

Problems of Psychological Platforms in China: From the Perspective of College Students with Mild Depression

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ABSTRACT

In order to research internet psychological companies in China, this paper focuses on the group of college students with mild depressive disorders, a potential customer group. It uses SWOT (Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats) model to analyze current situations of 001 Psychology, Simple Psychology and KnowYourself, three representative internet psychological companies in the market which is made up of these college students. Then, some general problems of internet psychological companies reflected by the process of research are also discussed This paper concludes that there are some potential markets, customer groups for internet psychological companies while they can improve their products.

Keywords: *Internet Psychological Company, College Student, Depression, Psychological Platforms, Psychological Counseling*

psychological companies and provides some suggestions for internet psychological companies to improve.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the population of people who desire to improve their mental health or interested in psychology is growing quickly in China. However, because of some traditional thoughts and lack of recognition of mental problems, going to hospitals or clinics to find psychologists directly is not common. At the same time, internet technology and online social platforms are developing rapidly, therefore, seeking for psychological help online is gradually becoming a popular choice and many internet psychological companies are emerging.

As for internet psychological companies, college students are a potential customer group. On one side, it is easier for these young people to use online platform, accept psychological knowledge and recognize mental problems than some other groups because of their curiosity and knowledge level. On the other side, college students are also more likely to face some mental problems because many of them face environmental changes and academic pressure. Moreover, among all college students, college students with mild depression are relatively suitable to become target customers because their situation is not so serious that online psychological service could solve most of their mental problems.

But online psychological products for college students with mild depression are still limited and deficient, which can also reflect some general problems of internet psychological companies. This paper analyzes current business models of three internet psychological companies from the perspective of college students with mild depression, discusses some further problems of internet

1.1. Literature Review

In China, internet psychological service is a brand-new industry. Almost all internet psychological companies are founded after 2010 while their times to market are in 2015 or later [8]. Shen reports the development of Simple Psychology, a famous internet psychological company, which can provide some information about this industry. Simple Psychology was established to satisfy the increasing need qualified psychological consulting service. Although Li Zhen, the founder defines Simple Psychology to be a highly professional platform which connect can customers with psychological counselors, she also provides some other more popular products such as popularization of psychology [5]. Nowadays, the service of internet psychological companies includes psychological popularization and courses, mental tests, psychological counselling, question and answer community and other self-help psychological products[8]. As a result, many internet psychological companies are able to popularize psychological treatments, prevent psychological diseases while they are considered to have some problems about professionalism, effectiveness and ethic [6].

As for college students who are with depressive disorders, there are some academic enquiries which focuses on their causes for depression and other related situations. In a research which investigates 31 students with depression in an engineering college, academic pressure is the most dominating cause while dormitory conflicts and low mood are also general causes. While 48.39% of them choose to suspension of schooling and 64.52% of them didn't seek to

help on their own[11]. Some research also investigates incidence of depression among different groups of college students. For example, a research among 1912 college students in three public colleges in Jilin shows 42.5% of them have depressive symptoms [3].

In addition, only very little research combines college student's mental health with internet commercial psychological platforms. In a research which survey a random sample of college students in Xian, though 58.6% of college students thinks they are annoyed by mental problems, but only 26.9% of them have the desire to seek help from psychological counselling. As for online psychological counselling, 48.5% of them prefer online psychological counselling to in person psychological counselling. Only 64% of students have heard online psychological counselling while more than 60% of students are looking forward to experience it, which indicates that online psychological counselling is still very potential among college students[12].

1.2. Development of Online Psychological Platforms in China

Psychological service refers to making use of psychological professional knowledge and technology to serve people's mental health and development in a direct or indirect way to work out people's mental and behavioral problems. Internet psychological companies mainly provide online psychological service. In China, systemic online psychological service began in 1980s. In early stage, individual psychological counselors use related websites, forums, blogs, QQ and other platforms to popularize psychological knowledge and provide psychological counselling through QQ, email, phone and other ways. In 2011, WeChat appeared and began to provide a new popular platform to internet psychological service. It gradually becomes one of the most essential channels for companies and individuals who provide internet psychological service[8]. Then, because of the increasing need of formal psychological institutions, some inchoate internet psychological companies were founded after 2010. At present, although some mature internet psychological companies such as 001 Psychology are famous in a way, internet psychological companies and industry are still developing.

