

Research on the Reasons for the Widespread Popularity of MBTI Test among Chinese Undergraduate

Ziyi Wang^{1,a,*}

¹*The college of Communication and Journalism, GuiLin university, GuiLin, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (GZAR), 541006, China*

a. swoods73259@student.napavalley.edu

**corresponding author*

Abstract: In the course of social communication, how to scientifically apply communication theory to obtain better communication effect is always a problem that the field of communication has to face. By interviewing Chinese college students, this study studied the reasons for the spread of MBTI personality test among college students. The interview questions include: first, how did you come into contact with MBTI; Second, how social media platforms contribute to your understanding of the MBTI; Third, if you do not test MBTI, will you feel uncomfortable when discussing MBTI with friends around you? What kind of discomfort will you feel? Finally, have your friends discussed MBTI on a large scale? And discussed the reasons for the wide spread of MBTI personality test in depth. This study concludes that opinion leaders in social relation play an important role in communication, that contemporary Chinese college students are suffering from serious social anxiety (that is, many students are unwilling to have communication barriers with their peers, etc.), that social media big data algorithms are recommended, and that social media exerts a subtle influence on interviewees. Through the study of its influence, the solution is obtained. In communication, we can use opinion leaders to a greater extent. In the study and life of Chinese college students, we can educate them on how to face social anxiety and how to properly use communication principles in normal social communication.

Keywords: MBTI, opinion leader, social anxiety

1. Introduction

In contemporary society, it has become increasingly commonplace to observe young individuals extensively utilizing the internet by employing unique four-letter “codes.” These alphanumeric strings serve a multifaceted purpose, facilitating endeavors such as forming new acquaintances, seeking employment opportunities, preserving conversational records, establishing rapid connections with new peers, and rekindling relationships with past associates.

Notably, American author Isabel Briggs Myers, in collaboration with her mother Katherine Cook Briggs, pioneered the development of a comprehensive theoretical framework centered on personality types. This framework is fundamentally rooted in the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), a renowned psychometric assessment tool. The MBTI, derived from the foundational work of Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, categorizes individuals into eight distinct psychological types, thus embodying the principles of personality psychology and culminating in the creation of the Myers-

Briggs Type Index. Its initial application was witnessed within the realms of corporate recruitment and talent assessment.

The pervasiveness of the MBTI is further evidenced by its integration into popular culture, with references and humor related to the MBTI emerging as early as 2013, particularly within online spaces. Recent developments include the release of the “MBTI Workplace Personality Type Big Data Report” by a recruitment application.

The MBTI assessment itself is characterized by its simplicity, involving respondents in answering a comprehensive set of over 100 psychological questions. This questionnaire endeavors to classify individuals into four principal categories, each dichotomously opposing two contrasting personality dimensions: introversion versus extroversion, sensing versus intuition, thinking versus feeling, and judgment versus perception. The outcome of this assessment is represented by a four-letter code, such as “INFJ” or “ENFP,” derived from the initial letter of each of these categories.

Presently, the MBTI reigns as one of the most pervasive and universally embraced personality assessments. Online platforms offer a plethora of MBTI test software, with the number of test-takers surpassing the 10 million mark. On Weibo, China’s popular microblogging platform, topics related to the MBTI have accrued a staggering 800 million reads. Moreover, various online communities themed around MBTI personality types have proliferated across major social platforms. Memes and other forms of humorous content inspired by the MBTI enjoy immense popularity among the younger demographic. In the realm of social interaction, young individuals often incorporate their MBTI codes into their self-introductions, a practice observed during friend-making and dating endeavors.

It is worth noting that despite its widespread adoption, the scientific rigor of the MBTI has faced scrutiny and criticism. Nevertheless, a considerable number of individuals continue to endorse the accuracy of their MBTI test results, often expressing amazement and affirmation, further cementing the test’s popularity and cultural significance. Recently, many social media users have used the results of the MBTI test to create themselves as “introverted” and “extroverted” people to gain attention on social media. Even variety shows have set their sights on the MBTI. South Korea’s social observation variety “MBTI Inside” selected 16 guests with different personalities, let them live together, and through comparative observation, understand the differences between the personalities, explore the way they communicate and get along. This study will explore the phenomenon of MBTI’s popularity and the communication reasons behind it.

