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MBTI: Scientific Reliability, Performance Anxiety, and the Risks of Personality Labeling

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Abstract. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is often used by young people on social media for self-evaluation and classification of personality. However, this practice raises two main issues regarding the scientific validity of MBTI and the possible psychological and social consequences of depending on definite personality names. By examining the theoretical basis of MBTI and its stability in various environments, this study investigates the adverse effects of applying MBTI labels to young people. It shows that these labels may cause social anxiety, limit behavioral flexibility and promote one-sided attitudes. From the viewpoints of clinical psychology, linguistics and social cognition, MBTI can highlight certain stable personality features, for example, an inclination towards being alone and particular speaking habits. Nevertheless, it is suggested that the importance given to MBTI categories might result in unintended outcomes. Those who pay too much attention to the labels may develop a rigid view of themselves, becoming more reserved and anxious when faced with external assessments. Furthermore, these quick judgments lead people to have one-sided opinions about others and avoid those who do not fit into their types, thereby narrowing their social network. In summary, this paper believes that MBTI should be used merely as a rough guide rather than a precise science. Two practical recommendations are put forward to reduce the disadvantages of excessive categorization: enhancing the ability to doubt the online information and increasing face-to-face interactions in daily life. These steps may help to decrease the social anxiety resulting from a serious attitude towards personality tests.

Keywords: Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), Personality Labeling, Social Anxiety, Social Media, Stereotyping

1. Introduction

In recent years, MBTI has turned into a widespread popular trend on the Internet. It is no longer only a simple personality test, but has stepped into many parts of daily life. In ordinary chats, people often use MBTI types to describe themselves and their friends. Many companies also take MBTI results as a small reference during job recruitment. For most young Internet users of Generation Z define their personal identities based on the 16 personality types labeling is becoming more and more common online.

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Nowadays, more and more people begin to think about two key questions. First, whether the MBTI system is scientifically reliable. Second, what negative results will be caused by its overuse. Some people hold the opinion that MBTI only classifies people' s outside behaviors, and it cannot show people' s real inner personalities. Others worry that fixed personality labels may make people form performative personalities and raise social anxiety. If users cannot confirm its reliability and learn about its hidden harms, the wide use of MBTI in interpersonal communication and social life should be limited properly.

This paper will study the reliability of the basic MBTI system, analyze its bad effects on social communication, and mainly talk about the damage from online personality labeling. In the end, this paper will put forward practical suggestions to help people build a reasonable attitude towards MBTI.

2. Reliability

The MBTI is intended not only to describe observable behavioral tendencies but also to reflect differences in thinking styles, energy orientation, and social behaviors. By dividing individuals' self-reported preferences into several dimensions, the MBTI aims to describe relatively stable patterns that may underlie their observable behavior, so it can evaluate people's inner personality nature instead of only describing outer behavior. A study found a clear link between social phobia and introversion that people with social phobia are much more likely to score as introverts compared to the general population [1]. However, that does not mean being an introvert means someone has social phobia. The MBTI, which comes out of Jung's theory of psychological types, is designed to measure inborn preferences, not how well someone function in social settings. They're two very different things. Although introverted people tend to recharge through quiet contemplation, that does not preclude them from interacting smoothly with others when the situation calls for it. This correlation between introversion and social anxiety probably is probably more about internal mental habits. For instance, the way people make sense of their surroundings and manage their feelings, not with how they actually behave around others. Therefore, the MBTI scale seems to be picking up on thought patterns and emotional tendencies, not on whether someone is socially skilled or not.

However, with the rapid development of the internet and social media, researchers need to verify its credibility in the context of online social engagement. Study shows that MBTI traits can be predicted well from text data, which proves that MBTI types are valid in real life and that the lexical hypothesis is reasonable [2, 3]. The lexical hypothesis holds that the diverse ways people differ from one another in personality will inevitably show up in the words they use and how they express themselves from day to day [2]. However, the prediction based on text is not entirely reliable, because the online language only reflects a part of a person's entire personality [4]. Although the written language provides certain hints about the personality traits, digital writings cannot express the complexity and delicacy of a person's inner feelings adequately.

In addition to the shortcomings in text-based prediction, researchers have also mentioned the structural defects in the MBTI scale [5]. A systematic study shows that when the same test-takers take the test again, they usually obtain different results of the four-letter types, especially those with scores near the boundary of two dimensions [5]. The inconsistency indicates that the binary classification of types should be used with care, though some inner preferences can still be recognized by the instrument [5]. Furthermore, MBTI can correctly predict how people deal with social information. It has been discovered that the MBTI accounts for a larger variation in attributional adjustment than the Big Five theory, which suggests that it may provide some additional information about the processing of social information [6]. Taken together, the findings

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from clinical, linguistic, and social-information-processing contexts suggest that MBTI categories may correspond to several internal preferences, although such associations should not be interpreted as a complete assessment of personality. It also reflects their hidden thinking patterns, energy styles and social preferences, allowing it to evaluate people's inner personality rather than only their outer actions.