1.3. Current Situation of College Students with Mild Depression in China

College students with mild depression are students who are accepting higher or vocational education and with mood disorders. Moreover, although they are with depressive disorders in a way, their mood disorders are not severe or long-lasting enough. In other words, even if they have some symptoms of depressive of disorder, their depression could not be diagnosed as major depressive disorder or persistent depressive disorder. As for college students,

psychological service is necessary. According to the research of Rohde and other scholars among 43000 patients, 24% of them shows depressive symptoms between 18 and 23 years old[1]. In another research which uses meta-analysis, the prevalence of depressive disorder among Chinese college students is 31.38% [9]. Besides, another research points out that college-related stress should be separated from general life stress because they are weakly associated [4].

From the perspective of internet psychological companies, college students are potential customers. On one side, among all users of online psychological platforms, the proportion of college students is not small. According to a research which investigates 473 users of online psychological platforms, 36.4% of them are students and 53.1% of them are between 18 and 25 years old. Compared with other groups especially elder groups, it is more likely for young people who are accepting higher or vocational education to choose online service. Furthermore, college students have earning potential. If they get used to using online psychological service and develop a consumption habit, it is possible that they will contribute sustainable revenue to internet psychological companies after getting jobs and stable salary in the future.

1.4. Analysis Based on SWOT model

In the following part, this paper makes use of SWOT model to analyze the situation of 001 Psychology, Simple psychology and KnowYourself, three relatively famous internet psychological companies in China. SWOT model divides a company's factors into four parts: strengths (internal advantaged factors), weaknesses (internal disadvantaged factors), opportunities (external advantaged factors) and threats (external disadvantaged factors).

The analysis of this research is presented respectively in four separate parts, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats based on SWOT model.

1.4.1. Strengths

As three internet psychological companies with totally different positions, they have disparate strengths.

001 psychology was founded in 2011, which is one of the earliest internet psychological companies. As a result, it is with much reputation in both psychological industry and the public. If an ordinary college student with mild depression want to seek psychological help online, it is likely that 001 Psychology will be the first choice. While other internet psychological companies only received angel investor funding or series A funding, 001 Psychological have been got serious B funding. It means that if 001 Psychological wants to capture the market of college students with mild depression, it can make use of plenty of resource. In addition, 001 Psychology is a comprehensive internet psychological company with mature business model. It has not only different platforms such as main

website, WeChat official accounts and apps, but also various kinds of functions which include psychological consulting, psychological tests, popularization of psychology, online radio and online communities. Its multiple functions are able to cover most needs of college students with mild depression.

Simple Psychology defines itself as a professional psychological consulting company. Compared with the same type of other internet psychological companies, it pays more attention to the professionalism of psychological service. To improve the professionalism of psychological service, it has a psychological academic team. 90% of team members have high psychological academic degrees. Moreover, Simple Psychological also cooperates with some authoritative universities and institutions such as Peking University Psychological Counseling and Treatment Center. In conclusion, it has plenty of key resources and partners. So, college students who focus on professional psychological consulting are more likely to purchase their products to deal with depression. In addition, Simple Psychology has some popularization and programs about academic pressure, which shows it takes notice of some problems of students. Compared with other internet psychological companies, the founding team of KnowYourself is younger. They are good at psychological popularization and advertising their company by using different online platforms. For example, on Weibo (Sina microblogging), KnowYourself has about 239000 followers while 001 Psychology has about 130000 followers and Simple Psychology only has 68174 followers. On Zhihu, the most popular online question and answer platform in China, its followers are also much more than the other two platforms. In other words, as for college students with mild depression, it is possible that KnowYourself know better about their needs and have more powerful channels to attract them.

1.4.2. Weaknesses

The weaknesses of these three internet psychological companies have very strong relationships with their strengths.

Although 001 Psychology is an internet psychological company with much reputation, its company composition is too broad. As a result, it doesn't have a prominent product while some parts of products such as psychological consulting and tests are criticized. At the same time, most of their products are not suitable for college students. Therefore, its attraction to college students with mild depression is not strong enough.

