

Alone Together: Study of Adolescents' Psychological Health and Contemporary Social Media

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Abstract: As a very common way of communication, social media such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok and WeChat have deeply infiltrated the lives of teenagers. For teenagers, the use of social media has long been embedded in the following scenarios: talking with friends, arranging after-school life, getting news, following the news of friends and family, keeping up with the latest trends, sharing the bright moments in life, expressing yourself, etc. Over time, the role social media plays in the lives of teenage groups has become more complex, nuanced and diverse. It seems that long gone are the days when one could simply talk about the impact of social media on teens. Adolescents have always been the focus of society as they are the key sustainable factors for future generations. Hence, it is vital to address the phenomenon of "alone together", and then suggest suitable advice targeting the young people group.

Keywords: Alone Together, Social Media, Psychological Health, Adolescent

1. Introduction

More than one decade has passed since Sherry Turkle raised the concept of "alone together", which refers to a kind of interpersonal anxiety in the internet era, a sub-healthy state formed in the internet social environment [1]. To be more specific, "alone together" refers to long-term indulging in social networks or relying on technology products to connect with the outside world. Instead of getting rid of loneliness, it will make people lonelier. The "alone together" in the current social media is mainly reflected in indulging in social networking, ignoring real-life interpersonal communication, obsessed with online games, and becoming dependent on emotional robots.

From a certain point of view, the "alone together" under social media is a concrete manifestation of the continuous deterioration of the information cocoon, that is to say, the behavior of subjects who produce "alone together" under social media is constantly stepping into the information in the process of cocooning, various unhealthy psychology appeared. Adolescents in today's world are the first group who were born with the internet and booming social media. According to a 2018 survey by Hopelab and the Well Being Trust, 93% of young people between the ages of 14 and 22 use social media, mostly daily [2]. Adolescents are the most heavily dependent group on social media, but it seems that the appeal of social media to teenagers has declined. In 2019, 41% of teenagers stated they "a lot" enjoyed using social media; by 2021, that number had dropped to 34% [3]. With the decline in enjoyment but an increase in the attachment to social media, "alone together" appears frequently in the teenage group. For this reason, it is of great necessity to examine the phenomenon of "alone

together" under social media from the perspective of the formation mechanism of the information cocoon, and then find solutions.

2. The Internet Era and "Alone Together"

For many years, numerous scholars have conducted in-depth research on the status and role of media technology or means in the history of social development from different research fields. McLuhan once proposed that the medium is the message and the medium is an extension of human beings, and he developed the perspective of observing human society's development through the lens of media technology [4]. Sherry Turkle, a leading social psychologist in the field of human-technology relations, spent 15 years conducting research on the relationship between people and information technology by combining "field investigation" and "clinical diagnosis". In her book "alone together", she states that "we expect more from technology and less from each other" [1]. She believes that we rely on the virtual space of social networks and that when we leave that space, loneliness follows. In other words, people want to use social media to overcome their inner loneliness, but as a result, they experience a form of "alone together".

Most of the explanation of "alone together" comes from Sherry Turkle, which implies the situation that people desire to be together in order to maintain intimacy, but they also want to be elsewhere, which is known as multitasking [1]. People are happy to be able to connect to other places and keep in touch with people in other places, even if they are already in the middle of a bustling crowd. Furthermore, embarrassing "silence in the crowd" occurs even when on dates and working with colleagues. For example, when a couple is having dinner but they are playing with their phones without face-to-face communication.

A study discovered a growing link between social media use and feelings of loneliness [5]. 71% of heavy social media users reported feelings of loneliness. In comparison, 51% of light social media users said they were lonely. From these figures, it is apparent that the internet is not an effective treatment for loneliness. On the contrary, it is easy to become engrossed in virtual social networks if people invest too much energy and time in them. It is relatively simple to lure people away from real life and into social networks, where they can connect with others. In relationships, relatives and friends experience emotional alienation and indifference. In severe cases, they may appear reticent, emotionally fluctuating, and gradually indifferent to social relationships in reality, as well as other psychological symptoms similar to autism.

