

The Relationships Between Social Support Seeking, Social Media Use, and Psychological Resilience Among College Students

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Introduction: Social networking sites (SNSs) have evolved into a commonly used instrument for searching and obtaining social support. While previous research has explored and validated the correlation between seeking social support and the recipient's physical or psychological well-being, few studies have illuminated the mechanisms through which this relationship manifests in SNSs usage. This study investigated how the tendency of college students to seek social support corresponds to their psychological resilience via different SNSs activities and interactions on Douyin (ie, TikTok's counterpart in mainland China).

Methods: Drawing from social support literature and the activity-audience framework governing social media use, we conducted a survey-based analysis involving a random sample of 536 self-identified Chinese college undergraduates.

Results: The findings reveal that students seeking social support were inclined to engage in active SNSs usage (eg, status updating) and interact with familiar individuals, regardless of their distance to campus. As for the consequences on psychosocial well-being, active utilization of SNSs did exert a significantly positive impact on resilience levels. Communication with friends from the same campus was confirmed as a functioning mediator within this relationship.

Discussion: This study contributes to the literature on social support and adolescent health by underscoring that the effectiveness of social support on psychosocial well-being is contingent on specific types of SNSs activities and interactants. It provides valuable insights into the nuanced dynamics of social support seeking behaviors on SNSs.

Keywords: social support, resilience, social media, adolescent health, adolescent development

Introduction

Social support seeking refers to the active and intentional pursuit of aid, solace, counsel, or empathy from one's social network, including friends, family, peers, or support groups, during periods of difficulty or emotional distress.¹ It serves as a prominent coping mechanism and strategy frequently adopted by people to navigate the diverse challenges and adversities they encounter. Previous research has indicated that perceiving and obtaining social support can significantly contribute to both physical and psychological well-being when facing crises.^{2,3} Moreover, social support demonstrates a robust positive correlation with the perceived abundance of coping resources, thereby generating favorable influences on an individual's overall quality of life and life satisfaction.^{2,3}

College students, in particular, represent a subgroup with a compelling demand for social support. They are very likely to confront recurrent experiences of manifold challenges and stressors throughout their academic journey, including academic hurdles, emotional needs, interpersonal relationships, counseling utilization, and financial constraints.^{4,5} With the advancements in Internet technologies and the prevalence of mobile devices, college students have increasingly been drawn to leveraging social networking sites (SNSs), such as Facebook and Twitter, as a principle



method of seeking and receiving social support. The process of seeking social support through social media closely aligns with different SNSs activities and interactants. Yang and Robinson⁶ developed an “activity-audience framework” to elaborate on these indispensable elements in social media use. To begin with, SNSs activities are classified into three major types hinging on the level of engagement or involvement of users: passive, interactive, and active. Passive SNSs activities denote purely browsing and consuming existing content, with limited affects or cues to others. Interactive SNSs activities equate with directed interactions, such as commenting, forwarding, messaging, or donating. Active SNSs activities entail creating personalized content, such as updating statuses or posting new photos, without tagging others. In addition, contingent on the subject of interaction, individuals seeking social support can encounter three distinct groups of interactants: on-campus friends, off-campus friends, and strangers. The willingness and intention of social support seekers may vary accordingly and therefore the consequences of related social media use behaviors tend to differ.

A wealth of literature has examined the relationship between social support and the recipient’s psychological well-being, most of which reported a positive connection between these two variables in question.^{7–10} However, there exist few studies exploring the roles of different SNSs activities and interactants in mediating this relationship. To address this research gap, the current study aimed to investigate how the tendency of social support seeking among college students, specifically through the activity-audience mechanism, relates to their levels of well-being. Particularly, we focused on resilience as an indicator of psychosocial well-being, which signifies an individual’s capacity to effectively cope with, adapt to, and recover from challenging or stressful situations while maintaining a positive mental status amidst difficult circumstances. A sound level of resilience can empower college students to adeptly maneuver through academic difficulties and cultivate the cognitive tenacity necessary to successfully address obstacles and stressors. This competence not only propels academic achievements but also lays the foundation for shaping prospective career trajectories.