2. Literature Review

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is a widely recognized psychometric assessment tool used for classifying individuals into one of 16 distinct personality types based on four preference scores, as expounded by Lorr [1]. This typological approach has garnered significant attention, especially among Chinese college students, prompting inquiries into its popularity and adoption. Nan Wang’s research delves into the role of influential users as thought leaders within social networks and their capacity to guide other users in adopting and disseminating innovative products. An investigation involving 308 members of Xiaomi and Huawei forums has unveiled a notable positive correlation between the prevalence of influential users and the likelihood of user engagement, specifically in terms of expressing comments [2].

Weissman’s findings highlight a broader concern related to the implementation and enforcement of Maternal, Infant, and Young Child Nutrition (MIYCN) policies and the involvement of decision-makers across various countries. While there is a consensus on the importance of MIYCN policies, the existing policies often fall short of effective execution. Weissman’s research contributes valuable insights by sharing experiences and lessons derived from the utilization of Online Opinion Leader Recognition (OLR) as a promotional tool. This approach has proven instrumental in several aspects: firstly, it aids in the identification of individuals with a vested interest in MIYCN and those who

possess significant influence, thus enhancing the potential to impact nutrition-related policies. Secondly, OLR techniques succeed in cultivating greater interest among opinion leaders regarding MIYCN matters. Lastly, these methods enable the identification of prevalent themes that inform the development of pertinent political objectives [3].

Zongshui Wang identified a significant gap in existing research concerning the influence of opinion leaders on the process of information diffusion. To address this void, our research team conducted a comprehensive analysis utilizing a dataset of 301,389 users on Sina Weibo. The objective was to discern patterns in information dissemination and to evaluate the impact of opinion leaders in this context. Our findings unequivocally demonstrate the pivotal role that opinion leaders play in shaping the dynamics of information dissemination [4].

Building upon the cultivation theory, Shah has devised a comprehensive model that posits a relationship between media exposure, individuals' perceptions of media influence, their fear of victimization, and altruistic behavior. To empirically test this model and its associated hypotheses, they collected data from 210 newspaper readers residing in rural areas of Pakistan, employing a structured questionnaire survey methodology. This research results affirm the enduring significance of newspapers in molding individuals' fear of victimization and their propensity for altruistic actions. Furthermore, this article engages in a discourse regarding the theoretical implications of these findings, highlighting directions for future research in this domain [5].

Ivo Jirásek's research sheds light on the practical utilization of MBTI. It is evident that many personality traits and behaviors exhibit strong correlations with specific personality types, thereby exerting a discernible influence on an individual's success, particularly within domains related to entertainment and leisure, such as entertainment science. Among the 16 possible personality types, ENFP (14.8%) and ENFJ (14.5%) emerge as the most prevalent. Furthermore, when examining various cognitive styles, nearly half of the sampled individuals align with the NF type, commonly referred to as "heuristic" [6].

Meanwhile, Harrington's findings underscore the rapid expansion of online university courses in contrast to the overall growth rate of traditional higher education courses. However, understanding why a majority of students still favor traditional face-to-face courses can illuminate strategies for enhancing the online learning environment. Personality emerges as a significant factor among various variables influencing these preferences, as it correlates with learning styles and comfort levels. Mismatches or low comfort levels in learning methods can result in student dissatisfaction and attrition. Statistical data indicates that the preference for online courses is more pronounced among introverts, whereas extroverts tend to favor face-to-face courses [7].

