

New Manifestations of Media Dependence in the Mobile Internet Era and Coping Strategies: Post-print

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Abstract

In the era of mobile internet, the instantaneous connectivity constructed by electronic information media interconnects every individual. The intelligent evolution of mobile terminals progressively enhances the interactivity of information dissemination, elevating human dependency on media to an unprecedented level. In this context, avoiding excessive dependency on media assumes critical significance.

Full Text

New Manifestations of Media Dependency in the Mobile Internet Era and Coping Strategies

Abstract: In the mobile internet era, electronic information media instantly connects everyone. The intelligent development of mobile terminals has gradually enhanced the interactivity of information dissemination, pushing people's dependence on media to a new height. Avoiding excessive dependence on media is extremely important in this era.

Keywords: Mobile Internet; Audience; Media Dependency

By Hu Li

Since the era of mass communication began, people have engaged with media in various ways. The development of the internet has caused media, brimming with cutting-edge technology, to rapidly sweep across the globe. The increasingly sophisticated network environment has stimulated demand for various internet applications, and the mobile internet has, to a certain extent, shaped a new form of social life. Immersed in a vast ocean of information, people increasingly tend to rely on media, gradually exhibiting excessive instrumental dependence on it.

1.1.1 Intelligentization of Mobile Terminals

In the internet era, mobile terminals are primarily represented by smartphones and tablets. Smartphones, in particular, integrate functions such as telephone, computer, television, photography, videography, and positioning into a single device, becoming the mainstay of mobile terminals. The reality of “one phone per person” is gradually being realized. The high mobility and convenience of mobile terminals make information dissemination extremely convenient. Based on this, a special economic model has emerged—the media economy, also known as the attention economy, in which eyeball resources are the most scarce resource. The characteristic of mobile intelligent terminals providing services anytime and anywhere perfectly fills time gaps such as riding the subway or waiting for buses. By attracting audience attention during intermittent, non-continuous, and fragmented time periods to generate economic income, a “discrete attention economy” has been created.

1.1.2 Instantaneity and Interactivity of Information Transmission

In the internet era, the two-step flow model that connects interpersonal communication and mass communication can no longer summarize such complex networked communication patterns. “Network communication, set against a backdrop of global massive information, involves massive participants as its objects, who are simultaneously receivers and publishers of information and can provide feedback on information anytime and anywhere.” Currently, information spreads with high speed, strong timeliness, and few restrictions. Audience resources are greatly enriched by the huge number of mobile phone users, objectively increasing communication frequency and expanding communication content, gradually fostering media dependency syndrome.

1.1.3 Convenience of Application Platforms

“Applications” are commonly called APPs, that is, software. These “applications” are also referred to as “clients.” Currently, almost every mobile intelligent terminal device has an “app store,” where users download different software according to their needs. “Applications” simplify the path to obtaining information. Before the popularity of clients, people typically needed to use www or wap browsers to search for information, input URLs, and gradually obtain needed content. In this process, other distractions often occurred, leading to wasted time. The emergence of “applications” simplifies the information search process—opening an “app” provides direct access to content. Their prevalence solidifies audience habits, and specialized services make specific brands become special dependencies for audiences.

1.2 The Arrival of the Mobile Internet Era

The reason mobile internet can be defined as an era is not that it creates more information, but that it changes the original secondary relationship between

people and information. The development of the internet, especially mobile internet, makes spatial distance disappear, and people gradually become part of information. Before this era arrived, people and information were separate, and people often had to expend much effort to obtain needed information. But now, people can easily capture needed information, information dissemination channels have been broadened, and the autonomy of information selection continuously increases.

2.1 The Connotation of Media Dependency

In the book *Communication Studies Tutorial*, scholar Guo Qingguang defines “media dependency syndrome” as: over-indulging in media and unable to extricate oneself; having to find certain basis in media for any value and behavioral choice; being satisfied with virtual social interaction in media while avoiding real-life social interaction; having a lonely and autistic social personality, etc. Against the backdrop of mobile internet, with highly developed media, people gradually regard media use as an important means to complete their own socialization, and media dependency increasingly manifests.

2.2 New Manifestations of Media Dependency

Currently, people’s needs are relatively easy to obtain and can be persistently satisfied in media, and people gradually form habits. The new manifestations of “media dependency syndrome” mainly include the following three points.

2.2.1 Social Alienation: Value Choices Increasingly Influenced by Networks So-called social alienation refers to users being satisfied with virtual social interaction with media, spending large amounts of time on the network, thus neglecting real life. Data shows that as of the end of 2015, the three most used areas by mobile internet users in China were social networking, search platforms, and e-commerce. The most visited websites were qq.com and weixin.qq.com, with QQ and WeChat accounting for 30.34% and 11.95% of visits respectively. Currently, the expansion of social media makes more people inclined to release pressure borne in real life and alleviate various tensions. More and more people are keen to seek help on the network, and their views on matters are more easily influenced by the network, thus changing their original attitudes and positions.