Theoretical Background

Social support refers to the assistance, provisions, and solace individuals receive from their social affiliations amidst adversities or daily living.¹¹ It can manifest in a variety of typologies, each serving distinct purposes. For example, House¹² identified four categories of social support: emotional, informational, appraisal, and instrumental. Specifically, emotional support is typified by expressions of care, empathy, love, and understanding, cultivating the feelings of emotional safety and connection by giving gestures like listening, offering comfort, and providing a shoulder to cry on. Informational support revolves primarily around the provision of advice, guidance, information, or knowledge that helps individuals better understand a situation, make informed decisions, or solve problems. This particular type of support is essential in navigating complex issues, such as health conditions, work-related challenges, or personal dilemmas. Appraisal support pertains to feedback and evaluation of a person’s thoughts, behaviors, or abilities, whether it be in the form of constructive criticism or positive reinforcement. It is conducive to gaining insight into someone’s strengths and weaknesses, which subsequently stimulates personal growth and development. Instrumental support, also known as “material support”, consists of practical assistance, tangible aid, or useful resources that can facilitate individuals to address specific challenges or achieve their goals. Considerably alleviating burdens during stressful circumstances, examples of instrumental support include financial help, transportation, running errands, or assisting with coursework.

A robust social support network poses profound influences on multifarious dimensions of health and well-being. A plethora of public health and psychology research has documented a positive association between social support and adaptive psychosocial health outcomes, such as mitigation of emotional distress, elevation of self-esteem, and promotion of lifelong mental well-being.^{13–15} Psychological resilience, a construct frequently associated with social support, is defined by Masten et al¹⁶ as “the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances” (p. 426). It epitomizes personal qualities and social resources that positively impact adverse outcomes.¹⁷ Resilient individuals typically possess multiple optimistic traits, including self-enhancement, hardiness, and adaptive coping strategies, allowing them to handle challenges with a positive outlook and sometimes even a sense of humor.^{18,19} Their capacity to maintain positivity and effectively address adversity can contribute to their overall satisfaction with life.²⁰

The psychosocial importance of resilience for college students stems from a multitude of challenges and stressors they may encounter throughout their academic journey. Resilience plays a crucial role in helping students maintain focus

and cope with the demanding academic requirements, including rigorous coursework, examinations, and deadlines.²¹ In addition, resilient students tend to demonstrate an enhanced level of social adjustment and an ability to navigate social challenges, such as rejections, conflicts, and isolation, nourishing the development of healthier relationships and support systems within the college environment.²² Financial stress is another prevalent issue confronted by many college students, and resilience equips them with the mindset and skills to capably manage such stress.²³ By making responsible decisions and seeking available resources and support, resilient students are better poised to handle financial challenges during their college years. Lastly, college students are likely to struggle with uncertainties related to their career paths and future ambitions. A high level of resilience can empower them to approach these uncertainties optimistically, explore different possibilities, and adapt to evolving career trajectories, thereby boosting their capacity to confidently and flexibly chart their professional blueprint.^{24,25}

In the contemporary world, college students are more inclined to utilize SNSs platforms and applications as their primary avenue for seeking and receiving social support.^{26,27} Despite potential concerns regarding privacy, cyberbullying, and negativity, these platforms and applications have several advantageous characteristics. Firstly, they provide easy accessibility and convenience, as they are readily available around-the-clock, enabling users to seek support from any location with an internet connection. In addition, SNSs afford access to both extensive support networks and specialized niche communities.^{28,29} This substantially facilitates connections with individuals from distinctive backgrounds and locations, as well as like-minded peers who share specific interests and can empathize with their unique experiences. Lastly, unlike traditional face-to-face meetings, the online environment adds up to a layer of protection, allowing individuals to share their experiences more freely without the immediate fear of being recognized or judged.³⁰ Otherwise, in those conventional settings, they may be hesitant to disclose personal struggles due to concerns about how others would perceive them.