3. Problem with Social Media and Young People

Internet and social media have filled every corner of people's lives and it seems that people are stuck with the "net" of the internet. People take out mobile phones to relieve anxiety on many occasions, such as waiting for the elevator or red lights. However, relying on the online world to help alleviate our emotional anxiety also allows us to avoid contact with people and the environment. Technology and information can gobble us at any time, robbing us of our ability to be alone and opportunities for introspection. The abilities of solitude and introspection are the key cornerstones for youngsters to develop a full self. Solitude refers to the ability to separate from the outside world and concentrate one's thoughts. When we lack the ability to solitude, we connect with others to only relieve anxiety or to feel as if we are still present. At the moment, surfing the internet serves only to bolster a frail sense of self-worth. When people go online to find emotional outlets when they are lonely, they lose the ability to think for themselves and the ability to be alone. People constantly believe that the buzzing internet would provide them with spiritual solace, but if people don't learn to be alone, they will simply get lonelier.

Sherry Turkle also carried out work on robotics. When she took her 14-year-old daughter to the museum for the Darwin exhibition, her daughter said the museum could have used a robot tortoise instead of taking huge efforts and transferring the tortoise from the Galápagos Islands. From her perspective, it is not meaningful to move a motionless and lifeless tortoise from all way along to the exhibition. Other children also concurred, claiming that the genuine turtles were unappealing and polluted the water. The functionality of things is significantly bigger in their eyes than the authenticity. The museum's "authenticity" as a selling pitch was unappealing to these children. This could imply that children may have lost sight of the ultimate meaning of life and are only concerned with their "materialized" utility. Addicts to the online conversation may "materialize" the other party and regard the other party as a "tool person" to pass the time. They don't truly care or respect each other; all they are concerned about is if the other person can satisfy their feelings. Furthermore, this phenomenon demonstrates a tendency in which people do not mind the appearance of simulated agents as long as they can perform a certain function that people desire.

However, humanoid robots could not live up to expectations of intimacy. Robotics simply provide the illusion of companionship without the demands of real friendship [6]. In interacting with people, the initiator of the conversation cannot control the other person's reaction, and he or she may be disappointed that do not get support or reactions as expected. The unique thing about intimacy is that you do not have one hundred per cent mastery and there will always be surprises. When people communicate with a robot, people may obtain a follower that is completely programed and understands them rather than an autonomous individual. People cannot empathize with robots, and people cannot have a deep inner collision with them. Also, robots cannot truly comprehend people's feelings since robots do not face mortality, therefore robots do not grasp life's happiness and fears. What is truly gratifying in such a relationship is people's narcissism. Narcissism is a vulnerable personality feature in classical psychoanalysis, not self-appreciation. People who are very narcissistic require a continual dose of external validation. Their ego cannot resist denial, and they can only find fulfilment in supporters while rejecting those who oppose it.

4. Efforts to Weaken "Alone Together" for Young People

Turkle mentioned in her Ted speech that "if we don't teach our children to be alone, they will only know how to be lonely". Realization and understanding of such an issue is the first step for young people to remedy the problem and there are also some methods that could be adopted in order to avoid "alone together".

4.1. Look Inside

On the surface, the contemporary person appears to connect with sociality, but there is no other in his inner reality, and the other disappears immediately into the identity and autonomy of "I," making organic social ties impossible to establish. The dread stems from the connotation of individual subjectivity and the logic of "objectification," which identifies the self as the only subject and treats others outside of the self as the "object." According to the logic of "objectivity," every human interaction ultimately becomes a reciprocal object relationship, and everyone considers others as an instrumental existence.

This reciprocity shatters ancient notions of continuity and destroys intimate ties in modern society. As a result, we must appeal to the practical shift of social interactions, from "seeking outward" to "seeking inward," that is, from seeking outward our own awareness of social and collective ties to seeking inward our own understanding of these relations. Instead of seeking social support blindly, rethink and tackle the problem of "alone together" via introspection. Whether it is the connection with

oneself or the other and society, one can only genuinely address the societal conundrum of being "alone together" by autonomous self-knowledge and introspection.

Moving from self-centered thinking and cognition to thinking and cognition of cohabitation with others implies abandoning practical "objective logic" and promoting "mutual recognition" and "mutual need" among individuals. The fundamental social value of living together. In the process of democratic debate and dialogue among members of society, the possibility of social solidarity and social life unity occurs.

