishes [8].

This conflict is also present in the use of social media. Most adolescents, in opposition to their parents, love social media for a variety of reasons: (a)social media provides a convenient stage for teenagers of practice impression management, which is a crucial part in forging a social identity [13]; (b) social media enhances confidence, for most teenagers receive positive feedback on their profiles [14], (c) teenagers feel less nervous about asking questions on social media[12], which in turn encourages more communication with others and more social connectedness.

Also, as the Internet develops, more and more people are using the social media to maintain their social network, which actually makes it possible to enhance social connectedness through this medium [1]. Furthermore, studies have already shown that online self-disclosure contributes to positive relationship between online communication by revealing more about the person and providing more to start a conversation on [1].

In response to the problem of developing harmful relationships with strangers, many have found that most teens are networking with people they are already familiar with and have a lot of common in, which implies that the risks of developing harmful relationships with absolute strangers are overestimated [12]. There are also voices (e.g. Danah Boyd [13]) advocating teenager's access to social media stating that

teenagers are learning to navigate networked publics, which confirm the benefits of social media and teenagers' need for it.

E. Possible Factors Of Conflict

The clash of ideas between parents and teenagers is precipitated on one hand by their different social media environments. For teenagers, social media such as Facebook provides a forum for adolescents to create and showcase themselves, to experiment with the online selves [15], and gain regular contact with those outside their family networks [16]. Studies have shown that when people are in a social media environment that promotes self-disclosure, they will often provide information which they feel uncomfortable to give in real life, and such information often includes political views, sexual orientation, romantic partner, birth date, etc [17]. Therefore, teenagers are more prone and used to self-disclosures in social media. As a result, when the more conservative parents look through their child's homepage on social media such as Facebook, they may find things that they consider as inappropriate and therefore try to talk to their children about it.

On the other hand, different social backgrounds shaped parents' and teenagers' values differently, which also lead to different views toward social media. The rapid development of information technology in China in recent decades has lead current teenagers to receive considerably larger amounts of new information than their parents, which can possibly lead to the formation of some new, open and global values that parents sometimes find hard to accept. Parents in this situation may feel obliged to educate their children when they see some "inappropriate" topics in their children's social media, while children in turn might feel the need to revolutionize the parents' "outdated" ideas.

Furthermore, Chinese parents worry about the effects of the open nature of social media on their children as much as the parents from other social backgrounds. Phenomena such as cyber bullying, loss of privacy, and distorted sense of identity are also present in Chinese social media, causing many parents to fear social media and restricting their children's use of it.

All of the above combined makes up parents' argument of restricting social media use, which is often rejected by the children. This situation is particularly apparent in the nowadays China, making this study gain importance.

F. Hypothesis

Based on what is known on the topic, some hypotheses are posed.

Hypothesis 1: More Authoritarian parents pose more restrictions on their children's use of social media.

Hypothesis 2: Teenagers with more Authoritative parents have more close friends on social media.

II. METHODS

A. Participants

There are 131 participants in this study. All participants are chosen from a middle school in Shenyang, China. All participants have voluntarily participated in the research, and signed their names under the informed consent on the first page of the questionnaire. In the process of forming descriptive statistics for this study, 4 participants have been thrown out due to largely incomplete and meaningless responses made on the survey.

B. Materials

The questionnaire is comprised of demographics, questions on family structures and identities of primary caregivers, as well as the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ), and questions on Perceived Control, Perceived Parenting Style, and Perceived Satisfaction.

Demographics also includes questions on usage of social media (e.g. QQ, Wechat), such as the amount of time spent on social media, amount of friends on social media, presence of parents' restriction on social media, and number of actual close friends in social media.

1) Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ)

The PAQ is a self-report questionnaire consisting of 30 items, and it is supposed to measure children's perception of their parents' parenting styles (authoritarian, permissive, or authoritative as proposed by Baumrind). Buri (1991) first included 48 items in PAQ, but after experts in field reviewed them for appropriateness he shortened the questionnaire to 30 items, with each scale of 10 items. Responses are scaled according to a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1(strongly disagree) to 5(strongly agree). In this study, the 15-item shortened version of the PAQ was used in order to increase efficiency and amount of responses from participants.

