"Electronic Pickle": Causes and Strategies of Media Dependence in the New Media Era

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Abstract: In the new media era, "electronic pickle" is a form of media presentation that is meaningful to people in terms of emotions and social interaction. However, it will also cause excessive media dependence, social alienation, and other related issues. From the perspective of media culture, this paper analyzes the causes of the audience's dependence on "electronic pickle" and the coping strategies, to optimize and reconstruct the cognition of this media and standardize normal social life.

Keywords: Electronic pickle; New media era; Media dependence

1. Introduction

In the media era, the media provides a kind of meaning for public life by building the connection between the audience and the outside world, which leads to the accelerating process of human media. However, this process does not always develop in a positive direction. With the further development of media life, its alienation characteristics are gradually emerging. Surfing the Internet, browsing short videos, watching dramas, and other media consumption behaviors have occupied many people's daily lives nowadays. In today's highly developed media, people can be immersed in the media at any time and anywhere, and their dependence on electronic media is becoming stronger and stronger. People are accustomed to devoting a lot of leisure time to the consumption of entertainment culture. The dependence on "electronic pickle" in short leisure time such as eating and commuting has become the consensus of people, especially young people. The "electronic pickle" refers to the videos, novels, and other works that people like to watch while eating, especially variety shows and short videos [1]. Like pickled mustard tuber, which is a seasoning that makes the food feel more appetizing, the "electronic pickle" has become the dining tool of young people, adding flavor to the food and becoming a necessity in the dining of contemporary young people. But in essence, the focus of "electronic pickle" lies in the adaptability of viewing scene and content, which not only emphasizes the sense of the eating scene, which is

highly tied up with the daily life scene but also reflects the individual mentality in the viewing content, showing the individual's high use of leisure time and individual media cultural needs.

On Sina Weibo, not only do the stars use "electronic pickle" as a tool to have interesting interactions with other users, but also many movies, TV series, and variety shows use "electronic pickle" as a publicity gimmick to attract the audience. For example, TikTok is full of short videos recommending "electronic pickles" released by major bloggers, each of which is very popular, and more than 30,000 people have joined the Douban group "Can I taste your electronic pickle?" to explore the content of "electronic pickle" in a short period of one month.

So, how does "electronic pickle" cause a viewing boom, why do people choose to consume "electronic pickle" and what are the drawbacks of "electronic pickle"? Based on these problems, the method of semi-structured interview is used in this paper, 17 young interviewees who have the habit of "electronic pickle" are selected to conduct in-depth interviews. The interview results as shown in **Table 1** are analyzed for the reasons of the popularity of "electronic pickle" and its impact.

Table 1. Interview responses based on categories

Category	Initial concept		Original statement (excerpt)
Emotional value	Social needs	A6	When eating by oneself, the "electronic pickle" is equal to a kind of companionship. For example, sometimes the app will show how many people are watching at the same time. It feels like watching with everyone.
	Self-space remodeling	A10	Throw away some worries about life or internship for a while, as if you had entered a world of your own.
	Independent choice	A13	"Electronic pickles" are what you want to see.
Media dependence	Necessary requirements	A4	"Electronic pickle" is just like food, and you cannot not have it.
	Value of time	A15	I usually save videos and watch them when I eat. If I watch "electronic pickles" at other times, I will feel guilty about wasting time.
Mental consumption	Spiritual occupation	A10	In fact, it is not so easy to find an "electronic pickle" that is suitable for eating. Sometimes when you find a good video and find that the food is cold, it will delay the time to eat.
		A1	Choose "electronic pickles" for 1 hour and finish the meal for 5 minutes.
	Distraction	A12	If you watch "electronic pickles" all the time, sometimes you will choke if you are too devoted.
	Sense of emptiness	A9	In fact, I feel quite empty after watching it, and that kind of happiness will be over after dinner.

