

An Analysis of the Improvement Paths of College Students' Network Literacy in the New Era

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Abstract: Against the background of the New Era, cyberspace has become an important field for college students' study, life and ideological growth. Improving college students' network literacy is a key measure to fulfill the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education and purify the cyber ecosystem. At present, college students generally face problems such as weak information identification ability, insufficient network moral self-discipline, weak awareness of the rule of law and security, and non-standard online behaviors. The root causes lie in the imperfect cultivation system in colleges and universities, inadequate family guidance, insufficient social supervision and supply, and lack of individual awareness of independent improvement. Based on the core connotation of college students' network literacy and aiming at the prominent existing problems, this paper constructs a four-dimensional linkage improvement path involving universities, families, society and individuals. Through systematic education, collaborative guidance, standardized supervision and independent self-cultivation, it comprehensively makes up for the shortcomings of college students' network literacy and helps young people grow into qualified netizens in the New Era.

Keywords: New era; College students; Network literacy; Improvement paths; Collaborative education

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1. Core connotation of college students' network literacy in the new era

Network literacy is a comprehensive literacy for citizens in the digital age to adapt to the online society and regulate online behaviors^[1]. Combined with the characteristics of the New Era and the positioning of college students, its core connotation can be divided into five interrelated dimensions, which are not only essential abilities for college students to live in cyberspace but also an important part of young people's overall quality^[2].

First, network information literacy. As the core of network literacy, it refers to the ability of college students to efficiently screen, accurately obtain, rationally identify and legally disseminate online information. It enables them to break through algorithmic information cocoons, distinguish false information, one-sided opinions and harmful content, and refuse to believe, spread or follow rumors blindly.

Second, network moral literacy. It requires college students to abide by online public order and good morals, establish a correct outlook on network morality, behave politely in virtual space, respect the legitimate

rights and interests of others, reject immoral behaviors such as cyber violence, malicious abuse, infringement and plagiarism, and stick to the moral bottom line ^[3].

Third, network rule of law literacy. It means being familiar with the “Cybersecurity Law,” “Personal Information Protection Law,” and other relevant laws and regulations, clarifying the legal boundaries of online behaviors, establishing a sense of law-abiding and civilized Internet use, and avoiding any acts that cross the legal red line.

Fourth, network security literacy. It includes the ability to prevent cyber fraud, privacy leakage, cyber attacks and harmful information, master basic network security protection skills, and consciously safeguard personal information security and campus network security.

Fifth, network value literacy. It refers to maintaining political and value sobriety amid diverse online ideologies, consciously resisting wrong ideas such as historical nihilism, money worship and extreme individualism, taking the initiative to spread positive energy, practicing socialist core values, and shouldering the social responsibilities of young netizens.

2. Prominent problems of college students’ network literacy in the new era

2.1. Serious lack of information identification and critical thinking ability

As “digital natives”, college students are proficient in online operations, but in the face of massive fragmented and algorithm-driven information, they generally lack critical thinking and source-checking ability ^[4]. On the one hand, most students passively accept platform-pushed content without verifying authenticity or objectivity. They are easily misled by clickbait, out-of-context remarks and online rumors, and even spread unverified information, becoming accelerators of false information. In various social hot issues and campus public opinion incidents, some college students make biased judgments and take sides based only on one-sided screenshots and subjective comments, ignoring facts and worsening online chaos ^[5]. On the other hand, college students are weak in distinguishing hidden wrong ideologies and bad values. They cannot effectively resist content that distorts history, slanders heroes, or promotes hedonism, which easily leads to value deviation and even being misled by harmful remarks.

2.2. General lack of network moral self-discipline

The virtuality and anonymity of cyberspace weaken the moral restraint of some college students, resulting in obvious contradictions between real behaviors and online words and deeds, with frequent abnormal behaviors ^[6]. Some students regard the Internet as an emotional outlet, wantonly launching personal attacks, malicious ridicule and abuse, and participating in cyber violence and fan conflicts; some blindly follow the trend and spread negative emotions, undermining the harmony of online communication; others are overly addicted to online games, short videos and live streaming, spending far beyond reasonable time online, showing Internet addiction, neglecting studies and real social interactions, seriously harming physical and mental health. In addition, a small number of college students lack awareness of copyright, engaging in immoral acts such as plagiarism, infringing reprints, malicious fake orders, and pirated resource sharing, with a weak sense of responsibility and rules.

