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Irrational Reward Behavior of Rural Left-behind Children from the Perspective of Social Control

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Abstract. Economic development and urban changes have made rural society ' vacuum ', and a large number of young and middle-aged migrant workers have made the problem of left-behind children increasingly serious. The absence of long-term guardianship and the inability of inter-generational upbringing have led to the lack of restraint in the use of the Internet by left-behind children, resulting in deviant behavior. Most of the research on the problem of left-behind children focuses on their psychological state, prosocial behavior and other issues. This study starts from the specific phenomenon of irrational reward, and uses the perspective of social control to explore the formation mechanism of irrational reward behavior of rural left-behind children, promote the research and practice of irrational reward phenomenon of left-behind children, improve the efficiency and level of Internet governance, let them really benefit from the development opportunities brought by digital technology. By using the methods of virtual ethnography and semi-structured interviews, this paper finds that long-term emotional indifference makes left-behind children addicted to the network and seek emotional attachment and emotional compensation from live webcasts. Left-behind children have a stable relationship with network anchors through large rewards, and gain emotional comfort, social identity and self-worth.

Keywords: Social control, left-behind children, live broadcast reward, internet addiction

1. Introduction

With the economic development and urban changes, a large number of rural young and middle-aged people work in cities, resulting in the phenomenon of 'hollowing out' in rural areas, resulting in a large number of children staying in villages and becoming 'left-behind children.' With the popularity of the Internet in rural society, left-behind children, as the 'aborigines' of the Internet in the new era, will learn online skills to feel the online world ; conversely, due to 'left-behind', most left-behind children live inter-generationally, live daily with elderly people with low media literacy, and experience the resistance of rural society to new technologies when they go to the countryside in the 'countryside' of their place of residence, showing unsafe network attachment [1]. Due to the long-term lack of emotion and guardianship, a large number of left-behind children seek the sense of identity and companionship in the virtual world through online rewards to make up for the emotional gap in real life.

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At present, the research on the Internet addiction of left-behind children is mostly carried out from the perspectives of 'mental health', 'intelligent device control', 'prosocial behavior'. The research system is perfect but not detailed, and there is no specific network problem for left-behind children. The research on adolescents 'irrational reward behavior is mostly carried out from the perspective of' emotional involvement' and 'identity compensation', or the network governance method for 'adolescents' reward behavior'. The research results are less, and the research on the formation mechanism of adolescents' irrational reward behavior is not systematic and in-depth. This study intends to combine the current chaos of left-behind children's live broadcast reward, use the research methods of virtual ethnography and semi-structured interviews, and conduct a systematic study of this behavior by constructing a social control perspective. To a certain extent, it provides new theoretical support for the formation mechanism of left-behind children's reward behavior. The purpose of this study is to promote the research and practice of left-behind children's irrational reward and Internet addiction, improve the efficiency and level of Internet governance, and build a digital environment to promote the healthy growth of left-behind children, so that left-behind children can truly benefit from the development opportunities brought by digital technology.

2. Literature review

2.1. The definition of the concept of left-behind children and irrational reward behavior

Left-behind children refer to minors whose parents or one of them go out to work and are taken care of by grandparents or other relatives [2]. Due to the long absence of parents in daily life and the imbalance of intergenerational communication, left-behind children face the dual dilemma of psychology and behavior in the process of growth.The emotional alienation from parents makes left-behind children lack emotional support in daily life [3]. Alternatively, the weakening of the authority of intergenerational upbringing leads to the lack of effective constraints on the Internet use behavior of left-behind children, which is easy to form short video addiction, which in turn leads to worse Internet use habits [4].

With the development of webcast technology, 'reward', as one of the important ways of participation in webcast, reconstructs the group interaction mode [5]. The irrational reward behavior refers to the behavior that consumers are driven by irrational factors in the interaction of live webcasts, violate the real consumption beyond a reasonable limit, and have a negative impact on themselves, families and intention and objective economic ability, carry out platform gifts or online consumption society. Due to emotional neglect in real life, left-behind children seek emotional comfort through live broadcasts.The symbols such as 'Carnival' and 'Porsche' set up on the network platform refer to gifts, becoming a symbol of wealth in a specific sense, and left-behind children get different ways of appearing in the live broadcast room by giving different gifts and different fan levels, which greatly satisfies the left-behind children's desire for attention and satisfaction with high consumption [5]. Furthermore, the value of 'gift' ranges from several yuan to several hundred yuan and this low-cost interactive way allows left-behind children to have emotional links with their favorite anchors, which satisfies the emotional loss and emotional appeal of left-behind children in daily life. Due to the lack of control over the economic behavior of left-behind children in intergenerational upbringing, the reward behavior of left-behind children is out of control, which in turn brings economic crisis to the whole family.

