The Influence of the Online Persona on University Students

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Abstract. The media network constantly updates the cognition of university students. The university students in the media society are gradually symbolized, labeled and fragmented. The network persona further develops and evolves into an idealized role for university students to participate in the media society. Although the concept of online persona has made a lot of research in communication science, the online persona as a symbolic representation of media society still leaves a gap at the psychological level. This paper adopts the questionnaire method to study the positive and negative effects of online personas on the psychology of university students. Through the study, it is found that online personas play a certain role in guiding the psychological development of university students. They also distort their values to a certain extent and cause mental stress and psychological anxiety among university students. Due to the complexity of social information and the immaturity of college students themselves, online persona is also one of the reasons for the confusion between the "true self" and the "ideal self" of college students. Therefore, this paper explores the influence of online personas and suggests that university students should improve their self-cultivation, identify social information and establish correct values.

Keywords: Social media; network persona; college students; ideal self-image; impression management.

1. Introduction

With the development of the Internet and the power of social media, it seems that the concept of a global village, which McLuhan proposed in Understanding the Media: The Extension of Man in 1967, has become a reality. The distance between people continues to shorten. The distance between people in time and space has reduced. People are more closely connected [1]. People's lives are innovating and progressing through technology.

With the development of online social media, people are becoming more and more involved in public online social media (e.g. TikTok, Weibo, WeChat, Xiaohongshu, etc.). In order to create and maintain a good image in public social environments, people tend to create a "self" that is different from reality. This online self is often an idealized and beautiful image of oneself. These images often bring praise and traffic. Persona initially refers to the image of a celebrity who is trying to maintain a good image in front of the public [2]. In 1959, the American social psychologist Goffman developed the theory of impression management, also known as the "impression modification theory" [3]. In psychology, it is explained as a theory of interpersonal techniques whereby one party to interaction designs or changes their own behaviour to trigger the other party to form the impression they want [3]. When people put it into the context of the internet, people find that the concept of an online persona is exactly that. On online platforms, people perform consciously or unconsciously to control the impression they leave on others through a range of dramatic techniques such as expressions, gestures, mannerisms and gestures [3].

University students are a new force in the online social media society, and social media has become an integral part of university students' lives. For example, university students immersed in social media can be found on university campuses [4]. University students also tend to use social media to communicate with each other rather than face-to-face [5]. Due to the viral spread of online media, it has influenced the interaction behaviour of university students in a subtle process [6]. At the same time, university students are also receiving and displaying their roles and images in online social media to varying degrees. As the variety of online personas received by students' increases, students are influenced by them. Some studies have shown that they enjoy deceptive image management on

public social platforms [7]. Existing research has found that social media has a two-sided impact on users: on the one hand, it enriches interactions, promotes self-presentation, maintains relationships and makes information more accessible; but at the same time, it also induces negative emotions such as anxiety, depression, jealousy, social fatigue and even unethical behavior [8, 9].

The influence of online personas on university students increases as their dependence on the Internet grows. In an era where everyone is covered with "masks", it is important to build self-awareness and awareness of others. It is important to properly handle the relationship between the "real me" and the "virtual me". It is of profound significance to deal with the emotional ups and downs of the information age.

Therefore, in this study, based on the two-sided influence of social media, this paper further investigates the online persona in online media and the online persona established by university students themselves, and the influence of these two aspects on university students' psychological, mental and emotional well-being [10]. In this paper, 100 Chinese university students were surveyed. An objective data model was constructed through scenario simulation, statistical pie charts, descriptive tests, chi-square tests and correlation analysis. Used to determine the role played by university students in social media. For measuring the degree of influence by other online personas. To measure the degree of symbolisation and labeling. For analysing the phenomenon of alienation in behaviour and cognition of university students and analysing their reactions to online personification based on this. The aim is to help university students whose online personas do not match their real personas due to the management of online impressions to break away from their self-perception dilemma, establish correct values and deal with the relationship between their "real self" and "virtual self".

In this paper, the online persona is explored in two parts. On the one hand, it is college students as recipients of information, that is, they receive other people's online personas; on the other hand, it is college students as transmitters of information, that is, the online personas they shape. Take TikTok as an example, by swiping videos or photos on TikTok, university students receive other TikTok users' or bloggers' images or characters on the Internet, such as game gods, handsome boys and girls, schoolmasters, funny men and women and other online personas; at the same time, after receiving others' online personas, for whatever purposes, such as seeking praise, approval and traffic, etc., university students also share their own information. College students also share their own information, such as posting videos or photos on TikTok and tagging them, or agreeing with or criticising others on the internet to create their own online persona.