2.3. Weak network rule of law and security protection capacity

The popularization of network rule of law education among college students is insufficient. Most students

have not systematically studied relevant laws and regulations, and have a vague understanding of the legal consequences of online rumors, infringement, violence, and privacy leakage, even believing that “online speech is not accountable”. Meanwhile, college students are seriously deficient in network security awareness and have become a high-risk group for cyber risks. In daily Internet use, they randomly fill in personal information, click unfamiliar links, scan unknown QR codes, add strangers and connect to public unencrypted Wi-Fi, easily revealing private data such as phone numbers, home addresses, campus information and bank card numbers, and frequently falling victim to scams such as fake rebates, impersonating customer service, game account fraud and campus loans^[7].

2.4. Structural defects in the network literacy cultivation system

At present, the improvement of college students’ network literacy lacks systematic support, and the joint education mechanism among universities, families and society has not yet taken shape^[8]. At the university level, network literacy education is scattered in ideological and political courses and safety lectures, without independent curriculum systems, professional teachers or special teaching. Teaching content lags behind cyber environmental changes, and forms are dominated by rigid theoretical lectures with low effectiveness. At the family level, parents either indulge college students’ online behaviors or stop them rudely, lacking scientific guidance and effective communication, failing to play the guiding role of family education. At the social level, network platforms fail to fully implement their main responsibilities; supervision over harmful and vulgar content is insufficient; public welfare publicity and science popularization on network literacy for young people are limited in coverage; and a multi-stakeholder collaborative cultivation mechanism has not been truly established^[9].

3. Multi-dimensional improvement paths of college students’ network literacy in the new era

Improving college students’ network literacy is a systematic and long-term project. It is necessary to adhere to problem orientation and build a four-in-one collaborative path: “universities as the main position, families as strong backing, society as a sound environment, individuals as internal drivers”, so as to promote cultivation in an all-round and multi-level manner and effectively solve existing dilemmas^[10].

3.1. Universities consolidate the main position and build a systematic and professional cultivation system

As the core subject of college students’ network literacy education, universities should integrate network literacy into the whole process of fostering virtue through education, break the fragmented education pattern and build an all-round and three-dimensional cultivation model^[11].

First, improve the curriculum system to consolidate the theoretical foundation^[12]. Include network literacy as a compulsory general education course, offer specialized courses such as network information identification, network rule of law practice, network security protection and network civilization, and adopt interactive teaching methods including case studies, scenario simulation, group discussions and practical drills, replacing rigid indoctrination to enhance attractiveness and practicality^[13]. Meanwhile, integrate network literacy into ideological and political courses, professional courses and mental health courses to achieve full-course infiltration.

Second, innovate online ideological and political carriers to broaden education channels. Rely on campus official WeChat accounts, short-video platforms, Xuexi Qiangguo and Yi Ban to create youth-friendly positive content.

Popularize network knowledge, analyze online disorders and promote cyber civilization through short videos, cartoons, live broadcasts and sitcoms. Establish campus network civilization volunteer teams to carry out rumor-refutation, anti-fraud publicity and positive energy communication, enabling students to improve literacy in practice.

Third, strengthen faculty construction to improve education capacity. Regularly conduct special network literacy training for ideological and political teachers, counselors and professional teachers, enhancing their capabilities in network public opinion guidance, information identification, legal and security knowledge, forming a professional team with both theoretical and practical abilities.

Fourth, strengthen campus network management to create a clean environment. Standardize campus network usage, block harmful websites and vulgar information, regularly carry out network security inspections, themed class meetings, debates and knowledge competitions on network literacy, shaping a campus cyber environment that values morality, abides by laws and maintains good conduct.