2) Perceived Control, Perceived Parenting Style, and Perceived Satisfaction

Perceived Parenting Style, and Perceived Satisfaction is a 4-item self-report questionnaire for evaluating children's perception of restriction, way of parenting, and satisfaction about their parents. Participants were asked to choose the option that best describes their mother or father respectively, and then were asked to respond on a 1-10 scale ranging from 1(worst) to 10(best) about their overall satisfaction with their relationships with their parents. In the last question participants were asked to choose an option that states the more influential parent to them.

C. Procedures

The surveys were distributed in all the classrooms in a six-year system boarding school in Shenyang, China. Participants were asked for voluntary participation in the research. The informed consent was the first page of the survey, and no incentive was given for the survey. Then the participants were asked to spend about 10-15 minutes on the survey questions.

During this time, there was no communication between researchers and the participants. After the participants completed the questions, the researchers collected and analyzed them. Data was entered into an Excel file. Data was analyzed by SPSS.

III. RESULTS

To analyze the overall conditions of the participants, a comprehensive statistical analysis of all data using SPSS was conducted. The total surveyed were 131 participants, and 4 were thrown out of the data due to largely incomplete answers.

A. Demographics

Age: The ages of the participants range from 11 years old to 18 years old. Most participants are 13 years old (19.7%), 16 years old (21.3%), and 17 years old (29.9%).

Gender: There are more males (55.1%) than females (44.9%) in participants.

Nationality: All participants surveyed are Chinese.

QQ account: Nearly all (94.5%) have QQ accounts. Most (81%) use QQ from "Once a week" to "Everyday". As shown in Fig. 1, Most (71.8%) have below 200 friends in QQ accounts. When asked "how many close friends you have in QQ account", 11.8% replied "None"; 10.9% replied "5";18.2% replied "10", and 10.8% replied "20" and the number of close friends in QQ account for most participants are under 10 as shown in Fig.2.
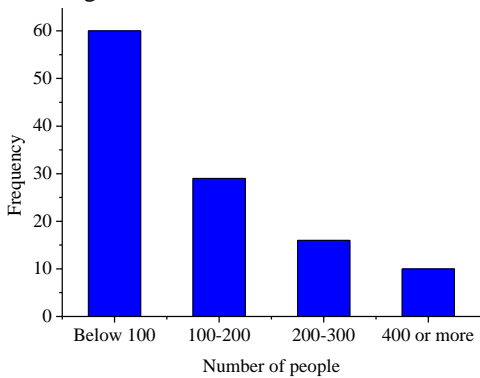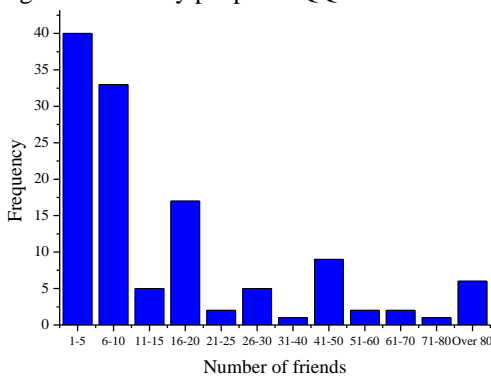

Fig.1. How many people in QQ account

Fig.2. Number of close friends in QQ account

Wechat account: Most (82.7%) have Wechat accounts. Most (73.2%) use Wechat from "Once a week" to "Everyday". As shown in Fig.3, most (73.6%) have below 200 people in their Wechat accounts. When asked "how many close friends you have in QQ account", 23.6% replied "None"; 17.3% replied "10"; 8.7% replied "20 and the number of close friends in Wechat account for most participants are under 10 as shown in Fig.4

Parents' Restrictions On Use Of Social Media: According to Fig.5, a majority (62.9%) reported restrictions are posed. According to Fig.6, 41.7% had restrictions on chatting on social media; 55.1% did not. 56.8% reported "Sometimes" when asked about how often the restrictions are imposed.
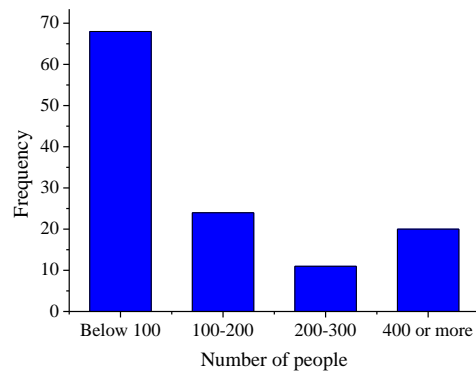