Turkle had a similar viewpoint, thinking that resuming face-to-face talks will help individuals overcome their online loneliness [6]. Unlike the closed and self-centred presentation of "container people" in the virtual network world, intersubjective communication that promotes "mutual recognition" and "conversation" has an openness and dynamism: each individual share with the other. Experience, shared comprehension to the greatest extent feasible, and even mutual communication and integration, all contribute to the formation of a meaningful world. This is a spiritual collision sparked by the subject from the depths of his heart as a result of re-understanding the self-other relationship. It not only maintains the individual subject's independence and autonomy, but it also transcends its isolation and isolation, so making the individual's separation possible. A new wave of co-living can be realized. Without a doubt, communication practice is the objective foundation for realizing intersubjectivity. Individuals must break out from their secluded lives on a practical level, re-enter the sphere of embodied communication, recreate the intersubjective conversation between "self" and "other," and establish a genuine social connection.

4.2. Using Technology Not Be Used by Technology

When dealing with the external reasons for "alone together", dialectical understanding and logical use of network technologies are also required. People's primary communication practice activity in today's times is social networking. Because, in the process of online communication, people do not form rich intersubjective interactions with others, but rather create a non-allowance surrounding each individual reliant on technology. Others' approaches are hampered. Furthermore, there is no other in the genuine sense in virtual symbolic communication of absence of the body, and there is virtually no intersubjective involvement in network connection, therefore it will eventually lead to more profound loneliness. However, it is an irrefutable reality that the social upheaval brought about by network technology has far-reaching implications for the unfettered growth of human communication.

People must inquire and ponder on how far it can support the generation of people's sociality, as well as how to comprehend the ethical quandary of current network communication. In other words, the true question is not how much technology can alter humans, but how individuals reflect on their relationship with technology in the face of change. The existence of technology is not the underlying factor that dictates people's dependency behavior, but rather in the process of people's conduct as the subject of technology, that is, the subject's technical rationality itself." This necessitates promoting a suitable restoration of technology's role.

If we investigate the technological development process, we will see that technology completes its own growth by solving human survival and development difficulties. That is, because technology is founded on human requirements as the underlying foundation for its existence and growth, and is the result of human practice and progress, its application must completely represent the humanistic features of the core aim of satisfying human development needs. It should be noted here that the network technology that generates group loneliness is not without human aspects, although this factor is masked by other reasons. To remove alone together and encourage the harmonious development of human subjectivity, it is important to return to the technology itself and recreate a notion of technical progress that is humanistic in nature. This necessitates technology, on the one hand, continuing to fulfil its function as an advanced producing force and laying the essential material basis

for human life and progress; on the other hand, negative impacts, causing it to evolve in the direction that humans desire. This means that in the evolution of technology, the organic coherence of the instrumental rationality of technology and the rationale of value must be considered, as well as the inevitable tension between the two. Only in this way can technology fully realize its function as a bridge uniting people, restoring people's subjectivity and sociality.

The Internet has become a part of people's everyday lives as a result of their absence, and it is hard for modern people to quit the Internet. The ideal and pursuit of "human-network symbiosis" and "virtual-real harmonious development" should not only fully exploit cyberspace's positive role in promoting inter-subjectivity communication between people but should also actively participate in offline face-to-face conversations to compensate for online interactions. To communicate with the inadequacy produced by the "absence of the body," to cultivate reciprocal subjectivity and intersubjectivity via genuine understanding and discussion, and to use the genuine "together" to cure lonely people and construct a better life.

5. Conclusion

The issue of "alone together" creates many mirror reflections in various domains. These mirror pictures represent people's states of existence. At the same time, this is a result of social growth and technical advancement. The advancement of Internet technology and the resulting alienation issue is a problem that cannot be ignored. When "alone together" becomes a collective resonance, it inevitably leads to collective introspection and the development of new consensus and solutions.

While social networks steadily improve people's communication, they also create a barrier to people's emotions. The media transforms people's values, behavior habits, and psychological experiences covertly. Technology is alluring because it has the potential to compensate for human nature's frailties. When individuals rely on technology and commit themselves to virtual cyberspace on a regular basis, it affects the public's psyche to varying degrees, forming "group numbness and loneliness". The alterations and effects brought about by the fast growth of media on the inner worlds of persons merit consideration. It is anticipated that as time passes, the problem of "alone together" in the social media era mentioned in this essay will intrigue the interest of youngsters and even society. Also, it is hoped that people would retreat from social media and see technology as a communication tool, but not communication per se.

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