The Phenomenon of College Students' "Spending Time" and Online Ideological and Political Education in Colleges and Universities: Logic, Challenges and Path Innovation

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Abstract: With the explosive growth of digital products such as short videos, social media, and online games, the "spending time" phenomenon has become one of the most prominent subcultural manifestations on current university campuses. Its characteristics of being latent, collective, conformistic, diverse, complex, and contradictory have weakened the effectiveness of online ideological and political education in colleges and universities. This has put the dissemination of the core socialist values in a new predicament of a "battle for time" and a "battle for attention". This paper systematically reviews the operational logic and psychological mechanism of the the "spending time" phenomenon, reveals its profound impact on the value orientation, emotional resonance and behavioral shaping of online ideological and political education in colleges and universities, and based on the "technology-capital-subject" ternary interactive framework, proposes an innovative path for collaborative governance of online ideological and political education in colleges and universities. Realize the paradigm shift from "content indoctrination" to "time leadership".

Keywords: The "spending time" phenomenon; Online ideological and political education; Path innovation

1. Introduction

At present, the internet has been deeply integrated into all aspects of social life, bringing about profound changes to people's ways of living, learning and working. For college students who are in a crucial period of value formation, the Internet has become an important platform for their study, entertainment, socializing and information acquisition. The Internet is influencing the thinking patterns, behavioral habits and value orientations of contemporary college students in all aspects and at a deep level. "Scrolling until 2:30 a.m." and "Gaming life never goes offline" have become highly resonant narratives on social media. This kind of "unconscious time payment" used in short videos, social media and online games is called "spending time" in the academic circle. Compared with "spending money", "spending time" is more covert and more likely to build an information cocoon, which in turn leads to a chain reaction among college students such as spiritual emptiness, academic lag and value deviation. The information cocoon means that we only listen to what we choose and what pleases us [1]. How online ideological and political education in colleges and universities can penetrate

the information cocoon and regain the "initiative of time" for young people has become a key issue in moral education and talent cultivation in the digital age.

2. The connotation and characteristics of college students' "spending time" phenomenon

The concept of "spending time" first appeared in a youth study conducted by Zhu Hui and Lu Shucheng from Shanghai Normal University in 2025. It mainly refers to the fact that users unconsciously consume a large amount of time cost in applications such as short videos, live streaming, and mobile games [2]. This article defines the phenomenon of college students' "spending time" as the fact that in the online environment, college students invest a large amount of time and energy in various online activities such as short videos, social media and online games, presenting a state of consuming a lot of time similar to "spending money" in games. The phenomenon of "spending time" is becoming increasingly common among contemporary college students and has become an important factor influencing their study, life and growth and success. The main features are as follows:

First of all, the hidden dangers that are not easily detectable. In online activities, college students' perception of time is weakened by the "infinite pull-down" mechanism, making it difficult to form clear usage boundaries. Unconsciously, they have consumed a great deal of time and attention. After experiencing immersive short video entertainment, many college students often can't help but exclaim, "Where has the time gone?" Their numbness towards time is becoming increasingly severe.

Secondly, the group characteristics are obvious. College students devote a great deal of time to online activities, forming a group-characteristic "spending time" behavior on the Internet, with online games being the most typical. In addition, on short-video platforms and social media platforms, they also form group interactions due to common topics of concern and hobbies, further increasing their time investment on the platforms.

Third, blind conformity is hard to extricate oneself from. The check-in, imitation and ranking mechanism around college students' social circles has intensified the collective pressure of "if you don't spend money, you'll be OUT", which can only lead to blind following and solidify the "social circle" mechanism.

Fourth, diversity and complexity coexist. Some college students relieve their study pressure by playing games and watching short videos in pursuit of entertainment and relaxation. Some, out of social needs, establish connections with others and expand their social circles on the Internet. Some people explore the novel things in the online world to satisfy their curiosity. Meanwhile, different types of online activities are intertwined. A college student may be addicted to online games while also being keen on watching short videos and interacting on social platforms.

Fifth, the contradiction between happiness and emptiness is intertwined. Immediate pleasure coexists with post-event anxiety, creating an emotional paradox of "the more you browse, the more empty you become". Although college students happily "spend" a lot of time on online activities, what follows is the contradiction of deep inner emptiness and weariness. In short, "spending time" may seem like a form of relaxation on the surface, but in reality, it is a counterproductive behavior of mental exhaustion.

3. The core functions of online ideological and political education in colleges and universities

Online ideological and political work is ideological and political work that relies on online dissemination methods. Ideological and political work in universities is an important part of ideological and political work [3]. It mainly refers to the interaction and symbiosis between the high-level supply of mainstream ideological information and the high autonomy needs of netizens in the online information ecosystem. Digital education practices that purposefully, systematically and organizedly promote the all-round improvement of people's ideological, political and moral qualities [4], guide college students to establish correct worldviews, outlooks on life and values, and promote the all-round development of college

students. In simple terms, online ideological and political education in colleges and universities is "a systematic practical activity carried out by colleges and universities based on the online environment, guided by the core socialist values, to shape the values, cultivate morality and develop personality of college students."

