

# Manufacture of Intimacy and Boundary Reconstruction: Analysis of Social Fatigue Behavior among Z-Generation Users on Xiaohongshu

## -- Taking "Companion Socializing" as an Example

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### ABSTRACT

In a mediated society, Z-generation users tend to engage more in online socializing, giving rise to "companion socializing." This study focuses on Z-generation users on the Xiaohongshu platform, exploring the reasons for the formation of "companion socializing" from four dimensions: emotional, demand, technical, and media usage. The research finds that "finding companions" is highly popular among young Z-generation users, satisfying their emotional needs and boundary reconstruction, forming social belonging and resonance within circles, and to some extent alleviating social media fatigue emotions.

### KEYWORDS

Social Fatigue; Mediated Existence; Companion Socializing; Xiaohongshu; Social Behavior.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In a mediated society, users delegate control of their time to social media, which not only facilitates the flow of information but also reconstructs the time and space in their lives. This trend of mediation often leads users to lack the energy and time needed to establish and maintain deep social relationships in their daily interactions. Especially as digital living becomes the norm, people increasingly prefer to communicate through online platforms, a trend particularly evident among Z-generation users. For the Z-generation, social media is not only an important platform for obtaining information, expressing oneself, and communicating emotions but also a crucial means of establishing social relationships, seeking recognition, and a sense of belonging. However, as the use of social media becomes more prevalent and ingrained, Z-generation users gradually exhibit a sense of fatigue towards social media, reflecting, to some extent, their dissatisfaction with existing social patterns and their desire for new ones. In mediated existence, "companion socializing" provides Z-generation users with a new social option, enabling them to maintain social activity while reducing social pressure and achieving effective relationship adjustment. Therefore, this study aims to delve into the reasons behind Z-generation users forming "companion socializing."

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Through the review of existing literature, the current academic research on "companion socializing" mainly revolves around two aspects. Firstly, it focuses on concepts, reasons for formation, and

influences. Such studies suggest that companion socializing refers to social relationships formed based on common interests or needs, with reasons for its formation including common interests, shared needs, and residential mobility, satisfying the social needs of modern people under fast-paced living conditions. Some scholars point out that companion socializing is precise companionship based on common interests or needs, serving to heal individuals' negative emotions, essentially exchanging needs and time between parties. When exploring the development of companion socializing, most scholars believe that an increasing number of people seek companionship and share daily life through various software platforms to achieve certain specific purposes. Regarding the impact of companion socializing, some scholars believe that it provides people with a medium scenario to expand their interests, where users create adaptive interactive behaviors through social scenario reconstruction, thereby creating "digital" proximity to meet people's social needs. Secondly, it explores "companion socializing" from the perspectives of practical investigation, changes in youth social psychology, and changes in social structure. Such studies suggest that companion socializing has become a new social trend for contemporary youth, reflecting changes in modern youth lifestyles and values. Based on the background of modernity transformation, some scholars believe that current companion socializing reshapes the interpersonal relationships in the original social structure, involving social interactions characterized by fragmentation.

Building upon the summary and analysis of the above research, this study focuses on the new social mode of Z-generation young users on the Xiaohongshu platform. Specifically, it investigates the following question: Why do Z-generation users on the Xiaohongshu platform tend to "find companions" in their social media usage behavior after experiencing social media fatigue?

### 3. RESEARCH DESIGN

**Table 1.** Interviewee basic information

| Interviewee | Gender | Age | Occupation    | Current Residence |
|-------------|--------|-----|---------------|-------------------|
| F1          | Female | 20  | student       | Hebei             |
| F2          | Female | 22  | student       | Shaanxi           |
| F3          | Female | 26  | student       | Hubei             |
| F4          | Female | 21  | student       | Zhejiang          |
| F5          | Female | 22  | student       | Liaoning          |
| F6          | Female | 30  | Civil Servant | Hebei             |
| F7          | Female | 19  | student       | Guangdong         |
| F8          | Female | 21  | student       | Zhejiang          |
| F9          | Female | 20  | student       | Zhejiang          |
| F10         | Female | 22  | student       | Guizhou           |

This study selects the Xiaohongshu platform, which is predominantly used by female users and currently popular for "companion socializing," as the research platform. Employing the method of in-depth interviews, the study conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 young women who have experienced "finding companions" on Xiaohongshu to understand their thoughts on companion socializing. In the end, the study interviewed 10 subjects, aged between 19 and 30 years old. The interview outline was adjusted continuously based on the actual situation, primarily divided into the following parts: 1. Basic personal information of the interviewees; 2. Changes in the sensory and psychological aspects of the interviewees after experiencing social media fatigue and their behavioral

changes; 3. The interviewees' views on companionship and changes in social behavior. Interviews were conducted either offline or online, with prior communication with the interviewees and the preservation or recording of the interview process obtained with their consent. After the interviews, the recordings were transcribed into text for analysis.

Here's the translation of the table into English.

## **4. RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **4.1. Emotional Dimension: Emotional Comfort in Mediated Contexts**

The profound influence of electronic media on society lies in its reshaping of social contexts and, to a certain extent, diminishing the influence of physical spaces on situations, allowing individuals' media behaviors to remain unrestricted by physical spaces. The research reveals that the emergence of social media fatigue among users often stems from concerns such as information overload, social pressure, and personal privacy protection. On the Xiaohongshu platform, although users can browse through a vast amount of content related to beauty, fashion, travel, and more, prolonged immersion in such an information deluge can lead to a decrease in information absorption efficiency and feelings of fatigue. Additionally, the "performative" nature of social interaction and strong connectivity on social media subjects users to ongoing pressures of social performance and self-censorship, leading to social burdens. In this context, the behavior of Z-generation users tending to "find companions" is, in essence, a quest for emotional solace. They seek to establish connections with like-minded companions, finding emotional solace and recognition. During the process of "finding companions," users can engage in deep conversations with individuals who share common topics and interests. This type of interaction helps alleviate social pressure and anxiety, providing users with emotional support.

