

Study on Information Avoidance Behavior in WeChat

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Abstract. [Background] As the rapid prevalent of social media, the receiving, processing and utilizing of information is becoming extremely convenient. However, the problems of information overload and low information quality emerged at the same time also bring excessive social pressure on the social media platform. As a result, an increasing number of users are beginning to take negative attitudes towards all kinds of complicated information on social media. So, it is of great significance to investigate how information avoidance behavior was happened. **[Method]** The in-depth interview was adopted as the way of collecting original data in this study, the sample of which was from Beijing and Anhui Lushan County based on the convenience of snowballing. **[Results]** Based on the grounded theory, the author summarizes five main categories, namely environmental factors, personal factors, technical factors, negative emotions and information avoidance behavior, and clarified the relationship among them. Environmental factors affect personal factors and bad emotions; personal factors affect bad emotions; adverse emotions and technical factors affect the information avoidance behavior directly.

Keywords: Information Avoidance Behavior, Information Overload, Grounded Theory.

1 Introduction

With the rapid popularity of the Internet and the wide use of smart phones, social platforms have become an indispensable part of people's lives because of their convenience, rapidity, diversity and entertaining. Social media is a platform for content production and exchange based on user relationship on the Internet. It is also a tool and platform for people to share opinions and experiences with each other. Up to now, the mainstream social media mainly includes Facebook, Twitter, Microblog, WeChat, major forums and so on, among which, WeChat has become the most important channel of information dissemination, acquisition and communication in people's lives in China. However, it also brings explosive growth of various information, group chat information and self-media information. Herbert Simon pointed out as early as 1997 that due to the development of information technology, information overload will become

a bigger problem, and the quality of information will become worse and worse" [20]. It is impossible for people to browse as much information as the vast ocean. So, it is necessary to establish a corresponding information selection mechanism to avoid information that we are not interested in or cannot produce value and delve deep into the study of information avoidance behavior.

From the literature review, most of the subjects are concentrated on special group members such as patients [3,4,11,16,17,21], pregnant women [14] and adolescents [1]. And some scholars have noticed the information avoidance behavior in social media from the perspective of social media burnout [2,9,10,12,22,23], but they have not placed it on the research focus. Research on information avoidance behavior in social media has not been fully discovered.

When it comes to the question how information avoidance behavior occurred, multiple factors should be taken into account. Firstly, a body of research found that negative emotions, like anxiety, fear and aversion, lead to information avoidance behavior. It is obvious that individuals tend to avoid information when they realize that information acquisition can lead to psychological discomfort [5,7,13]. For example, a research conducted by Chae[5] demonstrates that when patients' anxiety rises to the level of fear or disgust, their information behavior tends to change from information search to information avoidance. As a result, negative emotion is often positively associated with information avoidance behavior. Besides, information overload is another factor that should be considered [7,18]. Both Donald O. C. [7] and Charles Perrow [18] illustrate that people tend to avoid information related to or unrelated to them because of information overload, and this information avoidance behavior is accepted by others in most cases. Lastly, when the information contradicts existing knowledge and cognitive, people tend to avoid it. Take the studies of Donald O. C. [7] and Gaspar [8] as evidence, they propose that individuals tend to avoid information that is inconsistent with their inherent cognitive patterns. Clark J. K. et al.'s research also illustrate the relationship between information avoidance and personal contradictory state and believes that individuals in contradictory state will avoid the information that can persuade them [6].

The purpose of our research is to explore the influencing factors and performance of information avoidance behavior in WeChat daily use through in-depth interviews. Specifically, by establishing an analysis model based on case behavior data, this poster describe and explain the mechanism of users' avoiding lower value information efficiently. In this way, we can provide a reference for developing more effective information avoidance functions for stakeholders like social media.

The core question to be answered in this paper is as follow.

- (i) Is there any information avoidance behavior in the process of using WeChat?
- (ii)What are the characteristics of information avoidance behavior in WeChat?
- (iii)What affect users' information avoidance behavior?

2 Research Method

2.1 Participants

We selected Beijing and Zhudian Administrative Village in Anhui as the locations of the investigation. Considering that this study focuses on reliable and detailed interview raw materials, the author is more concerned about the quality of interview text, that is, whether the interview text can meet the data quality requirements of this study. Therefore, the author takes into account the use of WeChat and the degree of social network participation in the selection of respondents. Thus, young and middle-aged groups with high usage of mobile social media were selected as interviewees.

2.2 Data Collections

In order to disclose the answers to the core questions, this article adopts an unstructured form to conduct one-to-one in-depth interviews with representative group members from January 12, 2018 to February 14, 2019.

The outline of the interview was obtained by relevant literature before the interview, and made some reasonable adjustments based on the interview content in the early stage of the survey. According to the specific content of the respondent's answers, the author guides them to answer the related questions so as to collect the following information.

Demographic Data. The respondents are expected to offer their basic demographic information, like age, gender, educational background, major and occupation.

Basic Information Regarding WeChat Usage. The overall WeChat usage information, including length of service, using frequency, number of WeChat friends, number of official accounts followed, reading status of official accounts and experience of removal from official account, number of group chats, reading status of group chats, withdrawal experience and the basic situation of "Moments" in WeChat, is recorded.

The Reason for Negative Behaviors. The respondents are required to list the reasons for the negative behaviors (information avoidance behavior), such as incomplete reading, official account unfollowing, withdrawal from group chat and shielding.

2.3 Data Analysis

With the consent of the interviewees, the author used mobile phones to record, and formed text materials according to the interview recordings. After manual collation, the effective text of about 150,000 words was finally formed. A total of 26 valid samples, 28 audio recordings and 26 interview texts were included in the interview process.