The core function of online ideological and political education in colleges and universities lies in guiding college students to firmly hold onto their ideals and beliefs, enabling them to deeply understand and identify with Marxist theory, support the leadership of the Communist Party of China, and unswervingly follow the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Shape the correct values of college students, enabling them to possess good moral qualities and a sense of social responsibility, be able to distinguish right from wrong and good from evil, and adhere to the moral bottom line in a complex social environment. Enhance the comprehensive quality of college students, including ideological and political quality, scientific and cultural quality, physical and mental health quality, etc., promote the all-round development of college students, and make them qualified builders and reliable successors of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

4. The generation logic of the "spending time" phenomenon among college students

The existing research on online ideological and political education in colleges and universities mostly focuses on the impact of "fan circle" culture and online public opinion on online ideological and political education in colleges and universities, but neglects the important role of "time", an implicit variable that accompanies college students all the time. There is also a lack of in-depth exploration of the micro-psychological mechanism of college students' "spending time" and the causal relationship between it and educational failure. The phenomenon of college students spending more time is a "product" jointly brought about by technology, capital and the main body.

4.1. Technical Dimension: Algorithms Create "Time Traps"

Online platforms, especially short-video platforms, form a strong stickiness loop through the combination technology of "dual-column waterfall flow + auto-play + interest tag recalibration". Through the behavioral closed loop of "trigger - behavior - reward - engagement", they continuously strengthen users' participation motivation, making you click again and again, and eventually form an imperceptible dependence [5]. The common scene of "swiping mobile phones until the library closes" at the entrance of university libraries is precisely the result of the algorithm's reconstruction of time perception.

4.2. Capital Dimension: Traffic accelerates colonization

All major online platforms take daily active users as the core of valuation and engage in a fierce "arms race" over user duration. For instance, the financial report of a leading short-video platform at the end of 2024 shows that its main users are under 30 years old, with users aged 18 to 24 accounting for 60.28%. The average age of users is 22.8 years old, and college students account for a high proportion [6]. They have become the key targets of algorithmic "hunting", and the platform adopts methods such as traffic sharing and live-streaming rewards The subjectivity of college students was transformed into commercial data, and eventually the traffic was monetized.

4.3. Subject Dimension: Time poverty and thirst for meaning coexist

Under the multiple pressures of studies, employment, family and social interaction, contemporary college students are constantly seeking inner emotional shelter. The "lying flat" style of online entertainment has become the lowest-cost way to repair their emotions. However, the fragmented and short-lived pleasure cannot truly solve the problem of "spiritual deficiency", thus falling into a vicious cycle of "the more you scroll, the more anxious you become, and the more anxious you scroll". Psychologically, there is an urgent need for "spending time" for comfort, and this is precisely the psychological mechanism behind the phenomenon of "spending time". A senior graduate from the university where I work frankly admitted in an interview: "I also know that I should send out resumes, but watching short videos can temporarily help me forget my employment anxiety. As a result, after watching, I become even more anxious, so anxious that I dare not think about employment." "

It is precisely under the mutual "matching" of technology, capital and the main body that the phenomenon of college students "spending time" has affected the effectiveness of online ideological and political education in colleges and universities.

5. The Impact of College Students' "spending time" on online Ideological and Political Education in Colleges and Universities

The phenomenon of college students' online "spending time" has brought severe challenges to online ideological and political education in colleges and universities in terms of educational objects, educational content and educational methods. In terms of the educational targets, it leads to a deviation in college students' values, weakened cognitive abilities and a decline in social skills. In terms of educational content, it lacks timeliness and appeal, has limited depth and breadth, and is disconnected from the reality of the Internet. In terms of educational methods, the limitations of traditional educational methods have become prominent, the effectiveness of online educational methods needs to be enhanced, and the innovation and integration of educational methods are facing difficulties. It is mainly manifested in

5.1. Value Orientation Shift: Mainstream values are increasingly being "marginalized"

After all, a person's energy and time are limited. When the screens of college students are flooded with algorithm-recommended entertainment content, it greatly reduces the visibility of mainstream values, thereby causing value deviations and behavioral irregularities, hindering the healthy development of college students' moral standards and ideological concepts, and restricting the value-guiding function of online ideological and political education in colleges and universities [7]. When the author conducted a survey on the participation of students in online activities at a certain college, it was found that when college students spend more than three hours a day "spending time", their browsing rate of the content pushed by the college's official Weibo account will drop by nearly 50%. A counselor at a 985 university once wrote in his work log: "Students don't even bother to earn login points on 'Study the Great Power', let alone take the initiative to study theoretical articles."