2. Causes of dependence on "electronic pickle"

2.1. "Electronic pickle" meets the audience's entertainment demands in the fast-paced society

In the fast-paced modern society, individual free time has greater uncertainty. As young people's working and non-working time boundaries are increasingly blurred, individual free time is further compressed, and the construction of time boundaries is increasingly difficult. Just like the concept of high-speed society put forward by German scholar Hartmut Rosa who believes that in the media society, time has become a scarce resource, and the boundaries between working time and leisure time have been blurred [2]. Therefore, mealtime becomes a scarce leisure time, which is a rare and short self-control time for individuals. "If you watch electronic pickles at other times, you will feel guilty of wasting time" (A15) response shows that watching "electronic

pickles" while eating reduces the guilt of wasting time caused by entertainment. The combination of eating and entertainment has become the first choice to maximize the time utility of young people. At present, the popular "electronic pickle" is usually based on short videos with simple content and intensive humor or classic TV series such as "Legend of Zhen Huan". The fragmentation and popularization of these contents can be perfectly adapted to the dining process, which can make the audience feel relaxed and happy. For example, short videos are convenient and fast, just like a pickled mustard tuber, which can be eaten immediately after opening the bag and can be stopped at any time, while TV series are easy to understand and do not require the audience to have complex thoughts, which can reduce the burden of meals. Therefore, "electronic pickle" can stimulate the audience's nerves through rich and simple content in a short time, help people realize their spiritual needs for relaxation, and invisibly effectively divide social time and individual time.

2.2. Self-space remodeling to provide a good digital world

In modern cities, there may be alienation, group pressure, and other problems in interpersonal communication, which also make some people feel marginalized. To escape too much direct contact and communication between people, young people, as digital users, are more willing to seek emotional value from the virtual world. Hence, "electronic pickle" provides them with a one-way, private, and unlimited emotional outlet. Compared with the shared media space created by radio, film, and television, "electronic pickle" is more private and arbitrary, and its enjoyment subject is often personalized, using mobile phones to see "what you want to see" (A13). During the enjoyment of "electronic pickles", people and devices build a new self-space, in which people establish a relaxed and comfortable environment, further regain self-control, reduce the anxiety from social interaction, and "temporarily throw away some worries in life or internship, as if entering a world of their own" (A10), to a certain extent. They can achieve a spiritual escape from the complex interpersonal relationships and life pressures in the real space, thus realizing the freedom of the spiritual world.

2.3. The accompanying value and social value of "electronic pickle" in the era of living alone

Due to the increasing number of solitary groups, fast-paced lifestyle, and high-intensity social competition in modern society, there are fewer and fewer opportunities for social communication between people, and the social barriers caused by excessive pressure make the interaction between people more and more difficult. Therefore, to alleviate the loneliness and anxiety in real life, people will choose to seek other information to divert their attention. "Electronic pickle" is to make up for the lack of scenes and emotions in eating, and become a compensation for people to alleviate loneliness, emptiness, and emotional value. The significance of the existence of "electronic pickle" is not what its content itself brings, but to provide people with emotional support and companionship in the process of eating, to meet people's social needs, and to alleviate the loneliness and emptiness caused when eating alone.

At the same time, compared with the previous television media, the interactive screen and function of "electronic pickle" can create a common communication space of virtual presence, to satisfy their emotional needs and build a temporary relationship with strangers far apart. "Electronic pickle" allows people to have a congenial and effective dialogue with strangers with the same interests via comments. Through the discussion and sharing of common interest videos, people can get a shared communication experience and establish a link to each other's emotions to achieve resonance.

3. The negative impact of over-reliance on "electronic pickle"

According to McLuhan, "We shape the tools, and the tools in turn shape us" [2]. With the popularity of "electronic pickles", more and more people have begun to notice its negative effects. For example, it is a bad eating habit to watch videos while eating, which is harmful to people's health. "If you watch electronic pickle all the time, sometimes you will choke if you are too devoted" (A12) respondent doubt that the content of "electronic pickle" can provide valuable information and worry that "electronic pickle" will affect real interpersonal communication and other issues, as follows.