Consistent with Yang and Robinson's⁶ activity-audience approach, we operationalized SNSs activities as Douyin browsing (passive), Douyin interaction (interactive), and Douyin updating (active), and classified SNSs interactants into three groups: on-campus friends, off-campus friends, and strangers. [Figure 1](#)

As such, we propose the research questions and conceptual research model as follows:

RQ1. How would the tendency of seeking social support associate with college students' frequencies of (a) passive, (b) interactive, and (c) active SNSs activities?

RQ2. How would the tendency of seeking social support associate with college students' engagement with (a) on-campus, (b) off-campus, and (c) unacquainted SNSs interactants?

RQ3. How would college students' frequencies of (a) passive, (b) interactive, and (c) active SNSs activities associate with their levels of resilience?

RQ4. How would college students' engagement with (a) on-campus, (b) off-campus, and (c) unacquainted SNSs interactants associate with their levels of resilience?

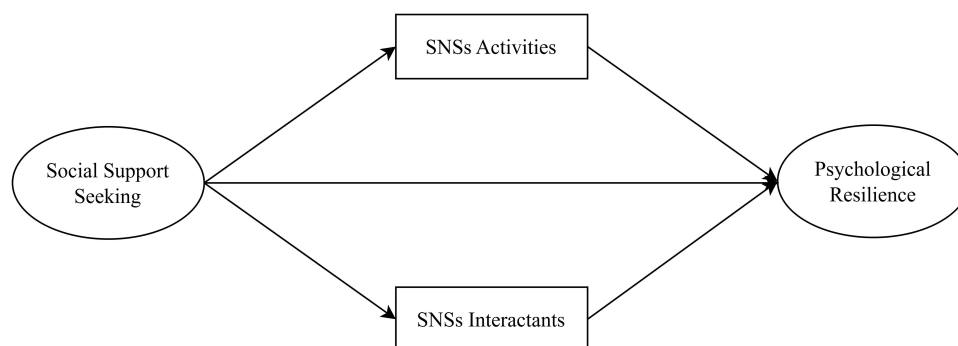


Figure 1 The conceptual research model.

- RQ5.** Would the relationship between social support seeking and resilience be mediated through (a) passive, (b) interactive, and (c) active SNSs activities?
- RQ6.** Would the relationship between social support seeking and resilience be mediated through (a) on-campus, (b) off-campus, and (c) unacquainted SNSs interactants?

Methods

Participants

We enlisted 536 participants who self-identified as college students in a random sample for an online survey conducted via Tencent Survey (<https://wj.qq.com/>). Upon accessing the survey, participants were presented with an initial page explaining the study’s purpose. Next, participants were required to provide their informed consent by selecting the “agree” button, which enabled them to proceed to the survey questions. Conversely, if a participant chose the “disagree” button after reading the introductory descriptions, their access to the online survey was denied. Table 1 presents a summary of the demographic characteristics of the participants in our study, showing an average age of 20.42 years ($SD = 1.73$), with 66.04% ($n = 354$) identifying as female. The participants also offered information about their family’s monthly household income and whether they attended higher education institutions generally recognized as prestigious in China under the “985 Project” and “211 Project”.³¹ Our study was subjected to review and approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Communication University of Zhejiang. The study has followed at all times the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

Measures

Social Support Seeking

We employed nine items sourced from Mortenson³² to assess participants’ inclination toward seeking social support. This included three items in relation to emotional support seeking (eg, “accepting sympathy or understanding from someone”), three items for appraisal support seeking (eg, “asking advice from a relative or friend I respect”), and three items for instrumental support seeking (eg, “ask a favor of someone who can influence the situation”). Each of the nine support-