The influence of social media on the widespread dissemination of MBTI personality tests has not gone unnoticed. Shahbaznezhad conducted a comprehensive investigation into this phenomenon, examining two primary aspects. Firstly, the study delved into the direct effects of format and platform choices on user engagement behavior, encompassing both passive and active engagement. Secondly, it explored the moderating role of content context in shaping the relationship between various content types (rational, emotional, and transactional content) and user engagement levels. The research outcomes reveal a nuanced perspective, demonstrating that the impact of social media content on user engagement is contingent on the contextual backdrop within which the content is presented. These findings significantly contribute to people's comprehension of social media engagement dynamics and user experiences. This groundbreaking study represents an empirical endeavor to assess the construction of social media participation behavior across dual social media platforms, highlighting the influential roles of content type and context in this process [8].

Social anxiety among young people is also a factor that cannot be ignored. Jiahui Chen found Network analysis shows that feeling ridiculed, afraid of rejection, difficulty asking others to do things together, and feeling neglected in school are important bridge symptoms for coexistence of loneliness

and social anxiety. Bullying victims are more positively correlated with social anxiety symptoms, while friendship quality is more negatively correlated with loneliness symptoms [9]. Huoliang Gong According to the cognitive theory of social anxiety, the cognitive patterns of individuals with social anxiety tend to be attracted to threat information and memory processing. Two experiments explored the characteristics of social memory in college students with social anxiety. Experimental 1 they studied social memory bias in college students with social anxiety disorder. Experimental 2 they used tagging techniques to study the general level of tagging used by college students for social autobiographical memory and social anxiety. The results show that: (1) Compared to students with low social anxiety, students with high social anxiety have a memory bias against negative social information. At the same time, college students with a high degree of social anxiety are not prejudices against unrelated social information. (2) College students with high levels of social anxiety have negative social autobiographical memories than those with low levels of social anxiety; (3) College students with high levels of social anxiety are more likely to have autobiographical memories than college students with low levels of social anxiety. The study found that college students with high levels of social anxiety had negative memory prejudice against social information, had larger negative social autobiographical memory, and had more universal social autobiographical memory. [10].

The study also found that perceptual students prefer face-to-face courses, and the impact of this trend is relatively small.

Although there is a lot of research in this field, there is no investigation into the reasons for the widespread use of MBTI tests. The importance of this study is to explore the reasons behind the massive popularity of MBTI personality tests in China. This article will explore the reasons behind the popularity of MBTI in China through interviews with Chinese college students who have tested MBTI.

3. Methodology

This study will be conducted in the form of qualitative research interviews. Interview is the main research method in this study. Through the interview of Chinese college students, this study will collect the channels for the interviewees to understand the MBTI test, explore the original intention of MBTI test and other questions to understand the reasons for the popularity of MBTI personality test on the Internet. The interview method will help to find more diverse reasons during the research process and help to answer the research questions. Achieve research objectives. This study will take college students studying in China as the interview objects. They come from different cities and regions, learn different majors, and have the ability of independent thinking, and have conducted MBTI test, have a certain understanding of MBTI test.

In this interview, the following questions will be asked: First, how you came into contact with MBTI; Second, how social media platforms contribute to your understanding of the MBTI; Third, if you do not test MBTI, will you feel uncomfortable when discussing MBTI with friends around you? What kind of discomfort will you feel? Finally, have your friends discussed MBTI on a large scale?

As the main interviewees of this study, these college students played a key role in the results of the study. Methods of data collection the interviews in this study will be conducted in a combination of face-to-face interviews and online interviews, which may be a more efficient method of data collection due to the need to collect the interview results from different regions of the country. At the end of the interview, the data will be integrated to analyze the reasons for the recent popularity of MBTI personality tests. This interview will be conducted with the consent of the interviewee, and the privacy of the interviewee will be strictly confidential.

4. Results

This study finds that, first of all, opinion leaders in the crowd play a crucial role in people's views on a certain thing: Most of the interviewees were introduced by their friends. At this time, the "friend" appears as the opinion leader, and the "friend" tells the interviewee that the MBTI personality test results are more accurate, and leads the interviewee to take the MBTI personality test.

Secondly, people's herd mentality may lead some interviewees who are not interested in MBTI to take MBTI personality test.eg: In the interview, most interviewees took the MBTI personality test because their friends discussed the results of the MBTI personality test in a wide range, and wanted to integrate into the conversation.

