The Practical Relationship Between Mobile Game Social Interaction and Parental Media Intervention Among Rural Teenagers: A Case Study of H Town in Henan Province

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Abstract. With the proposal of the rural revitalization strategy in the report of the 19th National Congress and the promulgation and implementation of the Family Education Promotion Law in 2022, rural family education has increasingly become the focus of attention of all parties. This study adopts qualitative research methods to conduct in-depth interviews with parents and children of 12 groups of families in H Town, Henan Province, aiming to explore the practical relationship between rural adolescents' mobile game social interaction and parental media intervention. The study found that popular culture and social identity are important factors affecting teenagers' social interaction with mobile games. Parents face many difficulties (such as role anxiety) when implementing media intervention, and it is difficult for parents to reach a consensus in social media practice. Based on this, the article puts forward suggestions for further building a good parent-child relationship to help rural families better cope with the challenges of the digital age.

Keywords: Gaming social; Parental media intervention; Rural revitalization; Family education.

1 Introduction

The vigorous promotion of the rural revitalization strategy has prompted the country to pay more attention to the revitalization of rural education. The report of the 20th National Congress of the CPC clearly stated that comprehensively promote the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation with Chinese-style modernization and stressed that education, science and technology, and talents are the basic and strategic support for comprehensively building a modern socialist country. The most difficult and onerous tasks are still in the countryside [1]. With the popularization of smartphones and Internet technology, mobile games have become popular among teenagers. In the countryside, due to limited social channels, mobile games have become an important way for teenagers to socialize. However, this has also brought about problems such as game addiction, social anxiety, and online fraud, highlighting the urgency of revitalizing

rural education. As the family is the main place for adolescents' gaming behavior, parents' media intervention is crucial. However, rural parents face challenges in intervention due to their limited literacy level. Currently, there are insufficient studies on adolescent mobile game socialization and parental media intervention in rural families. Therefore, this study focuses on rural families, explores the relationship between mobile game socialization and parental media intervention, and reveals the current situation of rural adolescents' cultural life, aiming to provide a new perspective on family media development and help revitalize rural education.

2   Literature Review

2.1   Interpersonal Communication in Mobile Games for Teenagers

According to the 53rd Statistical Report on China's Internet Development released by China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), as of December 2023, the number of Internet users in China has reached 1.092 billion, and the Internet penetration rate in rural areas has accounted for 66.5%[2]. Compared with adults, young people who have grown up with the Internet are the main force of Internet users in rural areas. Through literature search, it is found that domestic and foreign scholars have studied the interpersonal communication of teenagers in mobile games from different theoretical perspectives:

2.1.1 The Game of Mobile Game Socialization and Real Socialization.
   Previous studies have found that adolescents' social experiences are simpler and generally confined between campus and home, so socializing through mobile games is an important channel for them to get in touch with the society. Laksana N Y, Fadhilah A in their study mentioned that adolescents nowadays are more in favor of interpersonal communication based on new media, whether it is following the trend or making friends [3]. Most of the students reported that by participating in mobile games made their regular classmates into good friends. This shows us the outstanding positive function of mobile game socialization. A national study of 13-17 year olds reported that digital technology and social media platforms have changed the way teens communicate and build romantic relationships, with about a quarter of teens who have ever dated meeting a current or former partner online [4]. This result also validates that mobile gaming socialization has specific advantages in expanding the scope of adolescents' interactions compared to real-world socialization.

2.1.2 Game Addiction behind Mobile Game Socialization.
   A review of the existing literature reveals that the causes of game addiction behind adolescent mobile game socialization involve psychological dependence, social demands, and peer pressure. Early studies have shown that adolescent mobile game addiction is not only closely related to peer pressure, but also driven by the social anxiety behind it. Researchers such as Li Qua also mentioned that mobile games can effectively fill the gap of offline socialization and help adolescents alleviate individual

loneliness when real-life socialization fails to meet expectations [5]. This finding is in line with the results of related foreign research, a researcher using stratified random sampling method, 439 students to carry out a questionnaire survey, the results show that there is a significant negative correlation between addiction to cell phone games and individual loneliness [6].

