"Fish Farming": The Link Between Pre-romantic Relationship Behavior and Social Media Use

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Abstract: Social media has greatly involved aspects of people's lives. Young people are active users of social media, and their social interactions have shown some striking new phenomena on social media. When it comes to romantic connections on social media, the practice of aggressively starting romantic relationships hints but delaying or not formally confirming a romantic relationship seems to be on the rise. This study aims to investigate if the use of social media contributed to the creation of such a phenomenon using empirical methodologies. In order to evaluate the hypothesis, this study employs the independence test and the correlation test. The results show that, while social media use is associated with the behavior of starting a romantic connection, it also has a positive link with the behavior of continuing a romantic relationship. In short, it is counterintuitive that social media use cannot be shown to be positively correlated with initiating but not maintaining a romantic relationship. Therefore, this paper looks forward to future research to further test whether the research conclusions of this paper apply the research on a single social media.

Keywords: social media, romantic relationship, WeChat

1. Introduction

More and more social media provide social interaction functions, and people are becoming more and more accustomed to using social media to communicate with others. In other words, people's social interactions today have been greatly influenced by social media, no matter what purpose it is used for. One discourse about romantic relationships and intimacy stands out on Chinese-language social media platforms - "Neptune raises fish". The behavior referred to by this discourse is distinct from cultivating candidate mates and refers to ambiguous behavior exhibited by individuals who are not in an explicitly committed relationship. They take the initiative to initiate ambiguous behaviors with romantic relationship significance to other users but deliberately do not make a clear commitment to the relationship between the two parties or delay committing. Such behavior often creates insecurities or feelings of being cheated on by the other partner in the relationship, which may hurt the satisfaction of subsequent intimate relationships [1]. Previous research frequently focuses on how social media affects committed relationships in an effort to shed light on the detrimental effects of social media use on the caliber or pleasure of partnerships. For example, excessive use of social media may not only have the consequences of lower relationship satisfaction but also cause relationship conflict, which in turn leads to more addictive use of social media [2]. However, although it may also be accompanied by negative consequences such as jealousy, surveillance, and dissatisfaction, using a

variety of social media rather than a single social media to frequent contact with a partner increases the intensity of relationship communication, which also promotes the improvement of relationship satisfaction [3]. Although qualitative research has shown how difficult online infidelity is for those who experience it, there have been attempts to develop frameworks and models to predict the occurrence of online infidelity [4,5]. However, the use of LinkedIn can indeed facilitate the occurrence of infidelity, mainly through the direct messaging function [6]. Other research has looked at how social media use affects people's conduct in romantic partnerships. For example, studies have focused on how Instagram use varies with relationship status [7]. In a study on WeChat, researchers found that people use continuous evaluation strategies for online dating. Faced with a potential romantic partner, people will evaluate whether the conversation between them meets their expectations, and then further choose to advance or terminate their relationship [8]. Romantic relationship partners tend to use social media to showcase their relationships. This online relationship visibility is accompanied by their different decisions about romantic relationships, and the relationship between the two has subtle mechanisms [9]. Another study on Facebook showed that the level of relationship commitment affects the visibility of a relationship on social media [10]. Research on this latent, early stage of behavior that precedes a romantic relationship is sparse. Given the prevalence of this discourse in discussions about romantic relationships on social media platforms and its negative moral overtones such as criticism and complaints, this article attempts to examine the possible reasons for its alleged behavior. More specifically, this paper seeks to answer the question How does social media use negatively affect people's behavior in forming romantic relationships? Is there a higher likelihood that using social media will lead to more people starting but not continuing romantic relationships?

2. Methods

This work converts the research topic into the hypothesis that social media use is favorably linked with commencing romantic relationship behaviors and unfavorably associated with maintaining romantic relationship behaviors in order to facilitate assessment using questionnaires. Among them, social media is defined as mobile apps with social interaction functions that are mainstream in the market including China.

The measurement of social media use includes two aspects of use intensity and use preference. The intensity of use includes two dimensions of frequency of use and duration of use. The use preference consists of two dimensions: the use object and the preference weight. Therefore, this article will test three hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: The frequency of romantic connections on social media is positively correlated with the frequency of social media use.

