

Analyzing the Dissemination of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) in China: A Case Study of Weibo and Xiaohongshu Texts

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Abstract. This study delves into the dissemination of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) personality test on Chinese social media platforms, particularly Weibo and Xiaohongshu, unveiling the multifaceted socio-psychological drivers behind its popularity. An extensive analysis of social media posts reveals that MBTI has become a widespread cultural symbol among the youth, significantly impacting personal self-awareness, career planning, and interpersonal interactions. Employing a variety of communication and psychological theories, including Social Penetration Theory, Uncertainty Reduction Theory, Cognitive Dissonance Theory, Symbolic Convergence Theory, and Agenda-Setting Theory, the study explores the phenomenon of MBTI's spread on Chinese social media platforms. The application of these theories elucidates how MBTI has emerged as a cultural and social phenomenon among Chinese youth, profoundly influencing individual behavior and social interactions. This comprehensive analysis not only enriches the theoretical understanding of MBTI's dissemination on Chinese social media but also provides insights for practical application. It highlights the crucial role of MBTI in the psychological development, social behavior, and cultural trends among contemporary Chinese youth, offering valuable guidance for psychologists, educators, and social media practitioners. By examining this phenomenon in depth, the study demonstrates the significant influence of MBTI on contemporary Chinese social media platforms and its key role in shaping the thought processes and social habits of the younger generation.

Keywords: Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), Social Media, China, Social Penetration Theory, Cultural Phenomenon

1 Introduction

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), based on Carl Jung's personality theory, has gained global popularity since its inception in the mid-20th century. It is widely utilized in personal development, career planning, and team building (Choi, 2021)^[1]. With the rise of social media, particularly in China, MBTI discussions have become prevalent among the youth, focusing on self-awareness and social interaction (Jirásek et al., 2021)^[2]. Despite its growing influence in Chinese society, research on its dissemination via Chinese social media and its impact on Chinese youth is limited (Lu et al., 2020)^[3].

Studies by Qin Xiaoya and Wang Lin (2024), and Lu Juan et al. (2024), highlight MBTI's role in enhancing self-identity and social value among youth and establishing norms for career development. Research by Zhang Mingyang and Li Yuanxin confirms MBTI's significance in online social networks and cultural construction. Ding Lufeng (2023) connects MBTI with academic choices, providing a basis for subject selection in high school, while Zhang Hao and Zhang Peihan (2023) explore its implications on English learning outcomes^{[4][5][6][7][8][9]}.

Although these studies have explored the application and impact of MBTI from various angles, a comprehensive understanding of its widespread dissemination on Chinese social media, its impact on the psychological development and social behaviors of youth, and effective content creation and management strategies on social media platforms is still lacking.

This research seeks to explore MBTI's spread on Chinese social media platforms like Weibo and Xiaohongshu and its impact on Chinese youth, aiming to enrich theoretical knowledge and offer practical insights for psychologists, educators, and social media practitioners to address the needs of the youth more effectively.

2 Research design and methods

This study aims to explore the phenomenon of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) personality test's dissemination on Chinese social media platforms. We analyze this phenomenon from three perspectives: interpersonal communication, cultural dissemination, and mass communication. Here is our research methodology and detailed analysis results:

2.1 Data collection and preprocessing

We selected Sina Weibo and Xiaohongshu as our data sources. Utilizing Python web scraping technology, we collected a total of 8,242 Weibo text data and 992 Xiaohongshu notes tagged with “MBTI”, “E people”, and “I people”. The data preprocessing steps included text normalization (unifying case, removing spaces and special characters), Chinese word segmentation (using Jieba), and the removal of stopwords and irrelevant characters, preparing the data for subsequent analysis.

2.2.2 Theme extraction analysis

Figure 2 Theme Extraction Analysis Results.

Theme Number	Keywords
1	Introvert (I), meme, test, Extrovert (E), personality, character, burst, traits, career, click
2	ISFP, ISFJ, Xiaohongshu, baby, creation, personality, like, assistant, friend
3	Test, character, career, click, personality, everything, type, psychology
4	INTP, learn, thinking, INTJ, field, knowledge, analysis, thought, logic
5	ENFP, ENTP, puppy, learn, like, happy, friend, social, really
6	INFP, click, everything, spirit, world, response, exclamation, speak
7	INFJ, really, INFJ-INFJ, want, Nordic, ISTJ, world, everything
8	INTJ, self, ENTJ, fear, in, function, female, wisdom, personality
9	INFJ, doorslam, when, INFJ-INFJ, in, like, hurt, love, world

The theme extraction analysis using the BERTopic algorithm showed that MBTI discussions on social media focus on several key areas: personalized self-exploration, career planning, strategies for interpersonal interaction, and the connection between MBTI types and emotional fluctuations/mental health(Figure 2). Each theme reflects users' intense interest in deepening their understanding of their own and others' MBTI types, as well as attempts to apply MBTI theory in daily life.