Simple Psychology is too concentrated on professionalism and psychology consulting. Some of its content on main websites and online platforms is so professional that it is difficult for ordinary college students to understand. In consequence, its promotion channels are comparatively less attractive among college students with mild depression. As mentioned above, its followers are much fewer than KnowYourself and 001 Psychology on Weibo, a popular social platform. Besides, as for college students who don't

want to purchase psychology consulting immediately, its attraction is limited too.

Compared with Simple Psychology, KnowYourself has adverse weaknesses. Because psychological popularization is its most famous products, in some people's opinions, it is considered to be commercial rather than professional. In addition, part of its psychological popularization and other service is questioned by some psychological insiders. Therefore, college students who want to purchase some products other than popularization might considered other internet psychological companies.

1.4.3. Opportunities

Opportunities of 001 Psychological, Simple Psychology and Knowyourself among the market of college students with mild depression are similar.

According to a report of psychological consulting industry in 2018, 24.84% of customers are enrolled students, which is more than people in any respectively industry. From 2015 to 2018, the average age of customers is keeping decreasing [7]. This report shows that college students with mild depression are quite potential customers of internet psychology companies.

Currently, there are few online psychological products such as courses and popularization are designed uniquely for enrolled students. Online psychological products designed to work out the most common problems among college students, academic pressure and dormitory conflict are also very few.

To sum up, while college students' need of online psychological products is comparatively enormous and still increasing, internet psychological companies don't turn their attention to the purchase potential of this group adequately.

1.4.4. Threats

The threats of 001 Psychological, Simple Psychology and KnowYourself among the market of college students with mild depression are also similar.

Although college students are young, some traditional thoughts still make an influence on them. As a result of traditional thoughts, negative impression on mental problems may prevent college students with mild depression from seeking help from online psychological platforms. Moreover, college students might receive free psychological helps from colleges rather than purchasing products from internet psychological companies. Furthermore, some internet companies which can provide more subdivided psychological service and offline psychological companies may also threaten these three companies.

1.5. Discussion

The case study of 001 Psychological, Simple Psychology and KnowYourself in the market of college students with mild depression can also reflect some general problems of internet psychological companies.

The first problem is how to position internet psychological companies and find a balance between professionalism and popularity. If an internet psychological company focuses on the professionalism of one kind of products, its customers and advertising channels will be inevitably limited. But when an internet psychological company pay more attention to popularity or provide comprehensive products, it is likely that some of their products are criticized because they are not professional enough. According to the strategy of some internet psychological companies such as KnowYourself, focusing on one kind of products at first and the extending the range of service might be a feasible way to work out this problem.

Secondly, mental problems of some customer groups such as academic pressure facing by college students are underestimated by some internet psychological companies. While there are plenty of psychological products about love and marriage, psychological products about workplace problems are much fewer and it's hard to find psychological products which are designed for academic or financing pressure. Therefore, internet psychological companies can launch different products for some potential groups.

Thirdly, many internet psychological companies' products are not specialized enough. For example, some themes of psychological courses are women, but "women" is a too broad topic. A common tag of psychological consulting named personal growth while personal growth has a lot of aspects. As a result, it's not easy for customers to find most suitable products. Internet psychological companies can further specialize and detail their products.

Last but not least, connections between different products of internet psychological companies are too weak. In many internet psychological platforms, different products such as psychological popularization, tests and consulting are independent. When customers use one product, the system doesn't recommend other products which they might be interested in. Therefore, internet psychological companies can't fully dig out potential demand of customers and make use of advantages of their predominant products to promote the sales of other products.

2. CONCLUSION

In summary, this paper argues that there is still room for internet psychological companies to improve on both its channels to customer groups and quality of products.

On one side, it is shown that even though college students are a large customer group of internet psychological companies, present online psychological products can't fully satisfy their demand. When many internet psychological companies don't attach great importance to

college students and launch specific products for them, many students also don't notice the products of these companies. This situation reflects that there are still some potential markets and customer groups for internet psychological companies.

On the other side, the overall service and products of psychological companies can still be improved. If psychological companies can gradually improve their online system, specialize their products as well as make full use of their advantages, they might attract more customers and capture more markets.

Although internet psychological companies have to face some challenges inevitably, with the development of technology and people's thoughts, they have plenty of opportunities to promote the whole psychological industry as well as earn more profits.

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