Hypothesis 2: Social media usage preferences are positively related to social media usage preferences for initiating romantic relationships.

Hypothesis 3: Social media usage preferences are negatively related to social media usage preferences for maintaining romantic relationships.

Since this study is concerned with the relationship between social media usage behavior and people's specific behaviors in establishing romantic relationships, this study uses an online questionnaire survey to distribute questionnaires to WeChat users. The subjects of the study included four groups of people with different emotional states. The distribution and recovery of the questionnaires were completed within one week, and a total of 198 questionnaires were recovered. The effective rate of the questionnaires is greater than 90%, meeting the research reliability requirements.

The questionnaire is mainly divided into four parts, with a total of 19 questions. The first part is a survey of media usage behavior and preferences, the second part is a survey of preferences for using

social media for romantic relationships, the third part is a survey of attitudes about using social media to initiate and maintain romantic relationships, and the last part collects research subjects' demographic information.

In the first section, there are four questions—two multiple-choice questions and two single-choice ones. The purpose of this part is to distinguish the research subjects into groups with different social media usage categories, frequency, and duration, and to measure their preference of using social media. The second part consists of four questions, including one single-choice, two multiple-choice, and one sorting. The main purpose of this part is to differentiate the research subjects into different social media usage preferences regarding romantic relationships. The third part contains five questions, including a ranking question and four scale questions. The purpose of this part is to measure differences in attitudes towards social media use for romantic relationship purposes. The last part consists of six questions, which collect the gender, age, education, major, emotional state, and location information of the research subjects, which are used to control the proportion of the sample to enhance the representativeness and analyze the characteristics of more subdivided populations.

3. Results

The goal of this study was to determine whether two interdependent social media use behaviors were linked to two particular social media use behaviors prior to individuals getting into an explicitly committed romantic relationship. These two variables are social media usage intensity and usage preference, respectively. The sample population includes WeChat users aged 18 and above, most of whom are located in mainland China (accounting for 97.98 % of the total sample). This study uses the online questionnaire collection website "Questionnaire Star" to make and collect these questionnaire data and analyze them through quantitative analysis methods. According to the answers to these questionnaires, this paper will use the methods of independence test and correlation test to test whether the three hypotheses are true.

3.1. Assumption 1

Question 10 is used as the weighting basis to weigh the data, and under this condition, the independence test is carried out on questions 11 and 12 (see Table 1).

Table 1: Chi-Square Test.

	Value(V)	Degrees of Freedom (DF)	Progressive Significance (two-sided) (PS2)
Pearson chi-square (PC)	93.549 [a]	24	.000
likelihood ratio (LR)	90.749	24	.000
linear association (LA)	9.924	1	.002
Valid Cases (VC)	625		

a. Nine cells (25.7%) had expected counts less than 5. The minimum expected count is .80.

The independence assumption is refuted by the chi-square value of 93.549, and the asymptotic significance of 0.000 0.05, which establishes a correlation between the two variables.

Applying the Spearman correlation test, there is a significant association between the two positive correlations (see Table 2, Table 3). The Spearman correlation value is 0.144, and the asymptotic significance is 0.000<0.05.

Table 2: Symmetry Measurements.

		V	Asymptotic Standard Error[a] (ASE)	Approximate T[b] (AT)	Progressive Salience (PS)
nominal to nominal	Phi	.387			.000
likelihood ratio (LR)	Clem V	.193			.000
interval to interval	Pearson R	.126	.037	3.173	.002[c]
orderly to orderly	Spearman correlation	.144	.039	3.642	.000[c]
VC		625			

a. The null hypothesis is not assumed.
b. Use asymptotic standard errors assuming the null hypothesis.
c. Based on a normal approximation.

Table 3: Nonparametric Correlations.

			How long do you spend on social media on average each day?	How often do you use social media for romantic relationship communication?
Spearman Rho	How long do you spend on social media on average each day?	correlation coefficient	1.000	.144[**]
		Sig. (two-tailed)	.	.000
		N	625	625
	How often do you use social media for romantic relationship communication?	correlation coefficient	.144[**]	1.000
		Sig. (two-tailed)	.000	.
		N	625	625

**. At the 0.01 level (two-tailed), the correlation is significant.

The results of the Pearson correlation test (Table 4) reveal that there is a substantial positive link between the length of time spent using social media and the frequency of romantic partnerships, with a Pearson correlation value of 0.126. The first hypothesis is confirmed.