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2.2. The connotation and characteristics of social control theory

The concept of 'social control' was first proposed by Ross in 1896, and after Hirsch's efforts, a 'social control theory' was formed to analyze deviant behavior [6]. Social control theory is widely used in the field of crime. Its basic premise is that crime and deviant behavior are attractive and natural tendencies of human beings, and social bond is an important factor in suppressing criminal behavior [7]. Hirsch 's social control theory has shifted from the one-way emphasis of social control to the two-way emphasis of social control and self-control [8]. He believes that social control theory is mainly composed of four concepts, namely attachment, engagement, participation and belief [9]. At the same time, self-control begins early in life, and the strength of social connection depends on the strength of self-control [10]. When left-behind children are in a state of weak self-control, their connection with society will be weakened or even broken, resulting in deviant behavior.

In the field of sociology, the implementation, object and overall social control system of social control are stipulated. Social control is carried out by a few agents, and the control object is individual deviant behavior and the social control system is constantly changing [11].

Generally speaking, whether in the field of crime or sociology, there is a consensus in social control theory: the control object is deviant behavior, which emphasizes the connection between individual and society. When social control is weakened, it will inevitably affect the connection between individual and society, thus triggering a crisis.

3. Research methods

3.1. Virtual ethnography

In the process of looking for the research object, the survey found that this part of the group communicates through the network platform, and the content of the discussion mainly includes 'favorite anchor', 'reward amount', 'PK match between anchors'. Therefore, this study chose the social media with more left-behind children's reward behavior-quick-hands to conduct virtual ethnography research.

3.2. Semi-structured interviews

In this study, 15 research samples were determined by judgment sampling. As shown in Table 1, the respondents were left-behind children with large-scale reward experience or adolescents with left-behind experience. All the respondents in this study volunteered to participate and obtained the consent of their parents. At the beginning of each interview, the participants knew the research content and purpose, and agreed to record the interview content and transcribe the recording. The interview contents cited in this paper are anonymous display.

According to the order of interview time, the interviewees are numbered A1-A15.According to the research content, this paper sets up the interview outline from the four dimensions of background information, media use habits, and social control theory, and deeply understands the reasons for this part of the teenagers ' reward and the family growth environment. During the interview, according to the time arrangement of the interviewees, this study conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews online and offline within one week. After the interview, this study recorded the interview data and then classified them. Through comparative analysis, the common characteristics and differences of the cases were summarized.

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Table 1. Basic information of respondents

No.	Gender	Age	Reward amount	State of life
A1	Male	15	More than 100 yuan	Left-behind status
A2	Female	16	More than 1000 yuan	Have left-behind experience, now living with parents
A3	Female	13	More than 100 yuan	Left-behind status
A4	Male	11	More than 100 yuan	Left-behind status
A5	Female	12	More than 1000 yuan	Left-behind status
No.	Gender	Age	Reward amount	State of life
A6	Male	15	More than 100 yuan	Have left-behind experience, now living with parents
A7	Female	14	More than 1000 yuan	Left-behind status
A8	Female	10	More than 100 yuan	Left-behind status
A9	Male	15	More than 1000 yuan	Left-behind status
A10	Female	13	More than 100 yuan	Left-behind status
A12	Female	13	More than 1000 yuan	Left-behind status
A12	Female	12	More than 100 yuan	Left-behind status
A13	Male	16	More than 1000 yuan	Have left-behind experience, now living with parents
A14	Female	17	More than 100 yuan	Have left-behind experience, now living with parents
A15	Male	17	More than 1000 yuan	Have left-behind experience, now living with parents

4. The living conditions of left-behind children under the weakening of social control

4.1. Attachment weakening

As a product of 'split family', the psychological and educational problems of left-behind children have been widely concerned [12].

Due to the long-term separation of left-behind children from their parents, the emotional bond is alienated, and the daily communication tends to be formalized and superficial. Parents cannot understand the children's psychological activities and psychological state. In the long run, the frequency and quality of communication between the two sides decline, which leads to the weakening of the attachment of left-behind children to their parents. 'Mom and dad they come back on New Year 's Day, mainly talk about the results, nothing else to talk about, do not know what to talk with them, I said they do not understand, there is a generation gap' (A2, 22 October 2025). The disconnection between parents and children's communication has greatly affected the emotional communication between the two sides. In addition, the separation of parent-child ' time-space 'caused by left-behind [13] has led to the further weakening of parent-child relationship. The long-term 'absence' of parents weakens the functions of family education, supervision, guidance, emotional satisfaction, affects the normal socialization process of children, and causes the behavior anomie of left-behind children.