2.2.2 The Prevalence of Shallow Reading: Superficial Engagement with Issues McLuhan stated: “Print media cultivates linear, causal, and rational thinking patterns, but prevents people from understanding and thinking in three-dimensional and composite ways. On the other hand, using cool electronic media requires more active participation from people, exercising their rich imagination, thereby making human thinking more flexible, comprehensive, and unconventional.” Currently, the powerful amount of information from media greatly weakens original difficulty, substantially reducing media users’ judgment and thinking abilities. Compressed reading time makes people increasingly keen

to consume instant, superficial, and entertaining fast-food culture, rejecting depth, tiring of thinking, and quoting out of context, making shallow reading increasingly become a “chronic problem” for modern people.

2.2.3 Disrupted Life Patterns: Procrastination as a Complication of Media Dependency The vigorous development of media greatly broadens people’s horizons. The emergence of “night owls” can be said to be a product of media dependency to some extent. On the network, one often sees people joking: “I become increasingly tired when doing serious work, but once I pick up my phone, I’m fully revived.” With deepening media use, procrastination seems to become the norm in life: “I’ll browse Weibo for a while before doing this,” “I’ll check my feed first.” Moreover, more people even create a ridiculous phenomenon of “you’re only working hard in your social media circle.” This cycle repeats, and eventually planned tasks can only come to naught, making procrastination a complication of media dependency.

3. Coping Strategies for Media Dependency

Media development has become an unstoppable trend, and the harm caused by media dependency cannot be underestimated. Currently, how to correctly prevent it appears extremely urgent.

In 1992, the American Media Literacy Research Center defined media literacy as follows: “Media literacy refers to the abilities of selection, understanding, questioning, evaluation, creation, production, and critical thinking that people demonstrate when facing various media information.” Today, with fully developed media technology, media has become self-media, and everyone is in an equal position in media utilization. Thus, the dimension of information dissemination gradually transitions from a subject-object dimension to an inter-subjective dimension. To avoid excessive dependence on media, the key lies in enhancing information selection and understanding abilities, and facing new problems with active thinking rather than simple acceptance. “Life is a form of motion, an uneven, irregular, and even diverse motion. In it, indulging oneself and being firmly bound by various preferences to the point of being unable to deviate or turn—this is essentially not being a friend to oneself, much less a master of oneself, but becoming a slave to oneself.”

3.2 Active Guidance from Family and Friends: Enhancing Real-World Communication Some scholars call interaction on the network “lonely revelry.” In fact, participating in media interaction is also a process for users to find their own sense of identity and belonging. People tend to seek social consensus in similar groups, wanting to win others’ recognition and respect while striving for discourse power. Due to excessive dependence on media, media dependency syndrome patients are prone to communication barriers in social interaction, becoming more silent the more they fear, and their personalities become more reclusive. If they rely only on their own efforts to leave the virtual world, the

process will certainly be difficult. Therefore, they should receive help from family and friends at this time. As parents, they should encourage their children to go out, integrate into society, make more friends, and participate in more social activities. As friends, they should strengthen daily interaction, seek more opportunities for real-life interaction, and jointly participate in more positive and healthy activities.

3.3 Enhancing Media Credibility: Creating a Favorable Environment

Media credibility refers to a kind of power that news media possesses to be trusted by the public, determining the media's influence on public opinion. In today's mobile internet era, the lowered threshold for information dissemination mixes various types of information together, and the situation of fake news flooding gradually increases. When one media outlet is involved in falsehood, many media outlets, especially online media, rush to republish and spread it, becoming accomplices and seriously damaging the overall credibility of the media. It is particularly important for media itself to strengthen self-discipline, ensure news authenticity, not blindly pursue click rates, focus on social benefits, and have the courage to bear responsibility. In short, it is to combine the media's own industry self-discipline with external social regulation, improve relevant institutional mechanisms, ensure that audience opinions are heard and implemented, and create a clear and bright online consumption environment.

The development of mobile internet draws us into a "personalized" unique space. While constructing this space, we slowly enjoy our positioning as information disseminators, constantly showing ourselves and expressing ourselves to people, highlighting our uniqueness. Our lives gradually become out of our control, rapidly changing information surrounds us, and the transformation of identities gradually makes us tired of coping. How to maintain a clear mind amidst the rapid development of media and avoid the troubles of media dependency syndrome has become a question worth people's deep reflection.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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