Then the paper mainly uses the grounded theory to analyze the interview text. The specific method is as follows:

Encoding. According to Strauss's thought, this paper analyzes and summarizes the interview texts from a deep perceptive through three steps: open coding, axial coding and selective coding. In the stage of open coding, the author splits the interview texts into words, sentences or fragments, and then encodes the interview data one by one, abstracting the concepts involved in the text, in order to avoid personal subjective factors in the process. Then abstract the category based on the logical relationship between the extracted concepts. Through the axial coding, the author finds the internal correlation between the various categories formed in the coding process of the previous layer, and excavates the main category and the sub-category. Finally, the "core category" and "secondary category" are extracted through selective coding, and the "story line" is developed.

Establishing a Model. Based on the "core category" and "story line" extracted in the process of selective coding, the author constructs the theoretical model of "influencing factors and mechanism of information avoidance behavior in WeChat" and explains the model.

3 Preliminary Results

3.1 Details of Respondents

We recruited 26 qualified volunteers to participate in this research, ranging from 18 to 45 years old, 15 of which are males. When it comes to the educational background and occupation, exactly half of the respondents hold a degree of bachelor, and students, employees and farmers played an important role in this study.

3.2 The Formation of Information Avoidance Behavior Based on Grounded Theory

Open Coding. First, all the interview texts are presented in their original state, and then the original words of the respondents are split according to certain principles to form pieces of information, such as words, sentences or expressions of the whole event. In the data fragments, the original concepts are explored, similar original concepts are extracted as concepts, and the concepts with more frequent repetitions form categories based on the relationship between them. After this process, 17 categories were finally extracted from the original data, that is, information overload, information quality, information aging, information loss, service overload, social overload, personal privacy, perceived cost, cognitive conflict, personality traits, anxiety, disgust and irritability, psychological gap, technical skills, neglect behavior, exit behavior, shielding behavior.

Axial Coding. After the open coding, the principal axis coding should be carried out. The principal axis coding is mainly to clarify the logical relationship between categories and mine the main category and the sub-category according to their internal relations.

Through discussion and analysis, the author finds that there is a certain logical relationship between various categories, and many categories are intrinsically linked at the conceptual level. After summarizing and analyzing, these 17 categories are classified into five main categories: environmental factors, personal factors, technical factors, negative emotions and avoidance behavior. The specific connotations of these five main categories are shown as follow.

Environmental Factors. Environmental factors include information overload, information quality, information aging, information loss, service overload, social overload and other factors.

Personal Factors. Personal factors include personal privacy, perceived cost, cognitive conflict, personality traits and other factors.

Technical Factors. Technical skills. Ability to master and apply knowledge, technology and methods in a particular field of expertise.

Negative Emotions. Negative emotions include anxiety, disgust, irritability, low perception of personal value.

Technical Factors. Technical skills refer to the mastery of mobile Internet technology.

Information Avoidance Behavior. Neglect behavior, exit behavior and shielding behavior.

Selective Coding. Selective encoding is the third stage of encoding, which makes a deeper analysis of the categories derived from the spindle encoding and deals with the relationship between categories, that is, the process of synthesis and conciseness. This process needs to find a "core category" and "secondary category". The "core category" is able to command the "secondary category". With the help of a typical model, the "core category" and "secondary category" are logically linked, and the relationship between the two is summarized and analyzed, and the "Story Line" is clarified.

Environmental factors → Negative emotions. Information overload, information quality, information age, service overload and social overload are the external factors that cause users' negative emotion.

“There are a lot of official accounts to be concerned about, some of which push news more than once a day. There are many articles of sensational headlines, and even deceptive ones. Sometimes, when I look at dozens of unread articles, I really can't finish reading them. It's very annoying.” (Information overload and information quality cause users to have bad emotions)

Personal factors → *Negative emotions*. Perceived cost, cognitive conflict and personality traits are the internal factors that cause users' bad emotions.

“There was a Buddhist believer in a group added before. Every day, he shared the Sutra and monks in the group. Although I respected them, it was contrary to my life. Every day, I hated this group.” (Cognitive conflict leads to negative emotions in users)

Environmental factors → *Personal factors*. Information overload, information quality, information aging, social overload and other factors will affect individual perception and self-efficacy.

“If I could see the news in real time, I would not think that my time was wasted, but if it was news a few days ago and it didn't matter to my life, I would think that it would be a waste of my time to read it.” (Information efficiency Affects Individual Perceived Cost)

Negative emotions → *Information avoidance behavior*. Users' bad mood caused by using WeChat leads to information avoidance behavior.

“There are too many advertisements in the circle of friends, that is, some of them turn to WeChat dealers. I can't describe them with annoyance whenever look at them. I can do nothing but screen them out.” (Bad emotions are the direct cause of information avoidance.)

Technical factors → *Information avoidance behavior*. The user's mastery of the skill itself affects the occurrence of information avoidance behavior.

“There are a few people I've been trying to shield, that's the idea, but I don't know how to do it, and I don't want to ask people.” (Lack of technology hinders the occurrence of information avoidance behavior.)

Therefore, this paper believes that the user's information avoidance behavior is affected by the user's bad emotions and technical factors. At the same time, environmental factors and personal factors are the main factors affecting the individual's bad mood, and based on this, the influencing factors of information avoidance behavior and performance model in WeChat are constructed. This model is consistent with the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory proposed by Mehrabian and Russell in 1974s [15]. This theory points out that various stimuli will have an effect on individual emotions. The stimuli not only come from the external environment, but also from individual perceptions and personality traits. Individuals are stimulated to generate behavioral motives and respond accordingly.

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