Connections Between the Social Media, Commercialized Intimacy and Happiness

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Abstract: The Harvard Study of Adult Development highlights the importance of meaningful relationships for personal well-being and happiness. However, the ascendance of social media as a principal mode of social interaction has given rise to a paradox: while these platforms are designed to foster intimacy, they often contribute to feelings of loneliness and superficial connections. This article examines the influence of social media and commercialization on the pursuit of happiness and the development of authentic intimate relationships, examines the ways in which social media formats encourage the creation of curated personas and fragmented expressions of self, which inhibit the formation of genuine interpersonal bonds. Furthermore, the commercialization of intimacy through virtual relationship services commodifies emotions and introduces transactional dynamics into personal interactions. As intimacy becomes a marketable commodity, trust and authenticity in relationships deteriorate, often leading to mistrust and emotional detachment. Ultimately, these trends challenge individuals' ability to form meaningful relationships, which in turn impacts their overall happiness and emotional health.

Keywords: Digital media, Virtual intimate relationship, Emotional commodification.

1. Introduction

Human beings have never stopped searching for happiness; from ordinary people to great thinkers, all of them are concerned about happiness, such as concerned about how to obtain happiness. But before pursuing happiness, to understand what happiness is is the first thing. Happiness is a competent feeling, but it can be observed and evaluated from a social point of view, which provides possible space and perspective to understand what exactly happiness happens because of and how it can be achieved.

"The surprising finding is that our relationships and how happy we are in our relationships have a powerful influence on our health", said Robert Waldinger [1]. This is the conclusion of Robert Waldinger in The Harvard Study of Adult Development, which followed 724 people for 75 years. The study revealed that better relationships bring more happiness to others than any other factor and that lonely social relationships keep people away from happiness.

In today's day and age, social media, as a more efficient way of socializing, is supposed to make communication between people more intimate and lead to closer relationships in its own right. However, an interesting phenomenon has occurred: the birth of social platforms has made people more distant from each other.

When members of a group are in the same social environment, such as a family gathering, a gathering of friends, or a classroom, the members of the group are not connected to other members of the group in the same social environment, but rather, they form a separate space from each other through devices such as computers or cell phones. When family members are together, instead of mingling, they each look at their computers and cell phones; when friends get together, instead of catching up on old times, they swipe WeChat and Weibo; in class, instead of listening to lectures, students chat online [2].

In such a strange social environment, in which individuals seem to be in the same space, but in fact everyone exists only in their own space, it is difficult to establish a real link with in the real social environment [3]. However, because everyone has the need to establish relationships with others, they can only continue to commit themselves to the network. But after leaving the network links, this sense of loneliness will come back, so more and more dependent on the network, in the cycle of deepening their own sense of loneliness [4]. When the user is immersed and absorbed in the screen illusion, leaving the network will lead to problems such as inner emptiness, low mood, and communication barriers, making it difficult to establish intimate relationships [5].

This paper mainly studies the following key issues: First, how social media affects people's happiness and the establishment of intimate relationships; second, the negative impact of the commercialization trend of intimate relationships on the establishment of real intimate relationships; and finally, how to truly build stable intimate relationships with others in the current digital and commercial social environment. The research significance of this paper lies in the following aspects: First, it is to further understand happiness, especially to provide a new perspective on the relationship between the development of new technology and intimate relationship. The second is to bring a new perspective on the intimacy dilemma brought by social media and virtual emotional services, and to understand the possible impact of digital platforms on intimate relationships from more perspectives in terms of authenticity, trust and emotional depth. Finally, it provides suggestions for the design of future social platforms and services for establishing and intimate relationships. Based on current problems, it aims to build healthier emotional services by considering more authentic expression of emotions.

2.   The Reasons of not Getting Quality Intimacy on Social Relationships

2.1.   Social Media

First of all, users on social media platforms may be more deceptive in their exchanges and communications in order to portray a more satisfied self [4]. Personal statements in the public sphere and in the private sphere are more focused on the impact on oneself rather than on expressing one's true feelings because of the personal image and the possible risk of statements. Further, when speaking in the public sphere on social media platforms, one is more likely to take into account the risks to one's image, as they are more widely disseminated, so there is a greater likelihood that communication on social media platforms will be caught up in the virtual environment that one builds with others, rather than based on real communication.

