

Differences in Information Seeking Between Problematic and Regular Social Media Users

INTRODUCTION

- Social media platforms serve as major information sources (Kelly & Sharot, 2021).
- PSMU prevalence is increasing globally, characterized by excessive engagement causing harmful effects on mental health and well-being (Cui et al., 2023; Shannon et al., 2022; Shensa et al., 2017).
- Research establishes connections between information-seeking behaviors and mental health conditions (anxiety, depression) (Charpentier et al., 2022; Hildebrand-Saints & Weary, 1989).
- However, the relationship between information-seeking patterns and PSMU remains unexplored.

OBJECTIVE

Using RedNote (Xiaohongshu) - one of China's leading social media platforms - as an example, this study aims to answer two research questions:

1. Do problematic and regular social media users exhibit differences in information-seeking behavior on RedNote?
2. Do problematic and regular social media users differ in information-seeking motivation on RedNote?

METHODOLOGY

Participants: 114 adult RedNote users (16 PSMU, 98 RSMU) recruited through online survey

- Classification based on Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS; Luo et al., 2021).
- PSMU: scores >23; RSMU: scores <19

Measures:

- Information Seeking in RedNote Scale: Adapted from Facebook scale (Asghar, 2015), measuring 5 dimensions: Social Searching, Hedonic Proclivity, Social Browsing, Consumer Trends Information, General Erudition
- Information-Seeking Motives Scale: Adapted from Kelly & Sharot (2021), assessing instrumental, hedonic, and cognitive utilities
- Usage Patterns: Comprehensive metrics including followers, posts, engagement

Analysis: MANOVA for behavioral differences, t-tests/Mann-Whitney U tests for motivational comparisons

CONCLUSION

This pioneering study reveals distinct information-seeking patterns among problematic RedNote users:

Key Findings:

- problematic and regular social media users exhibit significant differences in information-seeking behavior on RedNote. PSMU users showed higher engagement in Social Searching, Hedonic Proclivity, and General Erudition.
- problematic and regular social media users differ in information-seeking motivation on RedNote. PSMU users are driven more by instrumental motivations and cognitive motivations.

Key Implications:

- Information-seeking mechanisms may underpin addictive social media patterns
- Targeted interventions could focus on instrumental and cognitive motivations
- Platform-specific research necessary for understanding user behavior patterns

Limitations:

- Small sample size with unequal group distributions (16 PSMU vs. 98 RSMU)
- Lack of demographic data collection limiting generalizability
- RedNote's cultural specificity restricts applicability to global platforms

RESULTS

	Mean (±SD)		t/W	p	Effect size
	PSMU (N=16)	RSMU (N=98)			
BSMAS total score	25.31 (1.62)	15.15 (2.65)	1568.00	<0.001	0.60
Average weekday usage time	3.13 (1.42)	2.68 (2.41)	986.50	0.091	0.16
Average weekend usage time	4.47 (1.97)	3.70 (1.73)	946.50	0.182	0.12
Frequency	3.88 (1.20)	3.80 (1.27)	801.00	0.889	0.01
Number of followers of the primary account	254.25 (217.98)	869.18 (5189.57)	1048.00	0.032	0.20
Number of accounts followed of the primary account	529.50 (936.05)	212.05 (255.61)	1130.00	0.005	0.26
Number of notes posted of the primary account	292.63 (550.83)	38.57 (55.08)	1045.50	0.033	0.20
Number of likes gained of the Primary account	2482.13 (4237.51)	1032.31 (2452.27)	1007.00	0.069	0.17
Number of favs gained of the Primary account	495.38 (786.36)	197.10 (621.13)	1074.50	0.018	0.22
Number of Followers of all accounts	603.00 (917.96)	504.02 (1612.39)	1086.00	0.014	0.23
Number of Accounts Followed of all accounts	1107.81 (2147.67)	244.06 (290.72)	1156.00	0.002	0.28
Number of notes posted of all accounts	682.13 (1215.51)	10770.12 (38867.01)	1047.50	0.032	0.20
Number of likes gained of all accounts	3336.00 (5914.78)	1169.10 (3207.52)	1062.00	0.024	0.21
Number of favs gained of all accounts	932.31 (1691.62)	169.97 (441.59)	1123.00	0.006	0.26
Passive Use Score	5.16 (0.97)	4.65 (0.68)	1109.50	0.008	0.25
Active Use Score	5.33 (0.85)	4.19 (1.06)	4.78	<0.001	1.10

Table 1. BSMAS and RedNote use pattern

Usage Patterns

PSMU users demonstrated significantly more active engagement:

- More accounts followed (p = .005)
- More notes posted (p = .03)
- Higher passive (p = .008) and active use scores (p < .001)