Table 4: Correlation.

		How long do you spend on social media on average each day?	How often do you use social media for romantic relationship communication?
How long do you spend on social media on average each day?	Pearson correlation	1	.126[**]
	Sig. (two-tailed)		.002
	Cases	625	625

Table 4: (continued).

How often do you use social media for romantic relationship communication?	Pearson correlation	.126 [**]	1
	Sig. (two-tailed)	.002	
	Cases	625	625

**. At the 0.01 level (two-tailed), the correlation is significant.

3.2. Hypothesis 2

According to the questionnaire results of the thirteenth question about the ranking of social media usage, the top three are selected to represent the top three social media most frequently used by the sample population, namely LinkedIn, Maimai, Zhihu, and WeChat (see Table 5). In the following independence test and correlation analysis, these three variables were used as dependent variables.

Table 5: Most frequently used social media.

Options	Overall Ratings	No. 1	No. 2	3rd place	No. 4	5th place	Subtotal
LinkedIn, Maimai	11.33	69(53.08%)	35(26.92%)	19(14.62%)	5(3.85%)	2(1.54%)	130
Zhihu	10.39	27(21.6%)	41(32.8%)	28(22.4%)	20(16%)	9(7.2%)	125
WeChat	10.31	43(35.83%)	43(35.83%)	27(22.5%)	7(5.83%)	0(0%)	120

First, the author cross-analyzes Question 9 and Question 14, and selects the variable data group with the highest crossover frequency with the independent variable respectively, and gets that the most preferred social media group for initiating a romantic relationship corresponding to the three mainstream social media groups is TikTok group (see Table 6).

Table 6: Media usage preferences corresponding to LinkedIn, Maimai, Zhihu, and WeChat.

X\Y	WeChat	Zhihu	LinkedIn, Maimai
WeChat	10(13.51%)	1(2.08%)	5(5.88%)
QQ	3(4.05%)	0(0.00%)	1(1.18%)
Weibo	17(22.97%)	15(31.25%)	21(24.71%)
Xiaohongshu	24(32.43%)	14(29.17%)	23(27.06%)
Bilibili	23(31.08%)	17(35.42%)	30(35.29%)
Douyin, Kuaishou	6(8.11%)	6(12.5%)	8(9.41%)
Zhihu	25(33.78%)	20(41.67%)	35(41.18%)
Facebook	25(33.78%)	23(47.92%)	38(44.71%)
Instagram	33(44.59%)	23(47.92%)	39(45.88%)
Twitter	19(25.68%)	14(29.17%)	33(38.82%)
TikTok	41(55.41%)	34(70.83%)	60(70.59%)
Telegram	3(4.05%)	6(12.5%)	6(7.06%)
WhatsApp	5(6.76%)	6(12.5%)	5(5.88%)
Snapchat	8(10.81%)	12(25%)	14(16.47%)
LinkedIn, Maimai	4(5.41%)	5(10.42%)	7(8.24%)
Tantan, Momo	20(27.03%)	18(37.5%)	39(45.88%)
tinder, hinge, bumble	7(9.46%)	0(0.00%)	0(0.00%)

Table 6: (continued).

Subtotal	74	48	85

In this way, independence tests were carried out separately. Firstly, the answer to question 11 about the duration of social media use is used as the weighting basis to empower the data. Afterwards, the independence test was carried out, and the results showed that the "WeChat" group had a significant negative correlation with the "TikTok" group (see Table 7 and Table 8).

Table 7: Chi-Square Test.

	V	DF	PS2	Exact Significance (two-sided) (ES2)	Exact Significance (one-sided) (ES1)
PC	13.027 [a]	1	.000		
Continuity Correction (CC)	12.447	1	.000		
LR	12.936	1	.000		
Fisher's exact test (FET)				.000	.000
LA	13.008	1	.000		
VC	686				

a. The expected count of 0 cells (0.0%) is less than 5. The minimum expected count is 97.78.

Table 8: Symmetry Measurements.