Secondly, the formatting of social media leads to the overall expression of the person into a fragmented text description, in the process of diluting the expression of personality [6], implies that the presentation of the real self is limited and improves the ability to link real communication. According to the research of Ye Zhourui [6], users need to fill in the information of gender, age, and preference when registering on the platform, and face different users through the same measurement dimensions and the same way of description. In such a process, the overall information of each person is integrated into many evaluations of different dimensions, but these evaluations cannot show a complete picture of a whole person. In such a case, the limited textual descriptions cannot carry a

complete personality, but only the communication of a complete personality can bring about what Gadamer considered to be the prerequisites for an emotional experience, which can constitute the prerequisites for intimate relationships such as intimacy, love, and friendship.

Finally, regarding the communication mechanisms of social media, negative narratives of intimacy tend to be more likely to be the focus of platforms' pushes, which means that the information that users can receive is all about the negative aspects of intimacy. In such an environment provides barriers For building intimate relationships. According to Chen Fangyu [7], in the microblog platform where young women make up 55% of the population, negative narratives of intimacy and PUA, domestic violence, etc. are able to occupy a high position in the traffic pool. Based on the social media built in the circle, panoramic communication space, the autonomy of information selection will be lost because of the communication mechanism, can only passively receive some negative content of intimate relationships, which may lead to a negative impact on the users who want to establish intimate relationships whether online or offline.

2.2. Commercialization of Intimacy

Virtual relationship services bring a commercialized approach to intimacy through the mediation of price and gifts, and the premise of this commercialization is that the service provider needs to transform itself into a commodity that satisfies the consumer. There are many problems that arise in this process, firstly, because commodifying a persona can makes the service provider separated from himself, the service provider performs the service by manipulating a persona that meets the expectations of the consumer, and at the same time the link with the client is not really the service provider himself, but a commodity created by the service provider and the consumer together. And such communication is lacking authenticity, which means it is not real communication.

As a virtual relationship service, the service provider builds a commodity that can satisfy the user's needs through text and voice, and provides the user with emotional satisfaction by playing the role of an intimate relationship. Text is used as the primary mode of communication, and voice is used as the secondary mode. The charm of text is infinite, and people can more actively, conveniently, and controllably refurbish their own image through text in order to complete a low-cost textual performance [8]. Compared with other virtual relationship services, companion chatting emphasizes more on satisfying users' emotional needs through text and voice performances in private space. In order to satisfy the emotional needs of different users when facing different users, the service provider needs to understand users' expected roles during the communication process and build a satisfactory role together with the users.

Hosts, as one of the main parts of the live streaming platform, provide a similar service. Unlike companion chat, companion chat is more private than live streaming platforms. Companion chat is more of a customized intimacy. The anchor is more in a public space on the live broadcast platform, in which each user can watch the live broadcast without cost. The premise of emotional commoditization is that emotions meet the emotional needs of users, but the live broadcast platform needs to face a large number of users at the same time, which can not be customized for each user's setting. This leads to the birth of a new mechanism based on this demand; in such an environment, gifts act as a carrier to bear the user's emotions, both the fact of the transaction, and also the expression of emotion, making the commodity covered under the expression of emotion [9]. The amount of gift becomes the degree of the user's emotion toward the anchor, and becomes the standard of what kind of emotion the anchor adopts. In the face of sending more users, the anchor will choose a more intimate way to meet the user's expectations to get more profits, such as adding private contact information.