2. Method

In order to analyse the impact of online personas on the psychological dimension of university students, this paper focuses on the analysis and research based on the data collected by the questionnaire. This article adopts an inductive approach, using questionnaires to give a small view of the big picture. Using a top-down format, the article uses data from a survey of 100 university students to analyse how the entire university population is influenced by personas on online social media platforms.

Due to the diversity of the questionnaires, this paper adopts a mixed research approach, combining quantitative and qualitative analysis. In the statistics of basic information, a quantitative analysis was adopted; in the statistics of attitude questions, a qualitative analysis was adopted. Factual judgments are made by comparing the actual situation of university students on the Internet with real life. Based on a positivist methodology, a database and data model with empirical evidence are formed. Its data is not subjective, making the questionnaire objective and extensive. It is used to explain social phenomena and make value judgments by understanding the attitudes of university students towards their own and others' online personas and by means of documentary analysis and observation.

In this paper, the one hundred questionnaires sent out for the study were all valid. One hundred questionnaires were randomly collected from university students, including 59 female students and

41 male students. In the questionnaire, the sample was collected by simulating certain scenarios and comprehensive and reasonable options and analyzed the sample quantitatively in order to explore the influence of online personas on the psychological aspects of university students.

In creating the questionnaire, the study was divided into two parts. One part focused on the psychological impact of college students' online roles on others. The other part focused on the influence of college students' own online roles on themselves when participating in public online social activities. In this way, the impact of online personas on university students can be explored in a more comprehensive and detailed manner. This survey places the questionnaire online for research, achieving a large scale research survey while being quick and effective. In the questionnaire, two questions, "gender" and "role", were used to understand the basic situation of university students on publicly available online social media platforms. The four questions are about "tendency", "persona gap", "labeling degree" and "change of gap in future persona ". The four questions were used to measure the self-perception of university students in shaping their online persona. And the questions about the degree of assimilation, slavery and tendency, measure the psychological fluctuations of college students when receiving other people's personas. Finally, a supplementary question was set up on university students' perceptions of the influence of online personas on themselves, which complements the previous data.

In the specific data analysis, the article uses SPSS data analysis software. Through pie charts and descriptive statistics, the user profile of this study is derived

This paper has conducted a study on three typical and representative variables - "persona gap", "degree of hashtagging", "degree of assimilation" were each done with a chi-square test between genders to account for differences. This was verified by looking at whether the Pearson chi-square value corresponded to a significance value of p greater than 0.05. At the same time, a correlation analysis was done between the above three variables and role, by comparing whether the sig (two-tailed) was greater than 0.05 to determine if the correlation was significant in terms of whether the difference in role had an impact on the online persona.

The hypothesis for this study is as follows: online personas on online social media platforms have both good and bad psychological effects on university students.

3. Result

The data from the questionnaire was divided through SPSS data analysis software. The descriptive statistics as well as the data from the pie charts allow for a picture of the sample users and the characteristics of the sample. This paper is based on the fact that most university students have access to online information and online social platforms and have a certain level of discourse. This paper provides further research on the psychological impact of university students when dealing with online roles.

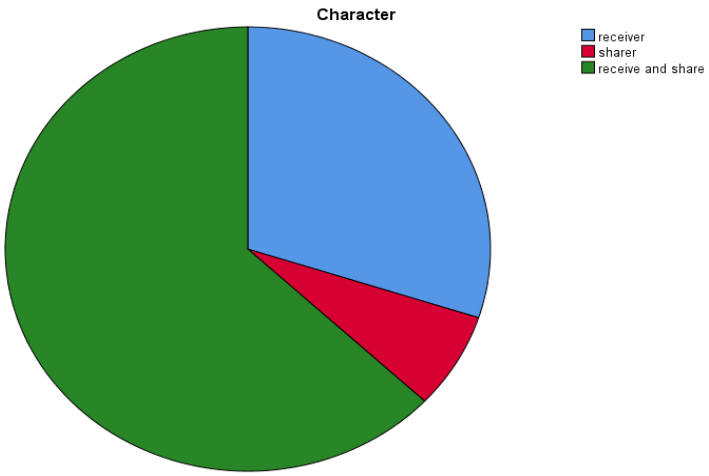


Fig 1. Online Character of Students.