2.2   Parental Media Intervention Model

The concept of parental media intervention can be traced back to the 1980s, when research focused mainly on the television medium, and scholars generally proposed three parental media intervention strategies: active, restrictive, and co-use [7][9]. Nowadays, with the rapid development of media technology, the scope of parental media intervention has gradually expanded from television to a variety of new media forms, such as smart phones and tablet computers [8]. At the same time, the increasing social interactivity in the digital age makes the boundaries of the original positive, restrictive and shared intervention strategies gradually blurred, and accordingly, new changes in parental media intervention have occurred, for example, Livingstone S, Helsper E J proposed a new measure of parental media intervention in the media environment of the Internet - supervision, that is, parents will regularly check their children's browsing habits. for example, Livingstone S, Helsper E J proposed a new measure of parental media intervention-monitoring in the Internet media environment, i.e., parents would regularly check the web pages, social media posts, game contents, etc., that their children browse [9]. In the case of smartphone game use, it is manifested in parents' supervisory observation of their children's use of mobile games. Thus there are four common measures taken by parents in the contemporary interventions on their children's social use of mobile games, namely, restrictive intervention, positive intervention, shared use, and supervision. All four strategies may contribute to changes in adolescents' attitudes and behaviors when using mobile games socially.

Further review of the literature revealed that parents in rural families generally have negative attitudes toward digital media use due to differences in socioeconomic status and cultural background [10]. How to transform parental media intervention in rural families from the theoretical level into practical and feasible practice research, and make it an effective media communication method to promote the development of parent-child relationship has become a common concern in the community. In view of this, the present study first aims to identify the deep-rooted causes of rural adolescents' addiction to socializing in cell phone games, and to further explore how rural parents adopt media interventions while focusing on adolescents' attitudes toward their interventions. The specific research questions are:

Research Question 1: What are the motivational and behavioral characteristics of rural adolescents addicted to mobile game socialization?

Research Question 2: Do rural parents intervene in their children's cell phone game socialization? What kind of intervention is adopted? What are the effects?

3 Research Methodology

This study utilized a combination of individual and family interviews through semi-structured in-depth interviews in order to collect first-hand information. When selecting families for interviews, special attention was paid to rural families that could highlight the topics of adolescent mobile game socialization and parental media intervention to ensure a high degree of fit between the content of the study and the proposition. A total of 12 groups of rural families were selected as the research sample for this study. After identifying the first group of families to be interviewed, snowball sampling was used to select subsequent families. For ease of description, this study draws on the nomenclature used by Prof. Zhou Xiaohong in her research. Specifically, the twelve letters of the alphabet, A through L, were used to represent the twelve groups of families participating in the interviews, and for the members in the interviewed families, F (father) was used to represent the father, M (mother) was used to represent the mother, B (boy) was used to represent the son, and G (girl) was used to represent the daughter. For example, the father of family A will be named AF and the daughter of family B will be named BG [11].

4 Findings and Discussion

4.1 Virtual Gratification in Popular Culture and Social Identity

During the interviews, when mentioning which game is preferred, the answers repeatedly included Honor of Kings and Original God, and after further pursuing the reasons for choosing this game, the author found that pop culture elements play an important role in promoting the socialization of teenagers' mobile games. A large number of pop culture elements have been integrated into mobile game socialization, such as cartoon images, celebrity endorsements, popular music, etc. These elements not only enrich the game content, but also help to promote the socialization of teenagers. These elements not only enrich the game content, but also influence the aesthetics, values and lifestyles of teenagers. For example, FG expressed in the interview, "I super like playing Original God, its scenes and characters are so exquisitely designed!" The popular elements in the game are in line with adolescents' aesthetic interests and hobbies, making mobile game socialization highly attractive.

Social identity is another important factor influencing teenagers' mobile game socialization. In addition to being competitive, mobile games also show a high degree of socialization. From individual competition to teamwork, the game platform provides players with a way to fulfill their social needs. Through gaming platforms, adolescents can not only make friends with gaming partners from different backgrounds, but also satisfy their psychological need for recognition in real life. In this interview, most of the students indicated that their real-life "not fitting in" prompted them to join mobile games to keep in touch and synchronize with others. This sense of social acceptance encourages adolescents to participate in games more frequently, and they may even become overly addicted to games, which affects their studies and lives.

4.2   Role Anxiety Under Parents' Digital Supervision

In the family arena, parents, as the first guardians of their children, implement digital supervision, which mainly refers to the use of modern digital technologies and tools to manage and supervise their children's digital media use. However, this process is not easy to implement, and rural parents often have role anxiety in the process of digital supervision, which comes from several aspects. One of the manifestations is that rural parents are overly concerned about their children's gaming behaviors and are highly vigilant about the amount of time their children devote to gaming. For example, DMs frequently mention that their children are in the critical period of high school, and worry that their children are over-indulged in the virtual world to the extent that their academic performance declines. The second manifestation is the questioning of rural parents' ability to supervise themselves. The rapid updating of electronic devices makes it challenging for more and more rural parents to understand and use digital supervision tools, and they worry that they are unable to master these technologies, thus making it difficult to effectively manage and supervise their children's gaming behaviors, which further exacerbates parents' anxiety about their own abilities.