4.2. The decline of real participation

The long absence of parents and the communication disorder of intergenerational upbringing lead to left-behind children facing a higher cumulative risk of family than other adolescents [14]. I-PACE model of Internet addiction research believes that Internet addiction is related to individual subjective emotions. The individual's personality traits will be affected by the environment, so that

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individuals have different subjective perceptions of the environment, and then produce different emotions, leading to Internet addiction [15].

Parents' emotional neglect and the alienation of real peer relationships aggravate the cumulative risk of left-behind children's families, making them feel insecure, thus prompting them to escape from reality through the Internet.' Real life is too quiet, or online lively, anyway live is also quite a long time, I brush the gifts, but also on the wheat chat. '(A4, 23 October 2025). Left-behind children are more likely to have negative emotions such as loneliness, depression and anxiety due to their long-term separation from their parents [16]. The long-term accumulation of negative emotions aggravates the psychological burden of left-behind children, and the network becomes the best outlet for negative emotions. The huge difference between reality and network makes left-behind children no longer willing to contact the real world and have resistance to interpersonal communication in reality. Due to the lack of supervision, the phenomenon of mobile phone addiction of left-behind children is becoming more and more serious, and online consumption is gradually losing its rationality.

4.3. The impact of family authority

Most of the left-behind children are inter-generational, which leads to the digital divide of inter-generational guardianship and the problem of weak supervision. Most of the rural elderly have a shallow understanding of the Internet, and cannot distinguish whether children's mobile phone use is out of order; conversely, the educational experience of inter-generational doting and left-behind children makes the elderly trust their children's daily behavior too much, which leads to the fact that the anomie behavior of left-behind children has not been clearly stopped.

Although the hedonism of the timely satisfaction of the live webcast runs counter to the traditional thrift, it is of great attraction to the left-behind children who have not established a good consumption concept. 'I am glad they can not buy a lot of money. Besides, they do not understand anything and can not control me.' (A1, October 22, 2025) There is a fierce conflict between the concept of ' money doctrine' and the concept of 'conservative consumption' in the webcast, and the inability of grandparents to educate makes the anomie behavior of left-behind children intensified.

5. Psychological motivation of alternative satisfaction of left-behind children's live reward

5.1. Emotional attachment brought by webcasting

The long-term emotional neglect of parents has a positive impact on the Internet addiction of left-behind children. As the most direct interactive way in the Internet media, webcast has undoubtedly become the best means for left-behind children to make up for their emotional loss. They enhance their connection with the outside world by means of likes, comments, and brushes, and have a stable relationship with their favorite anchors.

For left-behind children, anchors are more like network friends, and various types of anchors meet the different emotional needs of left-behind children. 'When I watched the live broadcast that day, I was in a bad mood. The anchor spoke very softly, and I suddenly had that closeness to this anchor, so I brushed gifts for him.' (A5, October 24, 2025) The network anchor brings emotional support to the left-behind children, so that they feel comforted when they are depressed, and give them the emotional value they need. They will consume for them, even have a sense of attachment to the anchor, and feel that they have found 'friends'. The best way to maintain a long-term

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relationship with ' friends ' is to constantly brush gifts and attract the attention of anchors, so as to reap special ' services '.

5.2. Network input to give emotional compensation

Most left-behind children will have a sense of inferiority and insecurity because of their left-behind experience.They feel that their family background, economic income are not comparable to their peers ; more importantly, the long absence of parents leads to the lack of confidence in the interaction between left-behind children and their peers, resulting in withdrawal. However, the common psychological states of ' love face ', ' strong self-esteem ' and ' eager to get attention ' in the youth group also exist in the left-behind children group. 'I think it should be more face, for example, thank someone to send a gift or something, and can show off in front of others.' (A6, October 24, 2025) The interweaving of the two states makes them have a strong sense of separation in the real social interaction, and the webcast just satisfies the two emotions of the left-behind children.

The symbolization of gifts on the live broadcast platform blurs its actual value. Gifts with high prices may even have special appearances to attract onlookers, which greatly satisfies the vanity of left-behind children. They think they have received great attention. 'The names of those gifts are particularly nice. I most often fill is the rocket, the castle, although only a few hundred, it sounds particularly expensive.' (A7, October 25, 2025) The webcast also blurs the wealth gap between the audience, and the amount of reward has become the standard to measure the economic level. The sense of achievement and pride gained by left-behind children through reward behavior has prompted them to gradually expand the amount of reward until it is out of control.

5.3. Virtual participation leads to alienation from the real world

The high interactivity of webcast is an important factor to occupy the leisure time of left-behind children. Common live broadcast means such as the script fabricated by the anchor and the communication skills with the audience are extremely attractive to left-behind children. The live webcast has created a virtual and lively world for left-behind children. They actively drive the audience to interact, guide the audience to participate, and let the left-behind children have the illusion of ' community '.For example, some anchors will actively brag about the strength and consumption ability of their own fans, stimulate consumption, and then moved to tears so that everyone can reduce their investment next time.' Then I can not watch the anchor lose ah, we are not worse than the opposite (fans), and PK match lost there will be punishment, I am not bad this, the anchor won us more face ah.' (A8, October 26, 2025) Left-behind children with a weak degree of socialization are easily incited by anchors, thus impulsive consumption, followed by continuous attention and immersion, and alienation from the real world.