As shown in Figure 1, 30% of university students acted as receivers, 7% as sharers and 63% were both receivers and sharers, meaning that 93% of university students received information and 70% shared their information.

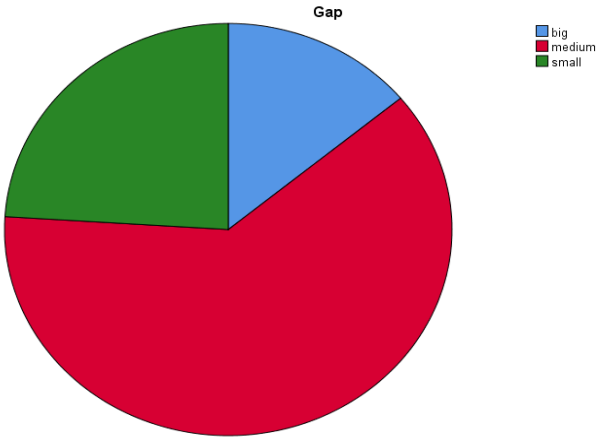


Fig 2. Gap between Internet and Reality.

As shown in Figure 2, when choosing the gap between their self-reality and their online persona, 62% of university students thought there was a certain gap, 14% thought there was a big gap, and 76% thought there was a gap between their online and real selves.

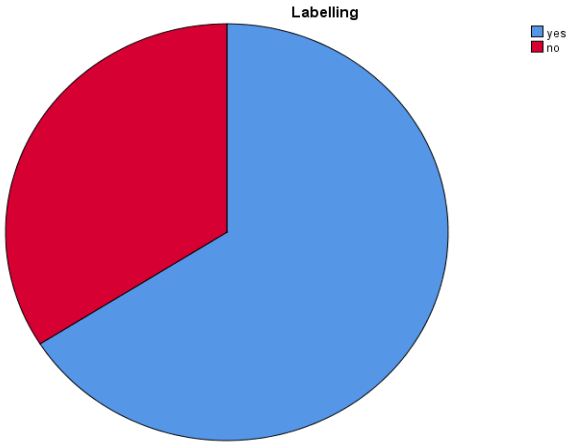


Fig 3. Students Labelling.

As shown in Figure 3, when choosing how much they label themselves, 66% of university students admitted to labeling themselves online. When choosing whether they preferred their real or online self, 67% of students chose real and 33% chose online.

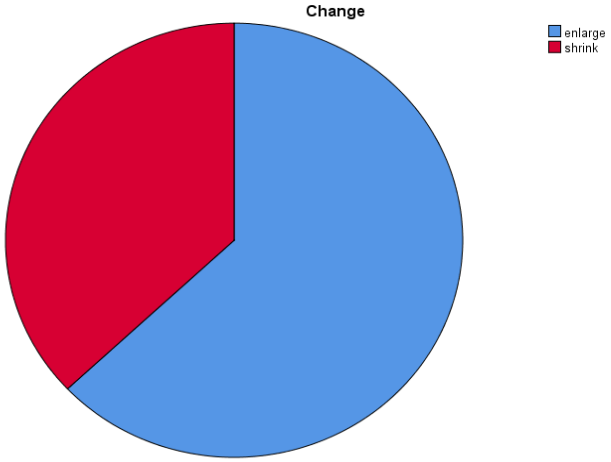


Fig 4. Persona Gap Change.

As shown in Figure 4, when choosing how reality changed in relation to online persona as traffic increased, 63% of university students chose that the gap widened and 37% chose that it narrowed.

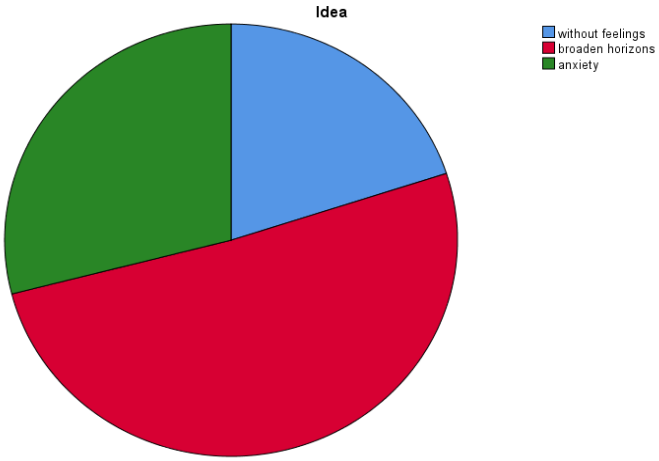


Fig 5. Idea when Confronted with a Persona.