3.2. Families strengthen guidance and play a warm and regular supporting role

Family is an important environment for college students' growth. Family education irreplaceably influences the formation of values and behavioral norms of young people. Parents should change educational concepts, abandon the one-sided thinking of "valuing scores over literacy", take the initiative to understand the online environment in the New Era and the online behaviors of college students, replace rude control with equal parent-child communication^[14].

On the one hand, strengthen daily communication with children, pay attention to their online dynamics, social interactions and ideological changes, timely detect and correct bad online behaviors, guide children to arrange online time reasonably, balance online life with study and real social interactions, and prevent Internet addiction.

On the other hand, parents should set an example by using the Internet politely and rationally, not spreading rumors or indulging in the Internet, imperceptibly cultivating children's awareness of network self-discipline. Meanwhile, parents should actively learn network security and anti-fraud knowledge, timely remind children to avoid cyber risks, cooperate with universities in network literacy education, and form a joint education force between family and school.

3.3. Society optimizes the environment and builds a standardized and supportive system

Socially, multi-party forces should be gathered to purify the cyber ecosystem, improve supervision mechanisms, strengthen publicity and popularization, and create a favorable external environment for improving college students' network literacy.

First, government departments should strengthen cyber supervision and law enforcement, improve the comprehensive cyber governance system, severely crack down on illegal acts such as online rumors, cyber violence, fraud and vulgar information dissemination, urge network platforms to fulfill their main responsibilities for content review and risk prevention, optimize algorithm recommendation systems, reduce the push of harmful content and break information cocoons.

Second, mainstream media and network platforms should fulfill social responsibilities, increase the supply of positive energy content, launch special columns, public service advertisements and programs on network literacy for young people, popularize knowledge on network rule of law, security and morality, promote the main theme and spread positive energy.

Third, social organizations, communities and enterprises should cooperate to carry out public welfare activities of network literacy entering campuses and communities, improving college students' network

security and information identification abilities through lectures, presentations and practical drills.

Fourth, improve the network public opinion guidance mechanism, timely clarify rumors, ease negative opinions, create a clean and healthy cyberspace for the healthy growth of college students^[15].

3.4. Individuals stimulate internal drive and achieve independent and comprehensive self-improvement

External factors are conditions, while internal factors are fundamental. The core of improving college students' network literacy lies in individual initiative and self-cultivation.

First, establish the awareness of active improvement and consciously learn network knowledge. College students should take the initiative to learn network laws and regulations, information identification skills and security protection knowledge, make up for shortcomings through courses, reading and practice, and overcome passive acceptance and blind conformity.

Second, strengthen network moral self-discipline and standardize personal online behaviors. Always bear in mind that "cyberspace is not outside the law", stick to moral and legal bottom lines, speak politely, express rationally and respect others, firmly resist cyber violence, rumor spreading, infringement and plagiarism, and develop good habits of self-disciplined Internet use.

Third, improve risk prevention capacity and protect personal network security. Enhance privacy protection awareness, do not randomly disclose personal information, carefully click unfamiliar links or download unknown software, actively learn anti-fraud knowledge, seek help in time when encountering cyber risks, and stay away from various online traps.

Fourth, establish correct online values and take the initiative to spread positive energy. Consciously resist bad ideologies and negative cultures, arrange online time reasonably, get rid of Internet addiction, take the Internet as a tool for learning and broadening horizons, actively participate in positive online activities, and strive to be builders and maintainers of network civilization^[16].

4. Conclusion

The New Era endows college students with new missions and puts forward higher requirements for their network literacy. Improving college students' network literacy is a long-term undertaking that cannot be accomplished by a single party alone; it requires concerted and sustained efforts from universities, families, society and individuals.

Universities must take primary responsibility and deepen their main position to build a systematic cultivation system; families should provide warm guidance and strong support to build a protective network; society must strengthen supervision and optimize the environment to provide all-round support; college students should take the initiative to improve themselves and master solid network literacy.

Only through joint efforts can college students distinguish right from wrong, keep bottom lines and take responsibilities in the complex and ever-changing cyberspace, truly use the Internet scientifically, politely and safely, grow into well-rounded young people in the New Era who are capable of shouldering the mission of national rejuvenation, and contribute youthful strength to building a clean cyberspace and advancing the development of a cyber power.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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