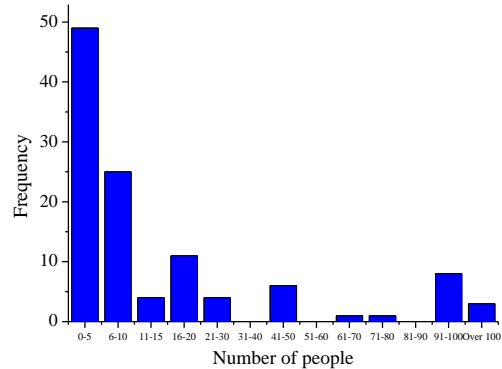Fig.3. Number of people in Wechat account

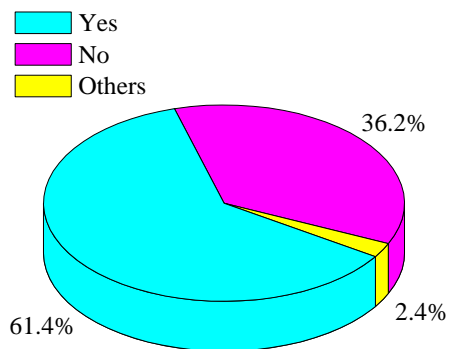Fig.4. Number of close friends in Wechat Account

Fig.5. Presence of restriction on use of social media
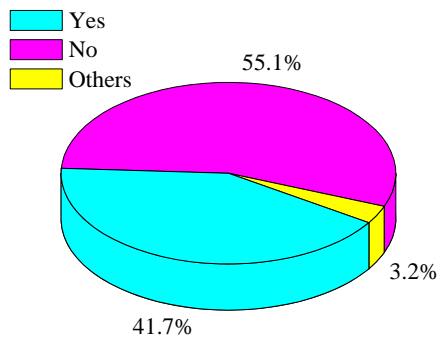
Fig.6. Presence of restriction on chatting

B. Parental Authority Questionnaire(PAQ)

PAQ Results: According to Fig.7, among all participants, most (72.18%) have parents with authoritative parenting style; 10.53% of the participants have parents with authoritarian parenting style; 13.53% of the participants have parents with permissive parenting style.
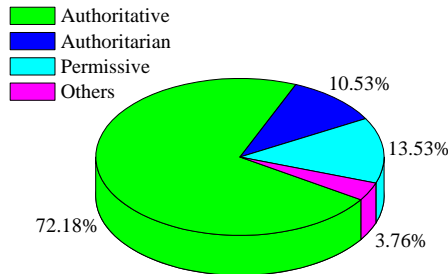

Fig.7. Parenting Style Distribution

Perceived Control Of Mothers: According to Fig.8, when asked to circle to perceived parenting style of their mothers, 16.5% of the participants circled "Permissive"; 71.7% circled "Authoritative"; 8.7% circled "Authoritarian".
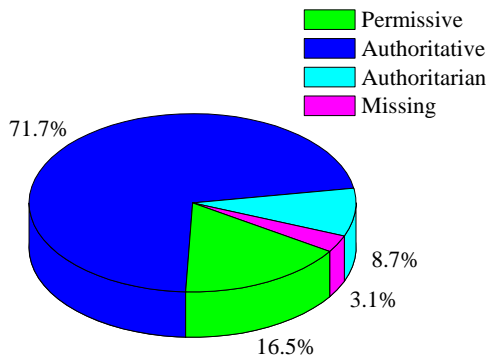

Fig.8. Perceived control of mothers

Perceived Control Of Fathers: According to Fig.9, when asked to circle to perceived parenting style of their fathers, 28.51% of the participants circled "Permissive"; 58.57% circled "Authoritative"; 9.71% circled "Authoritarian".
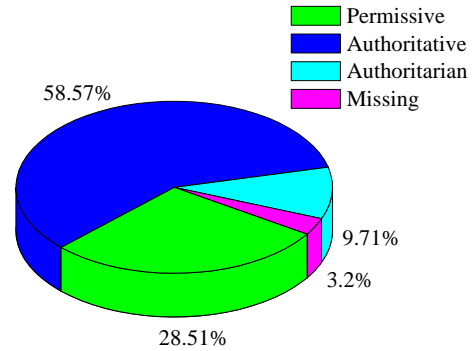