"I feel even the best of friends don't need to chat every day. Sometimes, when I don't want to expose too much of myself, I feel finding a companion is a good solution." (F7).

"The behavior of finding companions may be a short-term need for me at a certain stage, and a companion happens to have the same needs as me." (F2).

### **4.2. Demand Dimension: Interpersonal Boundaries in Weak Connection Relationships**

The accelerated pace of society leaves users in a state of social overload, making it difficult to invest substantial time in maintaining deeper social relationships, often resulting in users being in broad weak connection relationships. Although these weak connection relationships are extensive, they often lack substantive emotional connections and common interests. Z-generation users feel exhausted from long-term social media usage and consequently seek a more intimate and topic-oriented way of interaction. Compared to traditional social media interaction methods, the "companion" socializing model has clear boundaries of interaction. Users can quickly find like-minded companions based on common interests, hobbies, and lifestyles, thereby reducing the time cost of sifting through and filtering complex information. In these intimate relationships created based on common interests or needs, users can freely express themselves without worrying about others' judgments or comparisons. The clarity of these interaction boundaries enables Z-generation users to effortlessly expand their social relationships without breaking their existing social circles.

"I think finding a companion is temporary. I don't need to consider too much about what will happen later. It's more comfortable in this fast-paced era." (F7).

"I feel very relaxed when playing with a companion, which I almost found boring when playing alone before." (F1).

### **4.3. Technological Dimension: Circles of Resonance under Algorithmic Recommendations**

With the continuous development of media technology, media has become the window through which users perceive the world. "Companion" relationships are initially constructed in virtual networks, facilitating interpersonal relationship reconstruction through interactions with strangers. Meanwhile, algorithmic recommendation technology, based on users' browsing history, interest preferences, and social interactions, provides highly personalized content recommendations to users. It also guides connections between users through features like social interaction. Therefore, Z-generation users on the Xiaohongshu platform are more likely to encounter content and communities that align with their interests and values. The research finds that when users feel weary of the extensive and chaotic information on social media, they tend to seek a more focused and resonant social circle. In the process of using Xiaohongshu, algorithmic recommendations facilitate users in swiftly matching with "companions," thereby transforming from social behavior to psychological needs for users. In a mediated life, Z-generation users often experience negative emotions such as loneliness, anxiety, or unease. However, establishing deep connections with like-minded individuals can satisfy their sense of belonging and identity, thereby alleviating negative emotions. Additionally, "finding companions" can help Z-generation users expand their social circles, acquire new information and experiences, and achieve personal growth and development.

"Because everyone likes to showcase their positive aspects on social media, it adds peer pressure to me. So when going out, I am not very willing to be with these people. I prefer being with strangers who don't know much about me, as it creates a sense of boundaries in interactions." (F9).

### **4.4. Media Usage Dimension: A Novel Avenue to Alleviate Social Fatigue**

The rapid development of "companion socializing" is largely facilitated by platforms. The research finds that on the Xiaohongshu platform, "finding companions" can alleviate social media fatigue, primarily due to its unique social model and user experience. Firstly, Xiaohongshu provides accurate recommendations for users based on their topics and posting content, simplifying the time cost of users in selecting suitable social partners from a vast amount of information and reducing fatigue towards social media. Secondly, when "finding companions," users focus on socializing in vertically segmented fields, enabling them to find common topics and interests, thus increasing the depth and interactivity of socialization. Lastly, Xiaohongshu offers various ways for users to interact with companions, such as posting notes, commenting, private messaging, group chats, etc. These interaction methods not only satisfy users' social needs but also enhance the interest and diversity of socialization. Users can engage in deep conversations with companions through these means, sharing their thoughts and insights, thereby enhancing the interactivity and depth of socialization. Through "finding companions," users can obtain information and content that aligns with their interests more targetedly, thereby reducing the pressure and fatigue caused by information overload, improving user experience and satisfaction, and further reducing the occurrence of social media fatigue emotions.

"I think social media platforms are very supportive in this aspect. It's very convenient for me to find companions on Xiaohongshu. I think the companion relationship has both good and bad aspects. On one hand, we may develop further friendships, but on the other hand, finding too many companions may make social relationships feel superficial, and the ability to engage in deep conversations with people may weaken." (F5).

## **5. CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK**

"Companion socializing," from the dimensions of emotion, demand, technology, and media usage, effectively meets the social needs of Z-generation users in specific interests and demands, providing them with a new social platform. This social model based on common interests and demands allows

users to interact more naturally and effortlessly, effectively alleviating the pressures and fatigue of traditional socialization. Additionally, it reflects the transformation of Z-generation users' concepts of intimacy and emotional changes in digital survival. Compared to traditional interpersonal relationships, Z-generation users place more emphasis on "weak ties" and boundaries in social interactions to achieve dynamic emotional satisfaction.

However, as "companion socializing" continues to deepen, Z-generation users' emotional desires have not been fully met, gradually manifesting certain behaviors of social fatigue. This fatigue behavior mainly stems from weariness of frequent and superficial social interactions and reflection on the excessive reliance on virtual socialization brought about by social media. While pursuing individuality and self-worth, they begin to desire more profound and meaningful social relationships.

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