		V	ASE	AT	PS
nominal to nominal	Phi	-.138			.000
Continuity Correction (CC)	Clem V	.138			.000
interval to interval	Pearson R	-.138	.038	-3.639	.000
orderly to orderly	Spearman correlation	-.138	.038	-3.639	.000
VC		686			

But the "LinkedIn, Maimai" group showed the opposite performance, and it had a positive and significant correlation with the " TikTok " group (see Table 9, Table 10).

Table 9: Chi-Square Test.

V	DF	PS2	ES2	ES1	V
PC	14.069 [a]	1	.000		
CC	13.478	1	.000		
LR	14.247	1	.000		
FET				.000	.000
LA	14.049	1	.000		
VC	686				

a. The expected count of 0 cells (0.0%) is less than 5. The minimum expected count is 109.53.

Table 10: Symmetry Measurements.

		V	ASE	AT	PS
nominal to nominal	Phi	.143			.000

Table 10: (continued).

	Clem V	.143			.000
interval to interval	Pearson R	.143	.037	3.784	.000
orderly to orderly	Spearman correlation	.143	.037	3.784	.000
VC		686			

The "Zhihu" group and the " TikTok " group data also have a correlation, which also presents a significant positive correlation (see Table 11, Table 12).

Table 11: Chi-Square Test.

	V	DF	PS2	ES2	ES1
PC	4.075 [a]	1	.044		
CC	3.715	1	.054		
LR	4.150	1	.042		
FET				.045	.026
LA	4.069	1	.044		
VC	686				

a. The expected count of 0 cells (0.0%) is less than 5. The minimum expected count is 64.05.

Table 12: Symmetry Measurements.

		V	ASE	AT	PS
nominal to nominal	Phi	.077			.005
	Clem V	.077			.005
interval to interval	Pearson R	.077	.037	2.022	.005
orderly to orderly	Spearman correlation	.077	.037	2.022	.005
VC		686			

In any event, it can be concluded that there is a correlation between social media use and the behavior of establishing romantic relationships, despite the fact that there are still some discrepancies and issues with the rigorous evidence of Hypothesis 2. However, the correlation relationship subdivided into different social media has inconsistencies of positive or negative correlation.

3.3. Hypothesis 3

Still, the author conducts crossover analysis first, and selects the dependent variable with the highest crossover frequency with the independent variable, and it can be obtained that the most preferred social media for maintaining a romantic relationship corresponding to the three mainstream social media is Snapchat (see Table 13).

Table 13: Media usage preferences corresponding to LinkedIn, Maimai, Zhihu, and WeChat.

X\Y	WeChat	Zhihu	LinkedIn, Maimai
WeChat	16(27.12%)	4(11.76%)	11(18.03%)
QQ	20(33.90%)	8(23.53%)	17(27.87%)
Weibo	4(6.78%)	0(0.00%)	1(1.64%)

Table 13: (continued).

Xiaohongshu	20(33.90%)	14(41.18%)	23(37.70%)
Bilibili	22(37.29%)	16(47.06%)	22(36.07%)
Douyin, Kuaishou	25(42.37%)	13(38.24%)	28(45.90%)
Zhihu	12(20.34%)	9(26.47%)	22(36.07%)
Facebook	3(5.08%)	4(11.76%)	7(11.48%)
Instagram	16(27.12%)	9(26.47%)	22(36.07%)
Twitter	18(30.51%)	13(38.24%)	17(27.87%)
TikTok	15(25.42%)	9(26.47%)	18(29.51%)
Telegram	26(44.07%)	13(38.24%)	23(37.70%)
WhatsApp	27(45.76%)	22(64.71%)	38(62.30%)
Snapchat	9(15.25%)	11(32.35%)	16(26.23%)
LinkedIn, Maimai	8(13.56%)	4(11.76%)	7(11.48%)
Tantan, Momo	9(15.25%)	1(2.94%)	2(3.28%)
tinder, hinge, bumble	5(8.47%)	1(2.94%)	1(1.64%)
Subtotal	59	34	61

Next, the author does the independence test among the variables to see if there is a correlation between them. The findings indicate that there is a significant inverse relationship between the "WhatsApp" group and the "LinkedIn, Maimai" group (see Table 14, Table 15).