As shown in Figure 5, when choosing how they would feel about the idea of a more perfect persona on the internet, 51% of university students chose that they would gain insight and 29% chose that they would have anxiety.

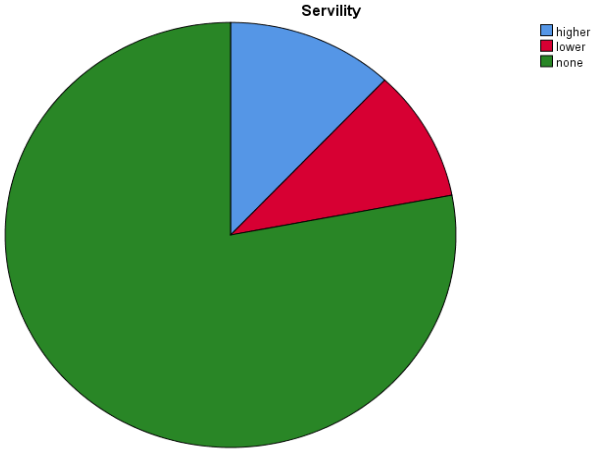


Fig 6. Students Servility.

As shown in Figure 6, when judging the level of slavery among university students through scenario simulation, 78% of university students did not have any slavery tendencies.

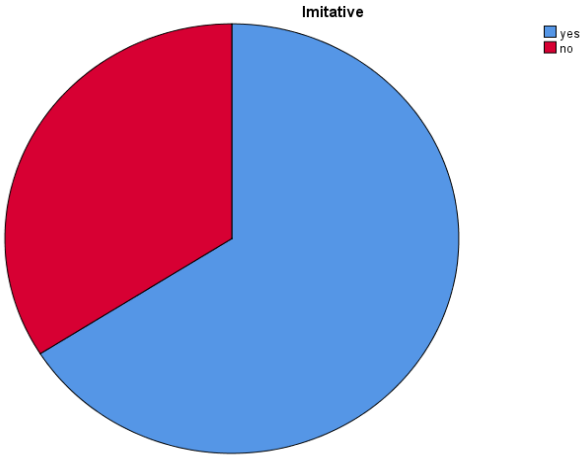


Fig 7. Imitative Behaviour.

As shown in Figure7, when choosing the assimilation behaviour of university students influenced by their online persona, 66% of them admitted to assimilation behaviour.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gap	100	1	3	2.10	.611
Labelling	100	1	2	1.34	.476
Tendency	100	1	2	1.67	.473
Servility	100	1	3	2.66	.685
Imitative	100	1	2	1.34	.476
Valid N (listwise)	100				

As shown in Table 1, the mean for gap is closer to 3, i.e. closer to the case of a significant gap. The mean for both labeling and imitative is closer to 1, i.e. there is alienation. The mean for tendency is more realistic and the mean for servility is more likely to have no slavery.

In order to ensure the accuracy and objectivity of the results, correlation analysis and chi-square test were done for typical problems selected in this paper, hoping to analyse the causes and make rational suggestions in a more targeted manner.

Table 2. Correlations.

		Character	Labelling	Gap	Imitative
Character	Pearson Correlation	1	-.238*	-.060	-.261**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.017	.554	.009
	N	100	100	100	100
Labelling	Pearson Correlation	-.238*	1	.090	.109
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.017		.372	.282
	N	100	100	100	100
Gap	Pearson Correlation	-.060	.090	1	.125
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.554	.372		.216
	N	100	100	100	100
Imitative	Pearson Correlation	-.261**	.109	.125	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	.282	.216	
	N	100	100	100	100

As shown in Table 2, in the correlation analysis, the sig. (two-tailed) of role vs. labelled = 0.017<0.05, so the correlation is significant. The correlation between gap and role sig. (two-tailed) = 0.554> 0.05 is not significant. Mimicry is significantly correlated with sig. of role onwo-tailed) = 0.009<0.05. The results demonstrate that the roles played by university students in online platforms are strongly correlated with the degree of labeling and imitation (assimilation). The difference in roles influenced the psychological impact of their own and others' online personas on university students.

