

# Study on Internet Social Identity and Isolation of Rural Adolescents

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## Abstract

The Internet has become an important platform for rural youth to obtain information, exchange ideas, find common topics and establish relationships. However, due to the gap between urban and rural areas, there is still a big gap in the use of social networks among rural adolescents compared with urban adolescents. At present, rural adolescents have the problems of deep information cocoon, social isolation at home caused by limited traffic conditions, and their social identity shows the characteristics of blurring reality and network boundaries, and pain needs. To better deal with the impact of social media use on adolescents' self-identity, there are steps that can be taken. First, educate teens to view social media in a proper way, making clear its virtual nature and incompleteness. Secondly, we should further improve the infrastructure construction in rural areas, enrich recreational activities, and encourage diversified social ways for young people, such as face-to-face communication and participation in physical social activities.

## Keywords

Rural adolescent, Internet Social Identity, self-identity.

## 1. Background

Social identity theory in psychology suggests that people tend to affirm their own values through the identification of others with them, thereby enhancing their sense of self-identity. And the same is true when people post WeChat "Moments". In fact, the act of posting on Moments is actually seeking recognition and positive feedback from others, and when people receive "likes" and "comments", this feeling of being recognized by others will increase significantly, resulting in a unique sense of satisfaction. Similarly, when people post a Moments and get a like from someone else, the act of liking is actually a response and attention. This response and attention makes us feel that we are being seen, which strengthens our interpersonal and social skills. So, people are delighted whenever they receive likes and comments under their posts. This knee-jerk "happiness" has been a part of our self-esteem and self-confidence, and the lack of positive social feedback can also lead to psychological problems such as social isolation, self-doubt, and decreased self-esteem.

For rural youth, this social phenomenon is even more important. First of all, as adolescent children, their main purpose is to build a good sense of self. And for this to happen, healthy self-esteem and appropriate positive social feedback are essential. Second, rural adolescents may face different social pressures and cultural identity challenges than urban adolescents, such as how to cope with the difficulties brought about by adolescence in the absence of parental roles for left-behind children? This sense of social identity can create stronger bonds within their families, peers, and communities. In addition, the acquisition of positive social feedback can also stimulate the self-confidence and enthusiasm of rural adolescents. Sharing your life, achievements, and thoughts on social media, with recognition and encouragement, can help shape a positive self-image, enhance optimistic beliefs about the future, and can also be effective in reducing the likelihood of mental illness occurring.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Literature on self-identity of rural adolescents

In *Identity: Adolescence and Crisis*, Erikson argues that "self-identity refers to the adolescent's consistent and well-established awareness of his or her own nature, beliefs, and important aspects of his life, that is, the integration and harmony of the internal state of the individual with the external environment" [1].

Cognitive connection theory argues that place identity is a part of self-identity, the "Physicalworldsocialization of the self". Self-esteem is a value judgment that contains an individual's self-perception, and is an individual's positive emotional experience of self-worth, importance, and success.

Zhuang et al. found in *Place Identity: An Analysis from the Perspective of Environmental Psychology* (2011) that the level of urban identity affects people's well-being, and that the higher the level of identity, the higher the level of well-being [2].

Liu et al. analyzed the mediating effect of local identity, self-esteem and life satisfaction among rural adolescents in the relationship between local identity, self-esteem and life satisfaction of rural adolescents in Hunan Province (2015), and the results showed that local identity could predict the life satisfaction of rural adolescents to a certain extent, and local identity affected the life satisfaction of rural adolescents through the mediating role of self-esteem. In particular, rural adolescents aged 12 to 14 years are experiencing a transition from junior high school to high school, and may have a low sense of identity and stability [3].

### 2.2. The impact of Internet socialization on adolescents

Many scholars define "self-esteem" as the component of self-evaluation, that is, the degree to which a person cherishes, cherishes, praises, and likes himself. It is an important factor in maintaining mental health and improving overall quality of life.

Jealousy often arises from people who are similar to themselves achieving great things or they have things that they have coveted for a long time. Mehdizadeh believes that individuals are more likely to feel jealous when using Facebook. Women who browsed social networking sites experienced a significant decrease in their emotional ratings and became more dissatisfied with their physical appearance [4].

### 2.3. Adolescent social interaction

While using the mobile Internet to communicate, it will dilute the interpersonal communication in the family and social environment, and in the long run, people's psychology tends to be more autistic, and finally cut off the real interpersonal communication. According to the survey statistics of China Youth Network, "seventy percent of the 1,089 college students often stay up late or occasionally stay up late, while only 2.66% of college students never stay up late." According to the reason survey among the people who often stay up late, 71.35% of college students stay up late to play with their mobile phones. In January 2005, the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) released the "Statistical Report on the Development of China's Internet Network", which can also be seen in the network services or functions frequently used by users, of which 85.6% of users use e-mail, and 42.6% use online chat (chat room, QQ, ICQ, etc.). Hamburger and Ben-Artzi's research found that neurotic individuals were more likely to be lonely and more inclined to use social sexual services on the internet.