Based on artificial intelligence, the same function of creating an object that meets the user's expectations to satisfy emotional needs can be realized with the increasing development of related

technologies. According to Wang Qian, Shang Peipei's study [10] on the Replika platform, the platform consciously caters to the diverse needs and aesthetics of users in order to satisfy their emotional needs by meeting the emotional needs of consumers through their voices and bodies. Even if the AI-based product is compared to the above two, it shows a more thorough commercialization, whether it is the physical appearance or the style of clothing can be changed according to different needs, and because of the thorough commercialization, the only way to create a satisfactory Replika character is to compromise on the payment mechanism. The process of developing a character does not require a staff member such as a service provider to manually adjust the character, but is left entirely up to the user, and the process of building a character, i.e., purchasing the relevant items for the Replika character, is also a process of establishing emotional links. According to Daniel Miller, people develop and visualize social relationships they care about through the choice of goods, and the buyer expects the item to be able to create a social relationship. social relationships, with the purchaser expecting the item to influence others to become recipients in line with expectations [11]. On the other hand, the set linguistic scripts also aim to promote consumption behavior by mobilizing emotions through intimate words such as "want" and "like", so that users can develop a sense of attachment and promote purchasing behavior. This is also one of the common features of all three mentioned above [10]. The difference between AI-based technology and the other two is that both companion chat and live hosting create a role that fulfills expectations, which also provides a certain potential risk that commoditized intimacy will be perceived as a commodity relationship if the user perceives the object of the emotional link to be false. There is no such risk based on AI.

Based on the above description, one of the common features is that the user and the service provider construct a role that can satisfy the user's emotional needs together, and satisfy the user's emotional needs on the way to and after constructing the role. Finally, the use of gifts as an intermediary to carry the emotional expectations or the direct use of money to buy the way to complete the conversion of emotion into profit.

Based on such a process, it will bring new dilemmas to both the service provider and the user at the same time. The above has discussed the problem of not being able to establish real links because of the mechanism of commercialized intimacy operation; in addition to this, there are also other aspects of the same problem. The first is about trust, according to Lv Hongmei [8], in companion chat creates a virtual communication space, but because of the lack of clues, there is no trust in the intimacy born in such a space. Such intimacy does not only remain in the virtual space, but in the process of constructing intimacy in real life, this mistrust extends to the construction of real intimacy, which is characterized by a lack of trust [6].

Secondly, regarding the service provider, intimacy is required to build a role together with the user in order to satisfy the user's needs, and in such a situation, in order to give the client as positive an emotional experience as possible, the service provider needs to hide the ego, and therefore repressing other negative perceptions and emotions becomes possible [12]. Once these emotions cannot be properly dealt with, the psychological risks cannot be ignored.

Further, when we define relationships in terms of theories and define ourselves and others in terms of literal descriptions, intimacy becomes a tool to fulfill self-imagination and desire. Emotions are becoming an entity that can be evaluated, examined, discussed, negotiated, quantified, and even traded, and are increasingly subject to utilitarianism.

3.   Conclusion

This paper examines the impact of social media and the commercialization of emotions on intimacy and personal well-being in modern society. The study's analysis indicates that, while social media facilitates ease of connection, its anonymity and virtualized interactions result in a scarcity of genuine emotional connections and an intensification of users' feelings of loneliness. Furthermore, the

commodification of emotional services through the use of payments or gifts has the effect of making the acquisition of emotional support seem utilitarian, and interactions lack the trust and authenticity that are essential for the formation of intimate relationships. In sum, these factors contribute to the dissolution of intimate relationships and impede the attainment of genuine emotional fulfillment.

The present study is primarily theoretical in nature, with a paucity of empirical data to substantiate its claims. In the future, data may be collected through questionnaires and interviews to enhance the persuasiveness of the conclusions. Furthermore, the literature cited in this paper is somewhat limited, with a greater focus on early studies. It would be beneficial to incorporate more recent studies on social media and AI emotional companions to enhance the exposition. This paper primarily examines social media and emotional commercialization from a critical perspective. To enhance the study's comprehensiveness, it would be beneficial to present a balanced analysis of the positive and negative impacts. Future research should focus on the differences in the experience of virtual emotions among different groups of people, such as the needs of different age groups and cultural backgrounds. Concurrently, as AI companion technology develops, the ethical issues of AI emotional services and their long-term impact on intimate relationships should be explored. Furthermore, attention should be paid to the long-term psychological and social impacts of social media and the commercialization of emotions in order to develop recommendations for a healthy digital life.

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