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Participants ($n = 536$)

| Characteristic | M (SD) | Frequency (%) |
|---------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Age | 20.42 (1.73) | |
| Gender | | |
| Male | | 182 (33.96%) |
| Female | | 354 (66.04%) |
| Income | | |
| Less than ¥5000 | | 3 (0.56%) |
| ¥5000 to ¥9999 | | 86 (16.04%) |
| ¥10,000 to ¥14,999 | | 211 (39.37%) |
| ¥15,000 to ¥19,999 | | 147 (27.43%) |
| ¥20,000 to ¥24,999 | | 86 (16.04%) |
| ¥25,000 or more | | 3 (0.56%) |
| 985/211 Institution | | 108 (20.15%) |

Notes: ¥ stands for RMB or renminbi, namely the official currency of the People’s Republic of China.

seeking items required participants to evaluate the appropriateness of responding to a distressing situation by engaging in the mentioned action, all starting with the phrase “When upset, I think it is appropriate to.” Participants indicated their level of agreement with each item on a 9-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 9 (“strongly agree”). Confirmatory factor analysis validated the pre-determined latent variable of the instrument containing a three-factor structure. The observed data in our sample exhibited a satisfactory level of goodness of fit ($CFI = 0.962$; $RMSEA = 0.044$; $\chi^2/df = 3.293$).

Douyin Use

By adapting from Yang’s³³ Instagram Activity Scale, we measured the frequency of participants’ engagement in three categories of Douyin activities using a 5-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from 1 (“never”) to 5 (“a lot”). Each category comprised two items: Douyin browsing referred to how frequently participants viewed others’ homepages, newsfeeds, or profiles without leaving comments (“browse the homepage or newsfeed without leaving comments” and “check out others’ profiles without leaving comments”); Douyin interaction encompassed interactive activities directly involving other individuals (“comment on or reply to others’ posts” and “tag others in your posts or comments”); and Douyin updating pertained to SNSs activities where participants posted information without addressing specific individuals (“post or upload on your profile without tagging anyone” and “post something that is not directed to specific people”). The above three subscales reflected passive, interactive, and active SNSs usage, respectively, with higher mean scores indicating a higher frequency of engagement in the corresponding activities. Following the approach of Yang and Robinson,⁶ we also gauged participants’ frequency of using Douyin to communicate with three different groups of participants’ usage frequency of Douyin for communicating with distinct groups of SNSs connections: on-campus friends, off-campus friends, and strangers, whereby strangers were defined as “individuals you have never met.” Participants responded using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (“never”) to 5 (“a lot”). Within the six sub-categories under consideration, the measures related to Douyin use demonstrated a minimum Cronbach’s α value of 0.79, signifying good internal consistency of the collected data.

Psychological Resilience

Levels of psychological resilience were measured with the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC),¹⁷ a 25-item scale focusing on participants’ ability to survive and thrive in the face of adversity. The items were entered simultaneously as (a) tenacity, (b) tolerance of stress and negative emotion, (c) positive acceptance of change, (d) control, and (e) spirituality. Sample items included “I am able to adapt to change”, “I can deal with whatever comes”, and “I tend to bounce back after illness or hardship”. Participants rated items using a 5-point Likert scale from 0 (“not at all true”) to 4 (“true nearly all of the time”). Previous research has confirmed the 5-factor structure, Factor analysis confirmed the well-fitting nature of the specified 5-factor structure for the latent construct ($CFI = 0.959$; $RMSEA = 0.046$; $\chi^2/df = 3.856$), resonating with previous research that supported the applicability of the proposed factor loadings.³⁴

Results

To examine the hypothesized research model and answer the research questions, the software R and its package *lavaan* were capitalized on to conduct statistical analyses of structural equation modeling (SEM). Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics and correlation matrix of the variables under consideration. Results of path analysis appear in Table 3, with significant paths being illustrated in Figure 2. The overall measurement model reported a satisfactory goodness of fit: $CFI = 0.976$, $RMSEA = 0.048$, and $\chi^2/df = 2.248$.