Behavioral Differences

MANOVA Results: Significant multivariate effect, $F(5,108) = 4.84, p < .001$

PSMU users showed significantly higher:

- Social Searching: $F(1,112) = 24.42, p < .001, \eta^2 = .18$
- Hedonic Proclivity: $F(1,112) = 12.32, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10$
- General Erudition: $F(1,112) = 8.57, p = .004, \eta^2 = .07$

No significant differences in: Social Browsing, Consumer Trends Information

Motivational Differences

PSMU users reported significantly higher:

- Instrumental Motivation: $U = 1185.00, p = .001, r = .31$
- Cognitive Motivation: $U = 1329.00, p < .001, r = .42$

No difference in: Hedonic Motivation (p = .153)

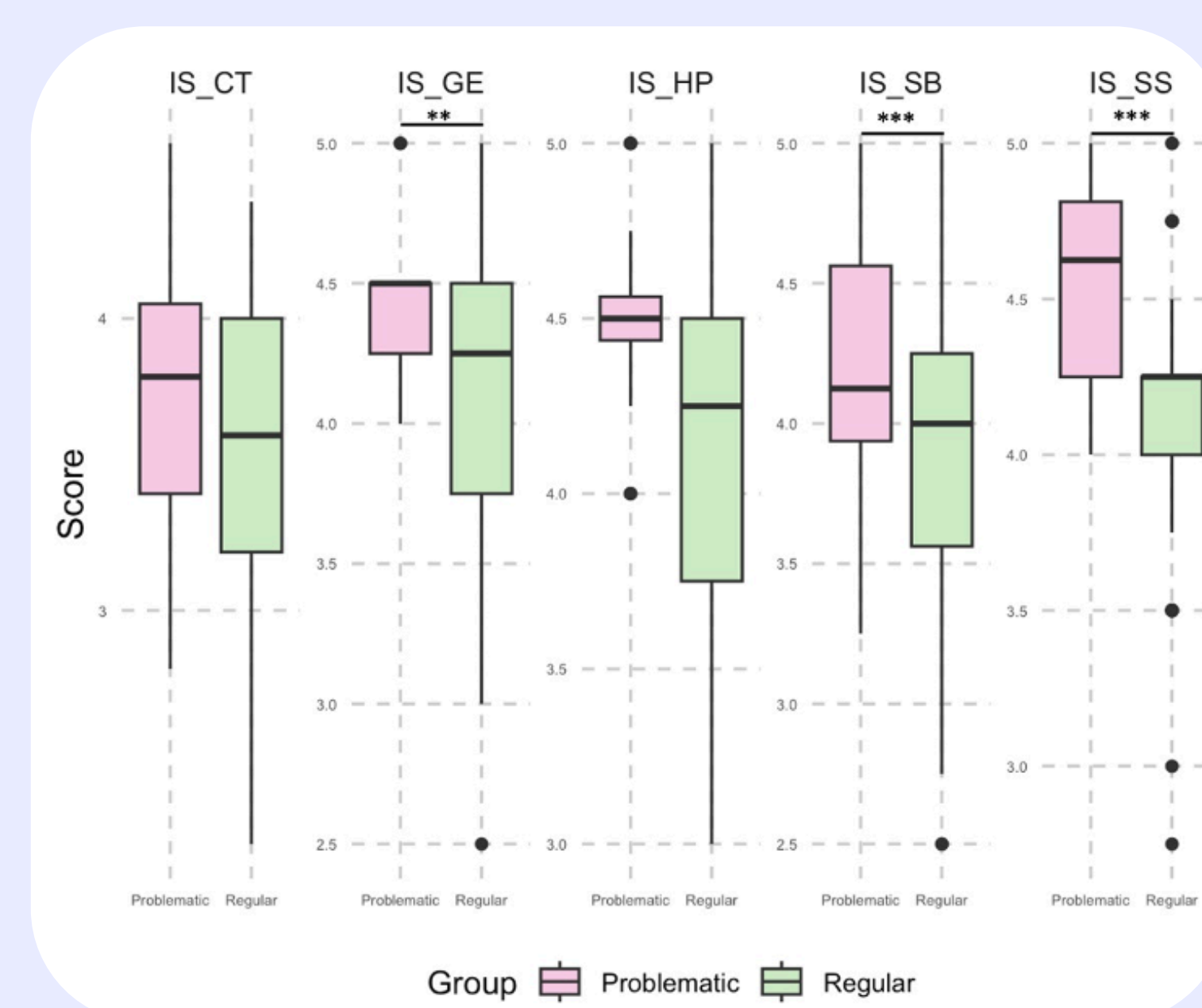


Figure 1. MANOVA follow-up analysis of the Information Seeking in XiaoHongShu Scale. CT = Consumer Trends Information; GE = General Erudition; HP = Hedonic Proclivity; SB = Social Browsing; SS = Social Searching.