3. Performance anxiety, and the risks of personality labeling

Using MBTI labels to define oneself might actually trigger or worsen Social anxiety is frequently encountered among college students who sometimes use inappropriate words. their personality as something set in stone. This leads them to constantly check whether their actions match up with the label, and if they do not, it can make them feel uneasy or self-conscious. This fixed thinking makes them feel worried, nervous, and self-conscious in daily social situations. Some investigations show that the MBTI labels affect both the individuals' cognition and the way they present themselves. About 70% of the respondents describe their daily activities through their type, while 45% hide their type due to dissatisfaction or embarrassment [7]. The Internet worsens this problem. When people post their four-letter MBTI codes on their accounts, others form opinions based on stereotypes before any real communication occurs [8]. Moreover, the personality-test labels can cause the Barnum effect for teenagers [8]. If adolescents do not carefully analyze the general and vague information given by the MBTI feedback, they may form definite views of themselves which may result in unnecessary mental stress [9]. Although proper use of personality tests can help people know themselves better, over-reliance on these labels may cause confusion in their self-awareness and even lead to anxiety [9]. This pressure makes them stick to a certain idea and prevents them from expressing their true characters. Those who firmly support a particular MBTI type must act according to the type, being afraid of criticism if their behaviors do not match the suggestion of the label. They may suppress their true feelings to conform to the stereotype, thus increasing their mental load. In social situations, they are unwilling to behave differently from their supposed personality type. For instance, introverts may avoid speaking in public since they think that introverts are naturally quiet and unwilling to communicate. These continuous doubts and fears of being evaluated bring unnecessary tension and anxiety. Therefore, the MBTI labels restrict people's behavior, enhance social anxieties and prevent them from establishing harmonious and natural relationships with others [9]. The MBTI also forms negative stereotypes and social prejudices by classifying people into types only, which does not allow a thorough understanding of others and themselves [9]. MBTI is a personality test which is now widely accepted by the young. However, some students evaluate others based on their four-letter type rather than their true personality, life experiences or individual differences [10]. For instance, they believe that all INFPs are very emotional, all INTPs are cold and all ESFJs are strict. Due to the frequent occurrence of simple explanations on the Internet, some people regard them as common and trustworthy ways to know personalities. Short videos and jokes simplify the complex theories into interesting information. Thus, many young people express their views on others through Internet jokes. These one-sided concepts lead to mental barriers and stop people from considering others' opinions and ignore the significant individual differences within one MBTI type. Consequently, the young people seldom make friends with those who have different types. This selective choice of friends might limit the range of their peer network and reduce the chance of communication with people thought to have different personality types. This one-sided attitude hinders people from having detailed discussions and truly getting to know each other. In the end, MBTI stereotypes result in discrimination, reduce openness and spoil healthy social relationships. In summary, improper use of MBTI labels has two

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effects on the young: it may restrict their behavior by encouraging strict self-expectations and may lower social openness by encouraging simple assessments of others. For example, it increases social anxiety by making people pay too much attention to fixed personality types and be worried about others' judgment, and also builds unfair stereotypes and social biases which prevent people from forming sincere friendships with individuals of different types.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the MBTI does hold some theoretical value in personality research. However, its growing popularity among young people has also brought up a number of less obvious psychological and social issues that are worth looking into more closely. The MBTI was originally To evaluate the consistent traits of personality such as thinking tendencies, energy orientation and preferences relate to others. These categories were never meant to lock anyone into a fixed identity. They were simply intended to serve as general reference points for spotting common patterns in how people think and interact socially. Actually, the MBTI has been greatly changed since its first use in the Internet. It is now an easy way to classify, which is affected by the social media. They have simplified the complex psychological concepts into interesting memes, short videos and shareable pictures, focusing more on entertainment than on accuracy. Over-reliance on these definite categories may be bad for the mental health and social development of teenagers. On one side, it may strengthen a strict idea of oneself and make people always check whether their daily actions fit into the given type. They will feel uncomfortable when they can not meet the requirements. This continuous checking may cause mental exhaustion. Teenagers may doubt their natural reactions and control spontaneous behaviors which are not in line with the perceived personality type. Moreover, the stereotypes spread by the MBTI discussion result in quick judgments; people are usually assessed according to their four-letter codes rather than understanding them based on their true personalities, backgrounds or personal experiences. When these simple labels are frequently posted online, they seem to be facts which are difficult to dispute. This superficial classification may make the social circle of teenagers smaller, reduce communication among different types and prevent them from building real and significant relationships with others. They may avoid contacting those who are considered unsuitable types and thus miss opportunities to learn from various angles and establish connections based on the differences in psychology. However, it is unfair to completely disregard the MBTI. Though it can give some helpful information in formal research conditions, it is not suitable for the everyday social life of teenagers. From this perspective, the temporary advantages of using the MBTI for self-exploration are less important than the long-term effects it may have on emotional health and social adaptability. The same characteristics which lead to the popularity of the MBTI also make it likely to be misused and generalized.

Looking ahead, there is a clear need for more empirical work that bridges the gap between MBTI as a formal psychological instrument and MBTI as a trending online cultural product. For instance, researchers might look into whether social media makes people more likely to stereotype others by personality type, and how spending years surrounded by these labels changes the way young people see themselves and others. Tracking young people over time would be especially helpful in seeing whether early MBTI identification predicts later social outcomes, such as friendship variety, social self-confidence, or openness to new things. Equally important is the question of how educators and counselors can help young people use these tools more thoughtfully, without falling into the trap of self-stereotyping. Moreover, teaching young people to think critically about personality assessments could help them separate useful self-reflection from harmful label attachment.

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On a more personal level, young people would be wise to treat the MBTI with a certain amount of skepticism. The results are probably best viewed as one small piece of self-knowledge; however, they are not well presented as who they are.

After all, people's personalities are not fixed once and for all. It shifts and grows through real experiences, relationships, and challenges. Life is a continuous process of adaptation and learning Reducing that dynamic journey to a static four-letter code does justice to neither the complexity of human nature nor the richness of individual potential. If there is any real path toward self-understanding and authentic connection with others, it lies not in any personality test, but in the messy, unpredictable process of living itself.

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