Table 14: Chi-Square Test.

	V	DF	PS2	ES2	ES1
PC	7.965 [a]	1	.005		
CC	7.228	1	.007		
LR	8.406	1	.004		
FET				.005	.003
LA	7.954	1	.005		
VC	686				

a. The expected count of 0 cells (0.0%) is less than 5. The minimum expected count is 26.54.

Table 15: Symmetry Measurements.

		V	ASE	AT	PS
nominal to nominal	Phi	-.108			.001
	Clem V	.108			.001
interval to interval	Pearson R	-.108	.035	-2.835	.346
orderly to orderly	Spearman correlation	-.108	.035	-2.835	.969
VC		686			

The "Zhihu" group does not correlate with the " WhatsApp " group (see Table 16).

Table 16: Chi-Square Test.

	V	DF	PS2	ES2	ES1
PC	2.827[a] –	1	.093		

Table 16: (continued).

CC	2.334	1	.127		
LR	2.660	1	.103		
FET				.124	.066
LA	2.822	1	.093		
VC	686				

a. The expected count of 0 cells (0.0%) is less than 5. The minimum expected count is 15.52.

The "WeChat" group and the " WhatsApp " group also do not show a correlation (see Table 17).

Table 17: Chi-Square Test.

	V	DF	PS2	ES2	ES1
PC	3.338 [a]	1	.068		
CC	2.858	1	.091		
LR	3.485	1	.062		
FET				.076	.043
LA	3.333	1	.068		
VC	686				

a. The expected count of 0 cells (0.0%) is less than 5. The minimum expected count is 23.69.

The results shown by the independence test showed that the three sets of data could not detect a clear and consistent correlation. The most representative three social media are WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Maimai, and Snapchat, according to the results of Question 9 ("Social media in use"), which reveals which social media the sample population uses most frequently. It will be discovered that there is a correlation between the two groups of data in the "LinkedIn and Maimai" groups when attempting to measure the behavioral data of starting and maintaining romantic relationships utilizing these three groups of social media (see Table 18).

Table 18: Chi-Square Test.

	V	DF	PS2
PC	17.614 [a]	2	.000
LR	14.237	2	.001
LA	.021	1	.885
VC	686		

a. The expected count of 0 cells (0.0%) is less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.04.

The two groups of "WhatsApp" data do, however, show a strong positive association (see Table 19, Table 20).

Table 19: Chi-Square Test.

	V	DF	PS2
PC	4.400 [a]	2	.111
LR	4.521	2	.104
LA	3.937	1	.047
VC	686		

a. The expected count of 0 cells (0.0%) is less than 5. The minimum expected count is 16.81.

Table 20: Symmetry Measurements.

		V	ASE	AT	PS
nominal to nominal	Phi	.080			.111
	Clem V	.080			.111
interval to interval	Pearson R	.076	.035	1.988	.047
orderly to orderly	Spearman correlation	.080	.037	2.101	.036
VC		686			

If the independence test and correlation test are carried out on the two groups of data on the preference to use Snapchat to initiate and maintain a romantic relationship, the results show that they have a significant negative correlation (see Table 21, Table 22).

Table 21: Chi-Square Test.

	V	DF	PS2
PC	20.044 [a]	2	.000
LR	18.426	2	.000
LA	19.104	1	.000
VC	686		

a. The expected count of 0 cells (0.0%) is less than 5. The minimum expected count is 13.51.

Table 22: Symmetry Measurements.

		V	ASE	AT	PS
nominal to nominal	Phi	.171			.000
	Clem V	.171			.000
interval to interval	Pearson R	-.167	.042	-4.430	.000
orderly to orderly	Spearman correlation	-.151	.040	-4.003	.000
VC		686			

There is a highly substantial positive link when it comes to choosing to utilize TikTok to start and maintain romantic relationships (see Table 23, Table 24).

Table 23: Chi-Square Test.

	V	DF	PS2
PC	12.349 [a]	2	.002
LR	12.946	2	.002
LA	1.771	1	.183
VC	686		

a. The expected count of 0 cells (0.0%) is less than 5. The minimum expected count is 49.27.

Table 24: Symmetry Measurements.