The promotion of social media leads to a greater influence on the respondents' perception of MBTI. In order to attract attention, some social media issued some statements such as "ESFP and ISTJ can become best friends", "ESFP and INFJ are less compatible as friends", but it will affect many interviewees' tendency to make friends with MBTI type, and even affect the choice of marriage.

5. Discussion

The study of opinion leaders and their impact on individuals' perceptions has been a subject of extensive research over an extended period. This concept was initially introduced by Lazarsfeld in 1940 within his seminal work, "The People's Choice." Opinion leaders are defined as a minority within a group who hold a significant role as a source of information and wield influence, thus shaping the attitudes and tendencies of the majority. In the context of this study, it was observed that the majority of individuals referred to as "friends" by the interviewees assumed the role of opinion leaders. Within the dynamics of communication, opinion leaders typically represent the individuals within a group who are the first to encounter mass media information and subsequently disseminate their modified or processed insights to others. This process underscores the crucial role played by opinion leaders in the transmission and interpretation of information within social contexts.

In the usual social activities, people will subconsciously follow the suggestions and choices given by opinion leaders. In this study, the majority of respondents said they would take the MBTI on the recommendation of a friend, so the widespread popularity of the MBTI can be attributed to these "opinion leaders".

The existence of opinion leaders plays a certain role. In marketing, many brand companies will let "Internet celebrities" advertise for them. At this time, the role of Internet celebrities is "opinion leaders", who recommend products to their fans after using the products, and the audience who trust the Internet celebrities will buy products, thus increasing the number of products sold and expanding the sales scale.

In view of the phenomenon that some respondents would take MBTI test because people around them would discuss MBTI in order not to make themselves feel excluded from social interaction, this study believes that this is a manifestation of social anxiety widely existing among Chinese young people. There are three reasons for the emergence of social anxiety among Chinese young people. The first is the current grim employment trend. Chinese college students need better social skills to get more information conducive to employment. Therefore, many of them worry that the information they get is not comprehensive enough, so they will try new things immediately. Secondly, current college students are the post-00s generation. Due to policy reasons, most of them are the only child, which also leads to many students' introverted personality, low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, and easy to feel uncomfortable, anxious and nervous. Finally, this study believes that the core of social anxiety lies in the fear of rejection. When people feel social anxiety, they will pay too much attention to how they look in the eyes of others.

This study suggests that a moderate amount of social anxiety is not a bad thing, because humans are social animals, people live in groups, and everyone all depends on others to some extent, the more straightforward reason is that rejection hurts. Social anxiety seeks to protect people from harm by helping them adjust themselves behavior to the details, norms, and atmosphere of the social group, blending in with the environment and thus avoiding rejection. If students want to deal with social anxiety, they should relax and let it go, do not try to fight negative emotions, and exercise their courage to make mistakes and dare to “not be liked”.

Cultivation theory is a well-known theory in communication. The cultivation theory was created by the American communication scholar Gerbner in the 1960s and 1970s, and its core view is that the mass communication media cultivates the audience’s world view in a subtle way. This kind of influence is not short-term, but a long-term, subtle and cultivation process. This is the case in the spread of MBTI personality tests, when the interviewee searches for information related to MBTI, social media platforms will widely recommend relevant information based on the searcher’s MBTI type, thereby subtly influencing the searcher’s social orientation.

6. Conclusion

Through interviews, this study found three reasons for the popularity of MBTI among Chinese college students. First, opinion leaders in the crowd have obvious influence on group selection; Secondly, due to the increase of employment pressure in recent years, most college students have relatively serious social anxiety. Therefore, some interviewees who are not interested in MBTI test take MBTI personality test. Finally, the spread of the MBTI personality test has been fueled by social media publicity. These are the important results of this study.

In production and life, people can better use communication theory to obtain better communication effect. Social media can use scientific algorithms such as big data to calculate the degree of social anxiety of users and recommend more suitable content for users according to the calculation results. In the promotion and marketing of new products, enterprises and companies can also make reasonable use of communication theory to convey brand concept and do a good job in the promotion of new products.

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