2.2.3 Sentiment analysis

Figure 3 Sentiment analysis results.

Positive Ratio	Negative Ratio	Average Sentiment Score
0.62962963	0.357158328	0.63834243

In the sentiment analysis of texts related to MBTI on social media, a total of 9,112 comments were analyzed. Among these, 5,814 comments were classified as expressing positive emotions, accounting for approximately 63.78%, while 3,298 comments were identified with negative emotions, making up about 36.18%(Figure 3). These statistics demonstrate that discussions about MBTI on social media tend to exhibit a predominance of positive emotions, reflecting a generally positive and optimistic attitude among users when discussing MBTI personality types. The high proportion of positive emotions is related to the characteristic of MBTI as a tool for self-awareness and self-improvement. Users generate positive emotional responses by seeking resonance and support through sharing and discussing MBTI types. However, more than one-third of the comments displayed negative emotions, arising from dissatisfaction with MBTI test results, concerns over the labeling of personality types, or skepticism about the scientific validity of MBTI. Overall, these sentiment analysis results indicate a relatively healthy emotional atmosphere but also signal the need to pay attention to those expressing negative emotions. Further in-depth analysis, combined with specific texts, is required to more comprehensively understand the phenomenon of MBTI discussions on social media.

2.3 Detailed analysis results

The word cloud and theme extraction results collectively reveal the main interest points and discussion trends among social media users in MBTI discussions. Users not only showed a keen interest in specific MBTI types but also sought strategies for understanding themselves and others and improving interpersonal relationships through sharing personal experiences. The sentiment analysis results further confirmed the positivity in MBTI discussions on social media, although a certain proportion of negative feedback also revealed users' concerns and criticisms regarding the application of MBTI.

In summary, through detailed data analysis, this study uncovers the phenomenon of MBTI dissemination on Chinese social media, reflecting users' attention to personalized self-awareness, career planning, interpersonal interactions, and mental health. These findings not only provide deep insights into the popularity of MBTI among Chinese youth but also offer valuable references for operators and content creators of social media platforms to better meet users' needs and interests.

3 Discussion

This study examines the spread of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) across Chinese social media platforms, employing various communication and psychological theories to understand its impact on self-disclosure, relationship development, and public perception.

3.1 Social penetration theory

Originally proposed by psychologists Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor, Social Penetration Theory describes personality structures as multi-layered onions, comprising beliefs and feelings about oneself, others, and the world. As intimate relationships develop, the depth of personal self-disclosure also increases (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2022)^[10]. This theory provides a useful framework for analyzing the phenomenon of MBTI dissemination on Chinese social media, particularly in how it influences individuals' self-disclosure and relationship development (Sun Xiaodi, 2022)^[11].

Medium of Self-Disclosure: MBTI serves as a tool that facilitates the process of self-disclosure on social media, allowing individuals to reveal their personality traits and preferences in a relatively low-risk manner. Sharing one's MBTI type encourages a form of self-disclosure that can deepen interpersonal connections and foster community formation based on shared MBTI types.

Expansion of Self-Disclosure: According to Social Penetration Theory, relationship development progresses from superficial exchanges to sharing deeper emotions and beliefs. Discussions around MBTI often start with basic type characteristics but can evolve into sharing more personal experiences and feelings.

Deepening Self-Disclosure Enhances Intimacy: The theory suggests that as self-disclosure increases, so does the intimacy of relationships. On social media, sharing MBTI types and behavioral traits leads to resonance and connection with others, facilitating the formation of communities grounded in shared personality types.

Examples from collected texts, such as comments stating the importance of including one's MBTI type in resumes in South Korea, highlight MBTI's role as a tool for initial self-disclosure and its influence on interpersonal communication.

3.2 Uncertainty reduction theory

Uncertainty Reduction Theory focuses on how people gather information, establish understanding, and reduce uncertainty in initial stages of communication (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2022)^[10]. In the context of MBTI's spread in China, this theory explains how individuals use MBTI to understand themselves and others, thereby reducing uncertainty in interpersonal interactions.

Self-Disclosure and Uncertainty Reduction: Users share their MBTI types on social media to connect with similar individuals, reducing uncertainty in initial interactions. For instance, an INTJ seeking friends of the same type exemplifies how self-disclosure reduces uncertainty in early communication stages.