4.3   Difficulty in Reaching Parent-Child Consensus in Social Media Practice

4.3.1 Differences in Social Media Perceptions Across Generational Divides.

From the perspective of teenagers, mobile game socialization is an important channel for their daily entertainment and socialization. From the perspective of rural parents, who are busy making a living all year round, they think that playing games is a waste of time, and they want their children to spend their time on more valuable things such as studying or housework. In addition, adolescents believe that mobile game socialization is a normal way of socializing, which can enhance friendship and social skills; while parents worry that their children's over-indulgence in the virtual world will lead to a disconnection from the real world. As a result, parents often adopt methods such as limiting the time of use and monitoring the game content in an attempt to control adolescents' mobile game social behavior.

4.3.2 Conflict between Parental Media Intervention and Adolescent Autonomy.

Rural parents usually take a conservative and cautious attitude toward their teenagers' social behaviors in mobile games. In this interview, the author listed four types of media intervention behaviors, namely, restrictive intervention, positive intervention, joint use, and supervision, based on the division of parental media intervention behaviors according to the existing theories beforehand, so that parents can make judgments about their own intervention behaviors. The interviews found that more than half of the parents preferred a single restrictive intervention due to the fear of their children being addicted to mobile games or being negatively influenced. Although restrictive interventions may, to a certain extent, reduce their children's excessive use of cell phones in the short term, such interventions tend to limit adolescents' autonomy and freedom in the long run. The author understands that adolescents desire to express

themselves freely and make their own choices in games, and their parents' behaviors often make them feel bound and suppressed. Therefore, when rural parents adopt media intervention, they need to consider their children's actual situation more comprehensively and deeply and adopt appropriate media intervention.

5   Conclusions

Starting from the theory of parental media intervention and through in-depth interviews with both parents and children of 12 groups of rural families in H Town, Henan Province, this study explored the reality of the dilemma of parental media intervention in teenagers' mobile game socialization, and at the same time, this study also reaped new discoveries, and put forward the following reflections on how to build good parent-child relationships in rural families in order to provide an important supplement to China's existing research and practice on parental media intervention in rural villages to some extent.

5.1   Open Dialogue Space to Build Parent-Child Bridges

During the interviews, we learned that adolescents' attitudes and feedback about parental interventions were diverse. Some believe that parental intervention is necessary and have a positive attitude towards parental media intervention. There are also some adolescents who have negative attitudes towards parental media interventions, believing that parents intervene too much and restrict their freedom. These adolescents try to escape parental supervision and even use cell phones and other social media in secret. In fact, as parents are exposed to more and more emerging technologies, their views on mobile gaming are becoming increasingly diverse. Instead of focusing solely on the negative aspects of gaming, parents are beginning to look more objectively at its entertaining and social features, and some are even recognizing the positive impact that mobile gaming can have when used appropriately. Therefore, when parents and children face conflicts in the use of media, they should respect each other and communicate effectively.

5.2   Enhancing Media Literacy and Promoting Cognitive Synchronization

Through interviews, the author learned that rural parents focus more on the behavioral level when it comes to media interventions, aiming to weaken the possible negative impacts of games by guiding their children to reduce the time and frequency of mobile game use. However, due to their own lack of media literacy, parents face great challenges in educating their children. The quality of online information varies, and parents first need to improve their ability to recognize information so that they can more effectively guide their children to sift the right information from the media. In addition, although parental media interventions may have a certain degree of influence on adolescents' mobile gaming behavior, their effect is often limited because adolescents are frequently exposed to a variety of media in their daily lives, and they are still exposed to

a variety of risks when their parents are unable to supervise them. Therefore, while parents emphasize on improving their own media literacy, they should not neglect the cultivation of their children's media literacy.

5.3   Deepening Technology Feedback, Communion in the Digital Age

Analyzing the interview data of the offspring, the author found that the children generally accepted their parents as their friends on social media with a negative attitude. When asked about the reasons, most of the children said that their parents had many questions about the use of social media, always encountered obstacles in communication, and that they did not have the patience to help their parents solve the problems. In fact, parent-child interaction is a two-way process. The proficiency of teenagers as active users of digital media often inspires parents' curiosity and desire to learn about new technologies. When parents are able to respect their children's wishes and take the initiative to learn from them about digital media, their children will also be willing to share this knowledge and skills with their parents. This is a smart way to achieve two-way parent-child socialization.

Acknowledgements

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