5.2. Lack of Emotional Resonance: Mainstream educational content seems a bit "unmanageable"

Online ideological and political education in colleges and universities needs to be carried out through new platforms such as live streaming and Bilibili for interactive discussions. However, the "spending time" phenomenon has led to college students being "absent offline and distracted online". Meanwhile, the general entertainment, bullet screen culture and meme culture have habitually interpreted many mainstream ideological issues and values in an entertaining way. By deconstructing rational and rigorous political discourse through "parodies" and "teasing", and using entertainment and revelry to dissolve the seriousness of mainstream ideology [8], the original moral authority, knowledge authority and age authority have lost their social foundation for existence, while data authority has become the new authority [9].

5.3. Lack of behavioral shaping: The saying that one must act upon knowing something thoroughly is increasingly broken

The time that college students originally spent on social practice, professional internships and volunteer services was significantly negatively correlated with the increase in their "spending time", which led to the breakage of the "cognitive-emotion-behavior" chain and prevented the extension of teaching practice. A sophomore student interviewed said, "It's not that I don't know volunteer service is good, but I really don't have time to do it."

6. Paradigm Shift and Path Innovation in Online Ideological and Political Education in Colleges and Universities

6.1. Transform Educational Philosophy: From "Content Indoctrination" to "Time Leadership"

In the digital age, colleges and universities urgently need to establish the educational concept of "time ethics", integrate the

Marxist thought of free and all-round development into the entire process of education, and help college students establish the awareness of "time sovereignty". For instance, the book "Time Management Handbook: How to Live Each Day Efficiently" published by Tsinghua University Press in 2023 offers a systematic solution to the problem of fragmented time in modern people, allowing them to be the masters of their time.

6.2. Reform classroom teaching: Create a "Time Management" golden course

Colleges and universities can organize teachers to develop general education course modules around the content of "Time Management in the Digital Age", and at the same time require students to master tools such as the "Pomodoro Technique" and the "Deep Work Method".

By adopting the "flipped classroom + adversarial algorithm experimental teaching" approach, college students can directly experience how algorithms "steal time", moving from "knowing algorithms" to "controlling algorithms", thereby strengthening their critical awareness. For instance, the author once organized ten students to conduct an experimental teaching experience class on adversarial algorithms. By designing "anti-algorithm tools", the students clearly realized that users of online platforms are not only led by algorithms but can also regain the right to choose information through active intervention. This is crucial for cultivating "rational information users" and even future "responsible content producers", and it is also related to the issue of the ownership of "time initiative".

6.3. Innovation Technology Synergy: Joint Governance and Practical Exploration

Promote the signing of "time reminder and priority of educational content" agreements between provincial educational big data centers and leading online platforms, and achieve a three-level intervention of "30-minute pop-up window - 60-minute forced offline - insertion of ideological and political micro-lessons".

Develop a campus version of the "Time Bank" mini-program, explore the conversion of volunteer services, reading hours, etc. into credits for the second classroom, and create positive incentives.

6.4. Control Regulatory Capital: Clarify the "boundaries" for Industry Capital Access

The economic base determines the superstructure. The economy of Internet celebrities and entertainment capital are the fundamental reasons for the formation of extreme "spending time" phenomena. It is necessary to control and guide the capital entering the online audio-visual industry [10].

Establish a scientific and reasonable supervision system for the use of industry capital to ensure that capital takes into account efficiency, fairness and justice.

6.5. Reconstructing educational scenarios: Building a practical community that integrates virtual and real elements

Integrate the three-dimensional scenarios of "ideological and political cloud Classroom - Metaverse campus - offline community", and replace "sign-in" learning with immersive task-driven approaches. In 2023, the Red Army Long March National Cultural Park, in collaboration with 28 universities, launched the "Cloud Long March" VR project. Students revisited classic battles such as the "Zunyi Conference" and the "Four Crossings of the Chishui River" through virtual reality technology, which was highly popular among college students.

Relying on 5G+XR/VR technology, transform major theme education and publicity into "participatory and co-created" digital curation to enhance emotional engagement.

6.6. Empowering Educational Subjects: Teachers and students work together to build a time alliance

Set up a "Internet Sense" training course at the Teacher Development Center to enhance the platform dialogue skills of counselors and ideological and political course teachers, and attract students to communicate and exchange actively.

Explore the establishment of a "peer time coach" system and train student leaders to use positive psychology

techniques to help their peers overcome "spending time addiction".

7. Conclusions and Prospects

The phenomenon of college students' "spending time" is the product of the mutual game among capital flow, algorithmic technology and the subjectivity of college students. Essentially, it is an ideological war centered on the "initiative of time". The ideological and political education on the Internet in colleges and universities should constantly transcend the traditional thinking mode of "content - channel - audience", and build a new paradigm of "time - scene - subject". That is, colleges and universities should regain the leadership of mainstream value education through time ethics education, achieve good technological governance through algorithmic governance, enhance emotional stickiness through scene reconstruction, and create a "digital community". Ultimately, the mission of fostering virtue and nurturing talent is accomplished within the "Digital Community".

Disclosure statement

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