Fig.9. Perceived control of fathers

Perceived Influence From Parent(s): According to Fig.10, when asked to choose a parent(or parents) as the more influential in their lives, 28.33% chose "Mother"; 9.41% chose "Father"; 58.36% chose "Both".
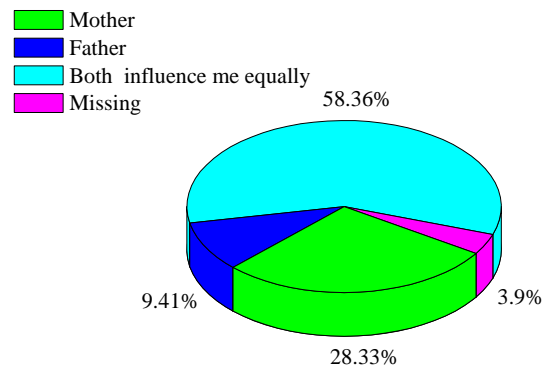

Fig.10. Perceived influence from parent(s)

C. Correlations and Relationships

Correlation between Restrictions On Social Media and Mean Of Authoritarian Parenting Style: According to table 1, there is a sign of negative relationship between Authoritarian Means and the NON-presence of restrictions on social media, which means that authoritarian parents are more likely to impose restrictions on the use of social media, which proves hypothesis 1.

Correlation between Restrictions On Social Media and Mean Of Permissive Parenting Style: According to table 1, there is sign of a positive relationship between Permissive Means and the NON-presence of restrictions on social media, which means that the more permissive parents are, the less likely it is for them to impose restrictions on use of social media by their children.

Correlation between Restrictions On Social Media and Mean Of Authoritative Parenting Style: According to table 1, there is sign of a positive relationship between Authoritative Means and the NON-presence of restrictions on social media, which means that the more authoritative parents are, the less likely for them to impose restrictions on use of social media by their children.

Table Ⅰ. Presence of restrictions on use of social media

	Yes	No	Difference(Y-N)
Authoritarian	2.6805	2.6356	0.0449
Permissive	2.9081	2.922	-0.0139
Authoritative	3.589	3.5907	-0.0017

Correlation between Perception Of Overall Quality and Satisfaction With Parent-Child Relationship and Gender: Participants gave a number between 1 and 10 to rate their perception of overall quality and satisfaction with their parent-child relationships, with 1 being the lowest and 10 the highest. It is found that females typically gave ratings higher than those of males, with a female average score of 8.1167 and a male average score of 8.0806. This outcome was also not expected.

Correlation between Restriction On Use of Social Media and Gender: It is found that the number of female participants' reports of presence of restrictions are larger than that of male participants, with the number of females' reports being 63 and the number of males' reports being 60.

Relationship between Parenting Styles and Number of Close Friends in Social Media: According to Fig.11 and Fig. 12, it is found that in both QQ and Wechat, participants with permissive parenting style have the most close friends in social media, authoritative parenting style the second most, and authoritarian the least. This outcome was not expected.
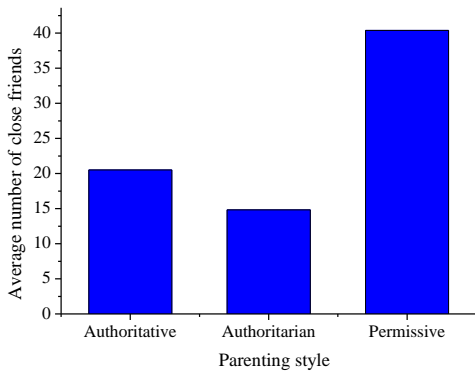

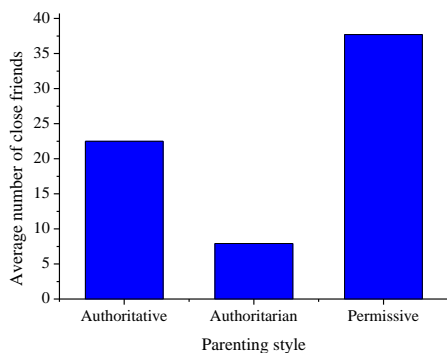Fig.11. Average number of close friends in QQ sorted by parenting style

Fig.12. Average number of close friends in Wechat sorted by parenting style

IV. DISCUSSION

This study mainly discussed the effect of parenting styles on teenagers' social interaction within social media in a Chinese cultural background.