Long-term virtual participation will make left-behind children continue to be out of touch with the real world. When the live broadcast is lively and the reality is quiet, they are naturally reluctant to return to real life. They think that the network can meet all emotional needs and are more willing to pay for the emotional value that is satisfied.

5.4. Network consumerism reshapes values

In the webcast space, emotion and status are quantified by money. The stronger the audience's consumption ability is, the more it can attract the attention of the anchor and the more it can be reflected in the status of the live broadcast room. 'Of course, the more money you spend, the more

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face you have. How to prove your love for the anchor without spending money. The anchor will be particularly excited to thank you that moment feels like a lot of face.' (A9, October 26, 2025) Left-behind children obtain emotional rewards that are difficult to obtain in real life through a large number of rewards, such as the satisfaction of vanity, the mastery of discourse power and the establishment of self-esteem.

In the view of left-behind children, these rewards are not a temporary impulse consumption, which is their emotional expression, but also a way to maintain ' friends ' and defend honor. It can be seen that the consumerism of webcasting has gradually been internalized by them as an important concept to explain the rationality of behavior. Through continuous large-scale rewards, left-behind children have built an ideal identity for themselves in the virtual world. 'Money equals everything ' can be explained and understood in their eyes.

Overall, as shown in Figure 1, in the context of long-term separation from parents, live broadcast rewards meet the self-esteem and vanity of left-behind children and adolescents ;alternatively, left-behind children build a long-term and stable relationship with the anchor through continuous high rewards, and build their own social network in the live broadcast room through ' famous on the list '.Live webcast further weakens the connection between left-behind children and real space, further weakens social control, and thus falls into a structural cycle.

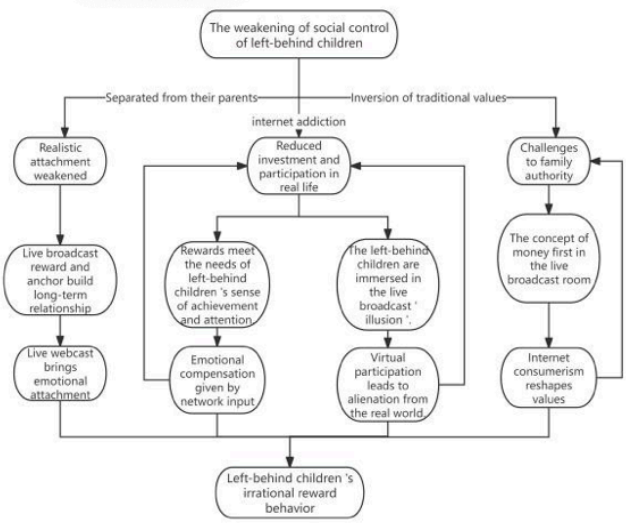


Figure 1. The formation mechanism of irrational reward behavior of left-behind children

6. Conclusion

This study takes the irrational appreciation behavior of left-behind children as an example and through their language and narration, it examines the real living conditions of left-behind children in the 'vacuum' state of rural society, and reveals the structural dilemma of the psychological state and the space in which the reality of left-behind children is located : in the context of weakened social control, the 'vacuum' environment of left-behind children and the emotional alienation in daily life lead to left-behind children 's emotional alternative satisfaction through live broadcast reward, while the immersion network makes them alienated from real life, thus falling into a vicious circle.

This paper expands the empirical understanding of the perspective of social control to a certain extent, and provides a richer perspective to understand the emotional needs of left-behind children. In addition, this paper hopes to provide some feasible action strategies for reference. At the family level, migrant parents improve the quality of communication with their children and pay attention to

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the real emotional needs of their children. At the school level, schools should actively cultivate children 's network literacy, so as not to be addicted, addicted and impulsive in the use of the network, so that the network can play an active role in daily use ; at the platform and policy level, the platform should actively promote mechanisms such as juvenile anti-addiction and juvenile identification to curb children 's irrational online behavior from the source ; the government should also strengthen network supervision, build a good network use environment for minors, and build a healthy network growth space.

There are also some shortcomings in this study. First of all, in the sampling method, this paper adopts the target sampling method. In the sampling process, it does not take into account the different effects of different anchor types on left-behind children, but only selects the most popular type of live broadcast in the current group of left-behind children. Secondly, the research model of this study is less, and more samples can be collected in the future, or the universality of the research conclusions can be improved by quantitative methods.

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