3.1. Addiction to "electronic pickle"

The theory of media dependence was first put forward by DeFleur and Paul Kiloch. Its core idea is that the media is the intermediary system between the audience and society, and the audience increasingly relies on the media to meet their needs, which means that the use of media has become a habit [3]. In the 1960s, with the rapid popularization of color television in the United States, people spent more and more time on television, and even some people were too attached to the video transmission of television media, so Japanese scholar Hayashi Yujiro put forward the concept of "TV people" [4]. "TV people" grew up in the birth and popularization of TV media, and their socialization process was greatly influenced by TV media, which is a typical example of traditional media dependence. The theory of "TV people" is also applicable to the theoretical analysis of the phenomenon of media dependence in the new media era. With the development of communication technology, traditional media has been impacted by new media, "TV people" are being replaced by "network people" and "mobile phone people" [4].

In addition, with the development of media technology, the requirements for the audience in the use of media are getting lower and lower. Today's media is a combination of visual, auditory, and tactile, the audience no longer needs a higher cultural level, as long as they have the basic media tools, they can easily use the media. The people can open the application to directly access the content, which makes the audience's media habits solidified, to a certain extent, for the needs of the audience. This is also one of the conditions that gradually cause the audience's dependence on the media.

People rely on technology to experience and perceive the world, which has become a trend of media development. As a popular media phenomenon, "electronic pickle" has been regarded as a part of the meal on the table, "Electronic pickle is the same as the meal, one cannot go without it" (A7) indicates that the dependence on "electronic pickle" has gradually become a natural subconscious or even mechanized behavior, and individuals are gradually lost in the consumption of "electronic pickle", eventually leading to media dependency.

3.2. Virtual space further increases loneliness

Japanese communication scholar Nakano Mu uses the image of "container man" to describe the media dependence of modern people. He believes that the inner world of modern Japanese, who grew up in a television-dominated media environment, is like a "can-shaped container" [5]. To get rid of loneliness, people also want to have contact with the outside world, but this contact is only a collision of the outer wall of the container, and cannot go deep into each other's interior, because people do not want each other to go deep into their inner world, so keeping a certain distance has become the best choice for interpersonal relationships. Because of the reduction of the cost of emotional participation, the virtual reality of the network also makes people choose this way of communication, so the intensity of emotional conflict that people can experience will be weakened, thus reducing the cost of communication with people in reality and the pressure of face-to-face communication. When we are used to communicating in this way, our ability to express ourselves will be

weakened, and our ability to resist pressure will also be weakened. Face-to-face communication will bring us greater pressure, thus weakening our ability to communicate in reality, further resulting in evasive behavior, and even self-isolation and other personality alienation problems [6].

On the surface, "electronic pickle" captures the favor of young people with interesting, convenient, interactive, and other characteristics. People have full autonomy and absolute control over "electronic pickle", and can choose the type of video and content to get spiritual satisfaction from it and enter the virtual life. But at the same time, people also invisibly give emotional dominance to "electronic pickle" and lose the freedom to control emotions. "Electronic pickle" sets up a crisscross social network, where people are eager to alleviate the anxiety of reality by seeking companionship. The audience relies on the virtual space of "electronic pickle" to contact others through the comments, but it does not truly relieve people's inner loneliness, and even gradually strengthens this feeling. Sociologist Benjamin stated "We have entered an era in which experience is very rich, but the experience is also very poor" [7]. So, short-term and symbolic communication cannot really convey complex emotions, nor can it reach people's deepest emotional needs. Once people stop consuming "electronic pickle", loneliness will follow. In other words, people want to use "electronic pickles" to get rid of the loneliness of eating alone, but the result is more or less a kind of being "alone together" [8]. This makes people fall into a vicious circle of inner loneliness, turning to the Internet for comfort, feeling more lonely, and continuing to surf the Internet for comfort.