		V	ASE	AT	PS

Table 24: (continued).

nominal to nominal	Phi	.134			.002
	Clem V	.134			.002
interval to interval	Pearson R	.051	.038	1.331	.184
orderly to orderly	Spearman correlation	.085	.037	2.242	.025
VC		686			

If the independence test and correlation test are carried out between the two groups of data that prefer to use TikTok to initiate a romantic relationship and prefer to use WhatsApp to maintain a romantic relationship, there is also a significant positive correlation (see Table 25, Table 26).

Table 25: Chi-Square Test.

	V	DF	PS2
PC	8.145 [a]	2	.017
LR	8.199	2	.017
LA	1.434	1	.231
VC	686		

a. The expected count of 0 cells (0.0%) is less than 5. The minimum expected count is 69.36.

Table 26: Symmetry Measurements.

		V	ASE	AT	PS
nominal to nominal	Phi	.109			.017
	Clem V	.109			.017
interval to interval	Pearson R	.046	.038	1.198	.231
orderly to orderly	Spearman correlation	.077	.038	2.015	.044
VC		686			

As a result, contrary to the original premise, the verification of premise 3 shows that there is no consistent association between using social media and continuing a romantic relationship. There are, however, favorable associations to varying degrees in the use of different social networking platforms for starting and maintaining romantic relationships.

4. Discussion

What can be found in the data analysis when verifying Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3 is that the discussion of social media use and related behaviors cannot be generalized, because social media is a complex and broad category concept. In the context of various platform applications striving to add social interaction, the differences within the social media category are far greater than the differences between it and the outside. The different forms and contents of different social media provide users with different behavioral conditions, which also contribute to different usage behaviors of users. It's hard to find consistency in people's usage behavior. Not only that but about establishing a romantic relationship, there are also differences in people's preferences for initiating and maintaining romantic

relationships. This may make it more difficult to grasp the overall impact of social media through subdividing or fixing empirical research on a single social media.

This article chooses to list as detailed a list of mainstream social media as possible for the sample population to choose from and regards social media with comprehensive weight and number of users as typical representative social media for data analysis. Strictly speaking, when the research horizon is social media as a whole, there are other ways or criteria to determine alternative social media applications.

The results of the data analysis showed some inconsistencies with the hypotheses. One possible explanation is that when designing the questionnaire, different content and functional categories of social media were not distinguished. There may be some competing media of the same kind that are mutually exclusive due to similar functional configurations. characteristics that weaken the correlation. Therefore, it is suggested that when designing this part of the questionnaire in future research, the existing multiple-choice social media options can be classified and merged to measure by category, and the question type should be changed to single-choice questions.

5.   Conclusions

Use and gratification theory holds that people specifically seek out media according to their own needs and get satisfaction from them. Increased use of social media may mean increased use in romantic relationships. The research in this paper demonstrates that the increase in social media use is indeed accompanied by an increase in the behavior of initiating romantic relationships. This not only means that the realization of the core functions of social media is real, but also the establishment of romantic relationships as an important part of social behavior is no exception in the performance of media use characteristics. Social media indeed mediates people's behaviors of establishing romantic relationships to a great extent, but the data of empirical research cannot prove that the increase in social media use is accompanied by more refusal of explicitly committed relationship behaviors. Perhaps contrary to what people feel when they roam social media platforms and browse the romantic relationship content that social media shows users, using a social media to initiate a romantic relationship often means using this social media to maintain the relationship. At least in their social media choices, people aren't as vague and varied as they are with their relationships, nor are they switching venues in the process. Perhaps this also means pursuing behavioral motivations to increase online relationship visibility when entering into a romantic relationship.

Of course, this study may be too general to measure social media use behaviors only from the two dimensions of use intensity and use preference, and it seems a bit crude to summarize the complex social media use behaviors. Therefore, it is impossible to specifically discuss how social media use affects behavioral changes before entering a romantic relationship. In addition to in-depth exploration in this direction, future research can also examine what negative effects and costs social media use brings to the stage before entering a romantic relationship. In addition, it would be interesting to examine how negative attitudes towards social media use are related to people's behavior in the pre-romantic relationship stage, thereby leading to a more rational understanding of the social interaction effects of social media.

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