Table 3. Character and labeling Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.591a	2	.022
Likelihood Ratio	7.539	2	.023
Linear-by-Linear Association	5.612	1	.018
N of Valid Cases	100		

As shown in Table 3, in the chi-square test of role played by college students on the internet and labeling, significance (p-value)=0.022<0.05. The result proves that there is a difference in the degree of labeling by college students depending on the role they play on the internet. The more roles they played (e.g., more roles of sharer and receiver than single receiver) and the more information they received, the greater the degree of labeling, which in turn indicates a greater influence on their own online persona.

Table 4. Character and imitative Chi-Square Tests.

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.167a	2	.028
Likelihood Ratio	6.978	2	.031
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.764	1	.009
N of Valid Cases	100		

As shown in Table 4, in a chi-square test of the roles played by university students on the Internet and imitation, significance (p-value) = 0.028 < 0.05. This result proves that university students imitate (assimilate) differently depending on the roles they play on the Internet. The more roles they played (e.g. more roles of sharer and receiver than single receiver) and the more information they received, the greater the degree of imitation. This suggests that the influence on the reception of others' online roles is greater, which in turn affects their own psychology more significantly.

In the first part of the study, which examines the impact of self-imposed personas on the psychological aspects of university students, the statistics show that university students are more labeled, the difference between reality and the internet is greater, and in the change of the gap, the majority of university students support that the gap will continue to widen. Therefore, most university students have the behaviour of shaping their online persona through online social platforms and this behaviour may cause their own self-perception to be wrong. According to logical attribution, it is the idealised self on the internet, and there is no reason why people cannot reasonably prefer a more perfect version of themselves. But the confusion of self-perceptions can result in an unclear perception of the real self, which is reflected in the data as people choosing the real self in their attitudes towards themselves when they should be more inclined to pursue the online self.

In the second part of the data, which examines the effect of the online persona of others on the psychological dimension of university students, the behaviour of university students is inevitably assimilated and they in turn engage in some imitative behaviour.

4. Discussion

From the results, it is undeniable that other people's online personas do have a positive effect on the psychology of university students, including the option of "learning more and broadening their horizons" and the very common act of brushing up on social media to relieve mental fatigue and satisfy people's spiritual needs [11]. However, some overly perfect personas can also cause emotional anxiety.

Some reasons are worth identifying. On the one hand, the lack of social experience and the immaturity of students' mental development makes them susceptible to external influences; moreover, the comparison and vanity mentality of students is also an important reason for the formation of online personas. On the other hand, the information in society is too complicated, and good and bad information are mixed together, making it difficult for people to distinguish. From the point of view of society, all sectors of society should strengthen the supervision of the information and do a good job as a gatekeeper in the face of the mixed information, so as to create a good social environment.

Although this is a questionnaire, it is more of a non-quantitative questionnaire as it asks respondents about their views and attitudes toward online personas. The reliability of the questionnaire cannot be guaranteed. In the process of collecting the questionnaire, respondents may not express their true attitudes or may fill in the information indiscriminately, thus the reliability of the questionnaire cannot be quantified and analysed. It does not guarantee correct completion as the general rule derived from a particular sample has an element of probability.

5. Conclusion

To promote the mental health of university students, the theme of this paper is to study the psychological impact of university students when facing online personas. The paper concludes that online personas can have both good and bad effects on the psychological aspects of university students. There is also a strong correlation between the role that students play online and the impact that their own and others' online personas have on them. The higher the level of participation on the Internet and the more roles they play in social networking platforms, the greater the psychological impact of their own and others' online personas on university students. This study aims to eliminate the negative influences and maximize the positive ones.

This article fills a gap in the study of the impact of online personas on the psychological aspects of university students and contributes positively to further research on the role and psychological issues of university students in the online media society, as well as to the promotion of the psychological health of university students.

In this paper, the research maybe can expand the geographical scope and sample range of research in this area and strive to be more objective and realistic. It is also hoped that more targeted research can be done on psychological problems, down to specific psychological problems such as internet addiction, social disorders, depression and other psychological problems.

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