3.3. The good and bad contents are intermingled, causing the deterioration of thinking ability

From the perspective of McLuhan, "The media makes people develop a linear, causal, and rational way of thinking, but it makes people unable to understand and think in a three-dimensional and complex way" [2]. At present, the Internet has thoroughly inserted itself into our lives, and the powerful amount of information in the media has greatly weakened the difficulty of analyzing information, making the audience's judgment and thinking greatly weakened. Similarly, "electronic pickle" has no restrictions on the audience's knowledge level, and the information content is not high, so the audience will feel relaxed and happy when choosing to watch, and then people are keener to watch superficial, entertaining "electronic pickle", thus losing the ability to think independently and deeply. At the same time, in the race against time, it seems that people have gained more mastery of technology, but these "electronic pickles" which are adjusted fast or slow at will do not have thought-provoking content to be understood, so many people will refer to them as "tasteless to eat, but it is a pity to throw them away."

4. Standardizing and guiding the phenomenon of "electronic pickle"

Given the negative impact of "electronic pickle", reasonable guidance and joint optimization of the media environment of "electronic pickle" have become a common obligation and responsibility.

4.1. Properly screening "electronic pickle" content

"Electronic pickle" has become a new trend in the contemporary era, which cannot be separated from the promotion of the media. The video production of major video platforms continuously outputs "electronic pickle", and these massive video resources provide consumers with a wealth of choices. Although the number is huge, due to the lowering of the production and publishing threshold, the quality of some network videos is low, and the content is vulgar and inappropriate. Therefore, the major platforms should take more responsibility, abide by their industry self-discipline, create a clear network consumption environment, and form a sound

content release screening process.

4.2. Optimizing the content creation and production of "electronic pickle"

Despite the massive output of video platforms every year, there are only a handful of works that can really catch the audience's eyes and are worth recalling repeatedly. Therefore, the main content of "electronic pickle" is still classic TV series such as "Legend of Zhen Huan" and "My Own Swordsman." Most of these works are eye-catching because of their excellent production, solid acting skills, and perfect plots. So, if video producers want to attract more audiences to "electronic pickle", the creators should first create dramas tailored for users based on accurate user portraits, adopt an intensive cultivation mode of operation, turn "electronic pickle" into "electronic delicacies", to achieve better market effect while satisfying users.

4.3. Improve the audience's own media literacy

The opening of network resources has opened up a new way for people to understand the world. If "electronic pickle" can make food more delicious without affecting the health and life of the audience, then there is no need to criticize it excessively and people can use it reasonably. However, if people rely too much on "electronic pickle" and develop bad dining habits, affecting normal life and interpersonal communication, it will make "electronic pickle" lose its original meaning of existence. Therefore, consumers should improve their media literacy, make clear their motivation when using "electronic pickle", avoid the excessive pursuit of entertainment needs, improve their ability to identify the quality of "electronic pickle", choose suitable content, and learn to control themselves to avoid media dependence caused by excessive emotional input.

5. Conclusion

"Electronic pickle" is the result of a high degree of adaptation between the new media era and the demands of dining and entertainment. Its prosperity lies in its function and concept to meet the selective contact of the audience, its content is relaxed and interesting, and the rich audio-visual effect creates a happy and relaxing atmosphere when people eat, hence it becomes the "seasoning" for the people of this era. At the same time, it provides opportunities for companionship and interaction, which can alleviate the loneliness of people when they are eating alone, and is a successful practice to meet the spiritual needs of the audience.

However, when more and more people use mobile phones to escape from reality even if they are eating face to face, which leads to prolonged meal time and difficulty in concentrating on thinking and attention to work, forming a new spiritual occupation relationship that needs to arouse enough vigilance and reflection. Given this phenomenon of over-reliance on "electronic pickle", people should realize that the media is only a tool created by human beings, not part of the human mind. As an instrumental embodiment of media technology, "electronic pickle" is still controlled by human beings. Therefore, people still need to hold an objective and comprehensive attitude towards "electronic pickle", based on satisfying personal leisure and entertainment, but also to prevent its excessive consumption of personal time and energy, learn to self-control, get rid of excessive dependence and ineffective intake, and maintain their insight and judgment of reality. Therefore, when people are in the face of changes brought about by any wave of technology, not only the "electronic pickle", people should consider their personal characteristics, pay attention to their promotion and growth, and fully determine the dominant position of individuals, to gradually reduce the control of media technology over people. In the era of social media, people should not lose themselves in the technology when making it widely available [9].

Funding

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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