Regarding RQ1, among the three types of SNSs activities, only the frequency of Douyin updating was detected to have a significant association with the propensity to seek social support ($\beta = 0.596$, $p < 0.001$). It did not produce significant effects on the frequencies of Douyin browsing ($\beta = -0.049$, $p = 0.32$) or Douyin interaction ($\beta = -0.010$, $p = 0.84$). Likewise, results relevant to RQ2 revealed that the tendency of social support seeking positively predicted the usage of Douyin with both on-campus friends ($\beta = 0.346$, $p < 0.001$) and off-campus friends ($\beta = 0.485$, $p < 0.001$), while showing no significant relationship with relating to strangers on Douyin ($\beta = 0.041$, $p = 0.46$).

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of Variables Analyzed in This Study

| Variable | Mean (SD) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 |
|-------------------------|-------------|---------|---------|---------|-------|-------|---------|---------|---------|-------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1. Emotional Support | 4.51 (1.33) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Appraisal Support | 5.72 (1.35) | 0.25*** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Instrumental Support | 2.13 (1.44) | 0.33*** | 0.26*** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Douyin Browsing | 2.09 (0.93) | -0.05 | 0.00 | -0.01 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Douyin Interaction | 2.10 (0.93) | 0.03 | 0.01 | -0.05 | -0.05 | | | | | | | | | |
| 6. Douyin Updating | 2.74 (0.78) | 0.48*** | 0.14*** | 0.18*** | -0.04 | 0.01 | | | | | | | | |
| 7. On-Campus Friends | 2.93 (0.78) | 0.12** | 0.42*** | 0.16*** | 0.00 | -0.02 | 0.17*** | | | | | | | |
| 8. Off-Campus Friends | 2.23 (0.59) | 0.17*** | 0.16*** | 0.33*** | -0.04 | 0.01 | 0.41*** | 0.28*** | | | | | | |
| 9. Strangers | 2.11 (0.94) | 0.03 | 0.02 | 0.00 | -0.04 | 0.03 | 0.03 | -0.01 | 0.03 | | | | | |
| 10. Tenacity | 2.58 (1.10) | 0.25*** | 0.12** | 0.14** | 0.02 | -0.01 | 0.34*** | 0.20*** | 0.17*** | -0.06 | | | | |
| 11. Tolerance | 3.43 (0.89) | 0.15*** | 0.06 | 0.01 | 0.05 | 0.02 | 0.30*** | 0.22*** | 0.18*** | 0.03 | 0.49*** | | | |
| 12. Acceptance | 1.71 (1.05) | 0.29*** | 0.20*** | 0.15*** | -0.02 | -0.02 | 0.52*** | 0.28*** | 0.18*** | 0.01 | 0.51*** | 0.43*** | | |
| 13. Control | 1.41 (1.02) | 0.13** | 0.13* | 0.10* | -0.01 | -0.03 | 0.15*** | 0.46*** | 0.13** | -0.05 | 0.33*** | 0.43*** | 0.33*** | |
| 14. Spirituality | 1.44 (1.03) | 0.13** | 0.09 | 0.05 | 0.05 | -0.02 | 0.15*** | 0.20*** | 0.32*** | -0.02 | 0.32*** | 0.45*** | 0.30*** | 0.31*** |