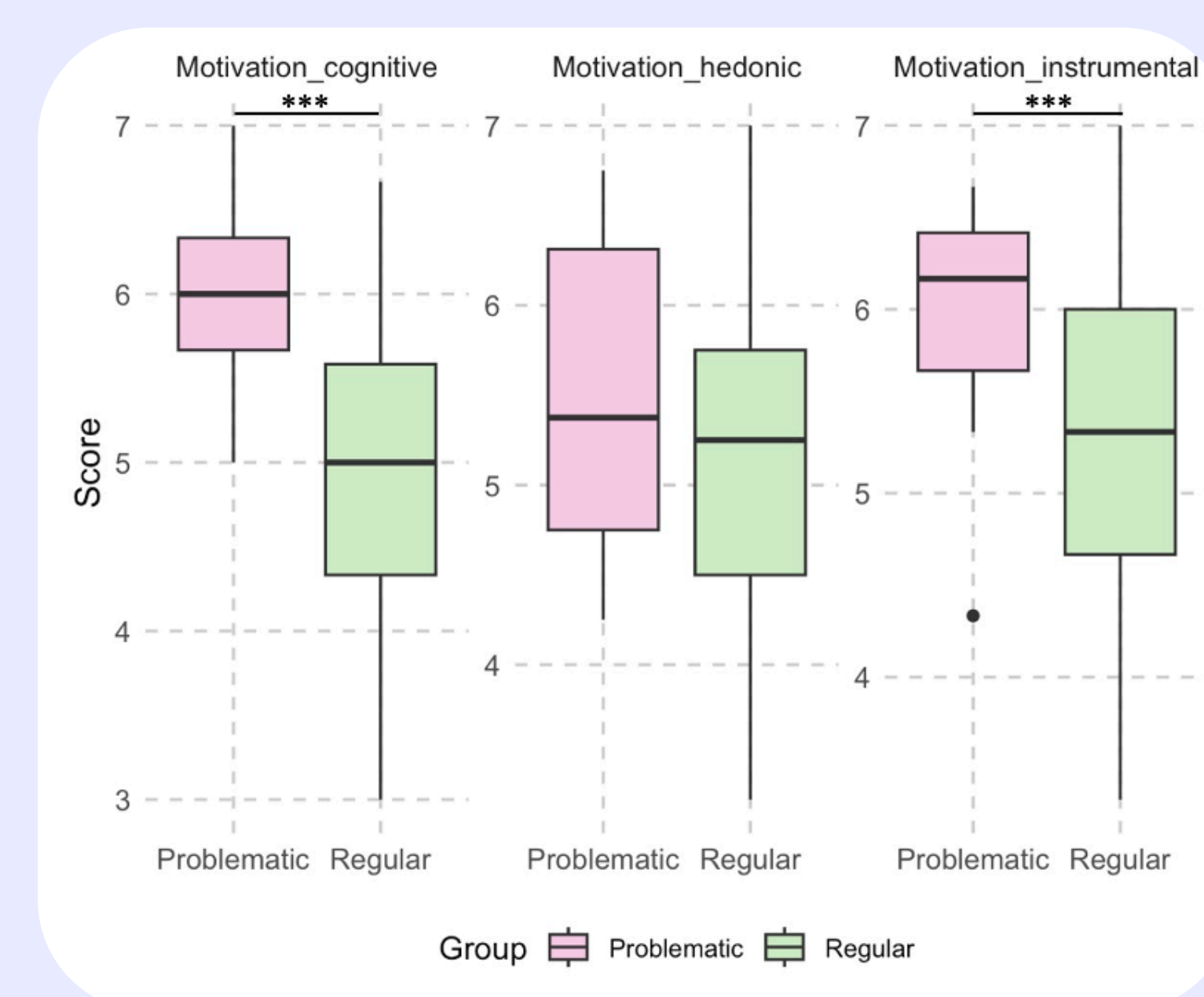


Figure 2. t-test or the Mann-Whitney U test results of the Information Seeking Motivation Scales.

REFLECTIONS

This pilot study provided a completely new research experience, particularly in developing original research ideas and conducting statistical coding. Adapting established psychological frameworks to culturally-specific digital platforms proved more challenging than anticipated, with significant room for improvement in my approach. The experience emphasized that each methodological step is crucial for achieving scientifically grounded results and highlighted the importance of rigorous cross-cultural research design.

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