Nowadays teenagers and parents have different ideas toward the use of social media, which includes the extent of self-disclosure, time spent interacting with people online, chatting with people outside the family network, etc. These differences often result in conflicts and will seriously undermine the parent-child relationship. Moreover, as China is facing a formidable influx of new information and collision between traditional values and western ideas, the conflict between traditional parents and westernized teenagers is becoming even more intense. This phenomenon is very typical and deserves much attention, and is the reason why this study is conducted.

A. Findings

Hypothesis 1 is validated by the results of surveys conducted, which means that more Authoritarian parents indeed pose more restrictions on their children's use of social media. This conveys that children with authoritarian parents are more likely to be restricted in making contact with other people on social media and are likely to be isolated from the world of social media. Since social media is proven by various researches as capable of promoting social connectedness, children without it cannot reap the benefits of it, which is a disadvantage to some extent. Authoritarian parents should be informed of the potential negative effects of their parenting styles and make alterations to make the rules more open to negotiation. There has also been a negative relationship between the presence of the two other parenting styles and the presence of restrictions.

Hypothesis 2 is not validated by the results of surveys since participants with permissive parents, rather than authoritative parents, had significantly more close friends in social media. This conveys that children with more permissive parents socialize better on social media, in part because parents allow them to spend time online and to talk with other people online. There might also be other factors, such as permissive parents also give children much freedom to go out and socialize in real life, resulting in better communication skills. Moreover, as conveyed in introduction, children often interact with similar peers online, therefore better social skills in real life can lead to more friends online as well.

It is also found that most parents do set restrictions on their children's use of social media, while a large part of parents also set restrictions on chatting online. This confirmed that the "social media problem" between teenagers and parents is widespread and a shared experience. Once again, the urgency of research in this field is emphasized.

There were two unexpected findings derived from this study. First, there was a significantly larger number of permissive fathers than mothers. A possible explanation is that due to the traditional gender roles of Chinese society, men are expected to work to provide income for the family and women are expected to take care of children, therefore more mothers take the lead in regulating the children's behaviors. This difference is also revealed by the significantly larger number of influential mothers versus influential fathers in the Perceived Satisfaction Questionnaire. This phenomenon should be noted because both parents are important in forming the child's identity, and an absence of care from fathers may cause psychological problems in adolescents. It is suggested that more research be conducted on this problem to find solutions to this phenomenon.

Next, females are generally found to have rated higher scores in the Perceived Satisfaction Questionnaire than males. One possible factor is the effect of the valued saying "Plank a boy and spoil a girl" in ancient Chinese pedagogy. Philosophers advocate that boys should be encouraged to achieve more and regulated strictly to succeed in careers, while girls should be satisfied with their environments to avoid generating too much material wants which could lead to misconduct. The difference in treating boys and girls is a peculiar problem in China because it is multifaceted and another conflict between traditions and new ideologies. Future researches should especially take this into account and try to find the potential effects of this difference.

B. Limitations and future implications

The major limitation of this study lies in that it has too small a sample to generalize the findings to a wider scale. If more time and capital were available, a larger and more representative sample can be made possible.

Another limitation lies in that only the perceived control and satisfaction of teenagers are surveyed. If reward mechanisms were feasible, a comprehensive survey on corresponding parents is highly appreciated.

The study can be improved by adopting more measures in quantifying social interaction instead of counting only close friends on social media, which might be influenced by all kinds of aspects such as frequency of use, friends' possession of social media accounts, etc.

The study could gain more accuracy and comprehensiveness if the 30-question long version of the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) were used and rewarding mechanisms were in place to ensure accurate responses from participants.

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