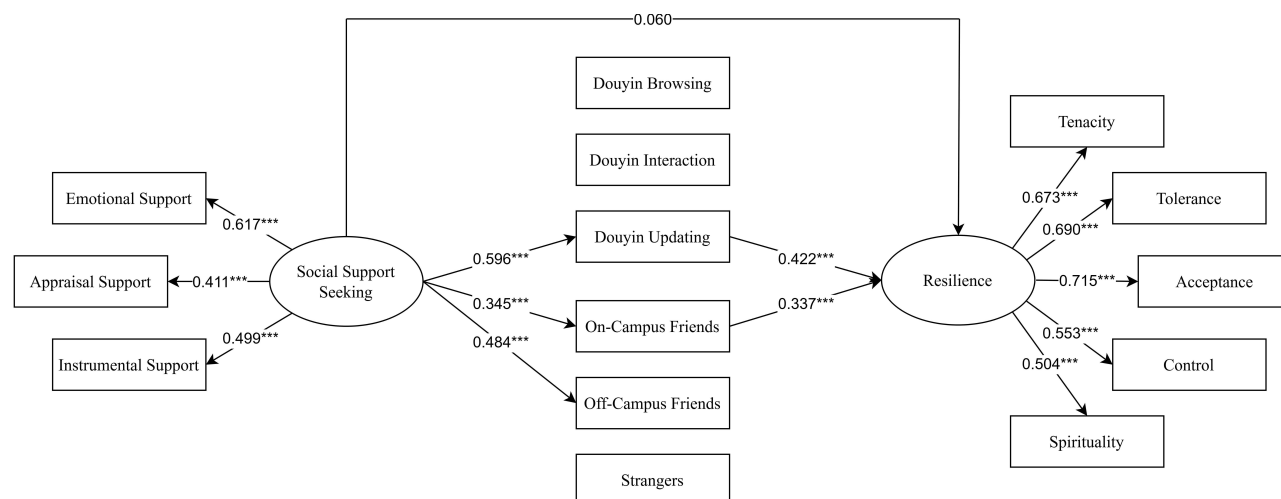
Notes: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 3 Results of Path Analysis

| | B | SE | β |
|---|----------|-----------|---------------------------|
| Direct Path | | | |
| Social Support Seeking → Douyin Browsing | −0.05 | 0.05 | −0.05 |
| Social Support Seeking → Douyin Interaction | −0.01 | 0.05 | −0.01 |
| Social Support Seeking → Douyin Updating | 0.46*** | 0.04 | 0.60*** |
| Social Support Seeking → On-Campus Friends | 0.27*** | 0.04 | 0.35*** |
| Social Support Seeking → Off-Campus Friends | 0.29*** | 0.04 | 0.48*** |
| Social Support Seeking → Strangers | 0.04 | 0.05 | 0.04 |
| Douyin Browsing → Resilience | 0.06 | 0.06 | 0.04 |
| Douyin Interaction → Resilience | −0.00 | 0.06 | −0.00 |
| Douyin Updating → Resilience | 0.70*** | 0.11 | 0.42*** |
| On-Campus Friends → Resilience | 0.56*** | 0.08 | 0.34*** |
| Off-Campus Friends → Resilience | 0.05 | 0.12 | 0.02 |
| Strangers → Resilience | −0.04 | 0.05 | −0.03 |
| Significant Indirect Path | | | |
| Social Support Seeking → Douyin Updating → Resilience | 0.33*** | 0.06 | 0.25*** |
| Social Support Seeking → On-Campus Friends → Resilience | 0.15*** | 0.03 | 0.12*** |

Notes: β represents standardized path coefficient. *** $p < 0.001$.

For addressing RQ3, it was found that a higher frequency of Douyin updating was associated with a higher level of resilience ($\beta = 0.422$, $p < 0.001$), which was not significantly affected by Douyin browsing ($\beta = 0.042$, $p = 0.32$) or Douyin interaction ($\beta = -0.002$, $p < 0.05$). Concerning RQ4, more frequently interacting with on-campus friends tended to predict greater resilience ($\beta = 0.337$, $p < 0.001$). On the contrary, communications with off-campus friends ($\beta = 0.022$, $p = 0.70$) and strangers ($\beta = -0.029$, $p = 0.47$) via Douyin seemed not to significantly improve levels of resilience.

**Figure 2** Illustration of path analysis.

Note: *** $p < 0.001$.

Based upon the above results, we further examined the direct effect of social support seeking on evaluation of resilience, as well as the indirect effects mediated through the frequencies of Douyin updating and communication with on-campus friends, respectively. Our findings indicated that the propensity to seek social support had no significant direct effect on the level of psychological resilience ($\beta = 0.060, p = 0.58$). However, with respect to RQ5, the indirect path from a stronger inclination of seeking social support to better resilience via frequent Douyin updating was significantly positive ($\beta = 0.251, p < 0.001$). In a similar vein, RQ6 was answered by noting that the other indirect path, mediated through interaction with on-campus friends, was also observed to be significant ($\beta = 0.116, p < 0.001$).