Similarity and Shared Networks: Sharing MBTI types helps form specific communities, such as groups or hashtags dedicated to particular types like “#ISTJ Gathering”. These communities facilitate mutual understanding and reduce uncertainty among members.

3.3 Cognitive dissonance theory

Cognitive dissonance occurs when there is a conflict between an individual's behaviors, beliefs, or attitudes, leading to discomfort. People tend to reduce this dissonance through selective exposure, post-decision dissonance, and minimal justification for action or decision (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2022)^[10].

Cognitive Dissonance: Individuals may experience confusion or discomfort when their actions do not align with the typical characteristics of their MBTI type.

Post-Decision Dissonance: If someone's self-perception conflicts with their MBTI test results, they might express skepticism about the test's accuracy on social media. This necessitates a reassessment of their MBTI type and its accuracy.

Minimizing Dissonance through Behavioral Adjustment: To reduce dissonance, individuals might reinterpret their behaviors to align with their MBTI type or seek advice on social media, thus adjusting their attitudes to resolve cognitive dissonance.

3.4 Symbolic convergence theory

Symbolic Convergence Theory posits that the dissemination of MBTI in China can be seen as the formation of a shared symbolic system and collective consciousness (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2022)^[10]. This theory emphasizes that through shared symbols, stories, and language, individuals within a group develop a common ideology and cultural identity.

Sharing Group Fantasies: Social media users creatively interpret or dramatize MBTI traits, sharing these narratives to gain validation from others. For example, the ENFP personality being likened to a “happy puppy” resonates with and is rapidly adopted by the MBTI community, fostering a collective fantasy and identity.

Collective Identity Formation: Posts inviting ENFPs to share creative and adventurous experiences exemplify how MBTI types can establish collective identities and shared interests among users.

Exchange of Similar Experiences: Discussions about shared experiences, such as ISTJs missing the bigger picture due to their detail-oriented nature, promote group communication and understanding based on similar MBTI types.

3.5 Agenda-setting theory

Applying Agenda-Setting Theory to the analysis of MBTI's spread in China highlights how media, especially social media, shapes public attention and cognition by emphasizing certain topics or issues (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2022)^[10].

Influence of Social Media: Posts about the growing discussion of MBTI on Weibo and users following trends to discover their MBTI types illustrate social media's role in directing attention towards MBTI and engaging the public.

Celebrity Influence: When celebrities share their MBTI types, it influences fans' behaviors and interests, demonstrating the impact of public figures in shaping fans' engagement with MBTI.

The Role of Social Media in Setting the Agenda: Users stating their newfound interest in MBTI after seeing content across platforms shows how social media plays a crucial role in determining topics of public interest.

These real-world examples from social media posts reflect the application of Agenda-Setting Theory in the context of MBTI dissemination. By highlighting MBTI-related content and discussions, social media influences where people focus their attention and interest, shaping public cognition and discussion around MBTI.

In conclusion, the spread of MBTI on Chinese social media platforms and its influence on public perception and interpersonal relationships can be comprehensively understood through the application of these theories. This discussion not only sheds light on the dynamics of MBTI dissemination in China but also contributes to the broader understanding of personality theory's role in social media culture and communication practices.

4 Conclusion

This study delves into the dissemination phenomenon of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) across Chinese social media platforms, particularly Weibo and Xiaohongshu, unveiling the multifaceted socio-psychological drivers behind this popular phenomenon. Through the analysis of a vast array of social media posts, it is evident that MBTI has become a prevalent cultural symbol among the youth, significantly impacting individual self-awareness, career planning, and interpersonal interactions.

Employing various theories from communication and psychology, such as Social Penetration Theory, Uncertainty Reduction Theory, Cognitive Dissonance Theory, Symbolic Convergence Theory, and Agenda-Setting Theory, this research thoroughly investigates the spread of the MBTI sixteen personality types test on Chinese social media platforms. The application of

these theories has shed light on how MBTI has emerged as a cultural and social phenomenon among Chinese youth and its profound influence on individual behavior and social interactions.

In summary, this study not only enriches the theoretical understanding of MBTI's dissemination phenomenon on Chinese social media but also offers insights for practical application. It reveals the pivotal role of MBTI in the psychological development, social behavior, and cultural trends among contemporary Chinese youth, providing valuable guidance for psychologists, educators, and social media practitioners. By exploring this phenomenon in depth, this research highlights the significant influence of MBTI on contemporary Chinese social media platforms and its key role in shaping the thought processes and social habits of the younger generation.

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