### 2.4. Summary

In the study of rural students' identity, the current academic community pays more attention to investigating the psychological effects and their roles in self-identity, self-identity, identity, mediation and so on. However, there are still fewer studies on individual cases.

Recent relevant research lacks attention to rural secondary school students, and in identity research focuses more on cultural identity, local identity, and less on self-identity. In terms of Internet-related research on Internet use, the largest audiences are rural left-behind children, rural residents and college students.

### 3. Theoretical Analysis

In this paper, we will combine two theories of social psychology to analyse the role of interpersonal interaction and social feedback in rural adolescents on their consciousness and the reasons behind it. We know that getting likes in the circle of friends is an event without any substantial benefits. Then how should we explain the feeling of joy when we reap the likes? In fact, likes largely satisfy our social needs: the desire to stay in touch with people, and to receive their attention and appreciation. On a physiological level, receiving my approval prompts the brain to secrete dopamine, a neurotransmitter that makes people happy. At the psychological level, the phenomenon is much more complex. Firstly, as mentioned above, one of the most important social tasks of adolescents is to clarify their self-esteem and understand their role and place in society. In order to accomplish this, adolescents are socialised through a process of evolution of their own, society's, or family's guidance through the "social comparison mechanism". For example, in the social circles of adolescents, there are often individuals who unintentionally or intentionally compare themselves to others in terms of social feedback, including the number of likes and comments in their circles of friends. When we see a large number of likes from other people, people tend to confirm and assess their own value and status in social media or even in real life through this social comparison. Therefore, in this case, we may question our own social image in order to pursue more likes. In other words, theoretically, the higher the number of likes, the stronger the social self-identity will be.

Secondly, the halo effect, or halo effect, also explains this social phenomenon. The halo effect was put forward by the American scientist Kelly, and it refers to the social phenomenon that people tend to form comprehensive conclusions about a person based on a certain characteristic of that person. Similarly, teenagers generally believe that putting their best foot forward in social media posts will give other people a positive social perception of them, and will incorrectly believe that their likes are the most direct recognition of them. Firstly, likes are often a way of expressing emotional resonance with a post or comment. When a person is able to resonate with others, this may create a positive social recognition on social media and deepen the halo effect. Secondly, likes are a way of expressing approval and support on social media. When a person's post receives many likes, this may influence other people's sense of social identification with that user. This social recognition may go beyond the content of the original post, creating a halo effect from what other people think of themselves. Finally, people selectively display their lives and achievements on social media. Likes can be seen as a form of feedback on this self-presentation. When a person receives frequent likes on their posts, they may be more motivated to continue presenting positive content, creating a positive halo effect.

## 4. Analysis of the Social Situation of Rural Adolescents Based on Field Research

### 4.1. Research Location

Hunan Baishuidong Village, located in Longhui County, is a village full of vigour and cultural charm. This village is famous for its rich Hua Yao culture and unique natural scenery. In recent years, Baishuidong Village has made remarkable achievements in education and ecological protection. The village's primary school has received funding and support from Hunan University, and the quality of teaching has been significantly improved. At one time,

Baishuidong Primary School had only one dilapidated teaching building, two playgrounds without hardening and an old-fashioned toilet, with a serious lack of teachers. Since 2015, Hunan University has successively selected two teachers from its children's primary schools and 23 postgraduate students to carry out a voluntary teaching relay in the village. From 2018 to 2020, Hunan University has invested more than 6 million yuan in the Baishuidong Primary School's renovation and expansion project, and organised the School of Architecture and other university departments and school-run enterprises to participate in the whole process of design, supervision and testing. The old teaching building has been repaired, and a new comprehensive building has been built. At present, the school has complete teaching facilities, with six functional rooms such as science laboratory, library, art room, multimedia classroom, physical education equipment room and young pioneers' activity room, which has become one of the modern schools with the most complete facilities, the most complete functions and the most advanced teaching equipment among the rural schools in Longhui County.

#### 4.2. Information Cocoon Room

Educational resources in rural areas are limited, and students tend to have more limited contact with people due to conditions, and their social circle is relatively narrow. Compared with urban primary school students, they lack opportunities to communicate with people from different backgrounds and with different interests, thus restricting the development of their interpersonal skills.

Rural youth are not inaccessible to the Internet, but are in the information cocoon of the Internet. Interviewee Xu mentioned in the interview that in the rural children's community, they seldom go out of their Internet social circle, but rather stay in their original "circle". This suggests that rural youth are active within their own comfortable social circles, but seldom break out of these boundaries.

Rural youth, like their urban counterparts, have strong hobbies in sports and culture, but for a variety of reasons, such as parental neglect and family financial constraints, they are unable to develop their hobbies and skills through specialised training courses like most urban youth. Instead, they only have to choose to cultivate and develop their hobbies, such as singing, dancing, drawing, editing videos, etc. through watching short videos.

#### 4.3. Frustrating experiences

Not only that, rural adolescents actually experience a certain degree of psychological frustration in facing the transition from rural to urban areas. Interviewee Xie mentioned in the interview that there was a period of time when she had just entered the city to attend university, and she did not know anything and could not keep up with the pace of everyone else, so she would have a certain degree of low self-esteem and anxiety. From this, we can see that rural adolescents actually need to go through certain psychological transitions and changes before they can successfully adapt to the urban social environment.

#### 4.4. The state of isolation of village students at home

By analysing the content of the interviews and the state of the interviewees, the author believes that there is a disconnection between the rural children and nature, their peers, and their mothers. For example, when asked whether the children spend more time staying at home or going out to play, the mother of the interviewee said, "No, not going out in any way. Just staying at home. Looking at the mobile phone, it's so big." Obviously, being addicted to technological products such as mobile phones and TVs will deprive children of the time and opportunity to get in touch with nature, so as to lead to a large number of countryside youngsters being cut off from nature.

Not only that, but rural children's interaction with their peers is also very limited. The relatively poor transport conditions in rural areas limit interactions between students. Due to the

inconvenience of transport, it is difficult for them to interact with their classmates in other areas, and they are unable to broaden their social circle. A junior high school girl said that she wished very much that her friends lived closer to her so that they could easily play together.

#### **4.5. Interpersonal guidance in family education**

Village children also did not have a very closely understood relationship with their parents. In three of the four households interviewed by the author, the parents said they never supervise their children's homework, and they do not even know when their children are on holiday or what their children's lives are like in school. For example, when asked if parents supervise their children's homework, the interviewee's mother said, "Generally then rarely go and watch them [complete their homework], they are generally homework assigned by the teacher, that is, they do it all." These parents believed that children at this age should rely more on their own self-motivation rather than their mothers' prodding. The common assumption among the uninitiated is that country children often spend a lot of time with nature and playing in the field with their classmates. But the reality is that the older the child, the more he or she tends to "stay at home" and watch mobile phones or TV, rather than go out and socialise with their peers.

In my observation, parents are generally more attentive to the details of their children's education and have a higher degree of attention and control over their children's lives. For example, mothers in the family would teach their children to be polite to strangers and friends and relatives, and to know how to greet and communicate with others. The potential causes of this phenomenon encompass economic, geographical, and social factors. It is well known that both or one of the mothers of the left-behind children work abroad all year round, and the purpose of doing so is to earn money to support the family. This incorporates the geographical factor of remoteness, the economic factor due to the family's need to work outside the area, and the social influence of other families in the neighbourhood.

#### **4.6. Social Identity and Isolation of Rural Adolescents**

Watching short videos is prevalent among rural adolescents and has become an important topic of conversation for rural adolescents to interact with at school. The positive impact is the ability to have a good relationship with friends, to have common topics to chat about, and to get along better with classmates. One girl interviewed mentioned that she likes to watch videos of dancing, drawing, and doing handicrafts in short videos, and she learns with her own hands. Girls who are in their adolescence begin to pay extra attention to their appearance and like to watch content on beauty and dressing. Boys, on the other hand, are more inclined to watch gaming content, but will only interact with their classmates during school. Rural adolescents are generally isolated and do not interact with others online during their home period.

In real life, rural adolescents have problems such as difficult economic conditions in their families, insufficient public service facilities, and limited groups of people with whom they can socialise, so they are keen to pursue "authority" in online gaming communities, and often analogise the names, titles, and statuses they have achieved in the virtual world with those they have achieved in real life, and call themselves such. For example, an interviewee in the sixth grade of primary school mentioned that he mainly plays the confrontation path in the game of King of Glory, which is characterised by "lone heroes", and therefore he usually does not communicate with other students in real life and keeps to himself.

Social media provides a stage for teenagers to display themselves. By posting photos, videos and text, they can showcase their lives, interests and talents. This display behaviour often gains likes and comments from others, thus boosting teenagers' self-esteem and self-confidence. However, what rural adolescents display in their circle of friends and QQ space are more "sad texts" copied from the Internet, and "sadness" itself is a kind of self-emotional expression and demand of rural adolescents. Psychological research shows that people tend to pay more

attention to negative stimuli than positive ones. Publishing hurtful texts helps to increase the number of likes and attention to the publisher. In this sense, hurtful literature is also a tool of self-identification for rural adolescents.

## 5. Conclusion

In summary, the Internet has become an important platform for rural adolescents to obtain information, exchange ideas, find common topics, and build relationships. However, due to the gap between urban and rural areas, there is still a big gap between rural youth's social network usage and that of urban youth. At present, rural adolescents are deep in the information cocoon, socially isolated at home due to the limitation of transport conditions, and their social identity is characterised by the blurring of the boundaries between reality and the Internet, as well as their wounded needs. Although there is interpersonal guidance for rural adolescents in terms of family education, they still lack opportunities for practice in reality.

In order to better cope with the impact of social media use on adolescents' self-identity, some measures can be taken. Firstly, adolescents should be educated to view social media correctly and clarify its virtual nature and incompleteness. They should understand that displays on social media do not represent real life, and that everyone has his or her own troubles and unsatisfactory situations. Secondly, we should further improve the infrastructure in rural areas, enrich recreational and cultural activities, and encourage young people to diversify their socialising methods, such as face-to-face communication and participation in physical social activities. This will help them establish more real and solid social relationships, thus strengthening the basis of self-identity.

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