There were several additional findings related to the control variables included. Participants' age was negatively associated with their frequency of Douyin updating ($\beta = -0.116, p < 0.01$), and communicating with on-campus friends ($\beta = -0.183, p < 0.001$) and off-campus friends ($\beta = -0.202, p < 0.001$). Differently, participants with higher monthly household incomes had an increased inclination to engage in Douyin interaction ($\beta = 0.087, p < 0.05$) and Douyin updating ($\beta = 0.143, p < 0.001$), as well as communicating with on-campus friends ($\beta = 0.137, p < 0.001$) and off-campus friends ($\beta = 0.126, p < 0.01$). Whereas individuals from relatively prestigious higher education institutions revealed a greater propensity for Douyin interaction ($\beta = 0.093, p < 0.05$), they were associated with a decreased level of psychological resilience ($\beta = -0.087, p < 0.05$).

Discussion

The findings from our study indicated that college students seeking social support were inclined to actively utilize SNSs, including activities like updating their status. Regarding the individuals they interact with on SNSs, students exhibited a preference for familiar connections, irrespective of whether these individuals were on the same campus or not. Furthermore, communication with friends from the same campus was identified as a significant mediator in the relationship between active SNS usage and resilience levels among college students.

Results of path analysis suggested that college students' propensity to seek social support did not directly impact their levels of psychological resilience. This is in line with previous research in the sense that social support should be perceived,^{35,36} or the resources for social support should be accessible and disposable,^{2,37} in order for it to yield intended effects on the well-being of the support seeker. Depending on specific SNSs activities and interactants, its usage served as a mediator that significantly connected the act of seeking social support to the recipient's psychosocial well-being. In particular, among the three types of SNSs activities under consideration, participants seeking social support gravitated toward the option of updating their status. The underlying rationales for this preference can be threefold. Firstly, young people who strongly feel the need for social support or are genuinely motivated to seek it find themselves predisposed to openly and actively ask for assistance.³⁸ This willingness stems from recognizing their own inherent demand for support. The evolution of technology has transformed SNSs into dynamic platforms that not only facilitate social interactions but also serve as instrumental tools for users in their pursuit of help and support.^{39,40} Secondly, the nature of problems that require support tends to be highly individualized, rather than generalized.⁴¹ Given this specificity, merely browsing through others' profile and status information, or interacting by leaving comments or sending messages, may not be sufficient to provide the tailored assistance they desire. Thirdly, active SNSs users may accumulate social capital or emotional value from acquaintances, which contributes to their overall well-being improvement by sharing recent life experiences in the forms of text, audio, or video content and regularly interacting with others.⁴² When it comes to the consequences of support seeking behaviors, only the frequency of SNSs updating activities displayed a significantly positive correlation with levels of psychological resilience. This seems to suggest that SNSs per se function more as a bridge and do not directly forecast the state of well-being. Instead, it is individuals seeking support who proactively participate on SNSs that hold the potential to enhance their health and wellness.

Interactant-wise, participants' inclination to seek social support was observed to have significant relationships with communications entailing both on- and off-campus friends, while showing no correlation with those involving strangers. This finding resonates with existing literature that emphasizes the importance of familiarity, credibility, and trust in the exchange of social support.^{43–46} While individuals tend to seek and provide assistance within familiar social circles, the reinforcement of credibility and trustworthiness establishes a reciprocal and effective network of social support. On the other side, however, only engaging with on-campus friends exhibited a noteworthy capacity to predict levels of resilience. The contrast between the psychological outcomes of interactions with on- and off-campus friends could

imply that, even though computer-mediated communication might enable and facilitate the delivery of social support, it remains less potent compared to interactions that can seamlessly transition into face-to-face conversations when needed.⁴⁷ Last but not least, our findings showed that interactions with strangers had a negligible impact on the connection between the tendency of social support seeking and the level of resilience. This observation provided supporting evidence to a lineage of research that negates or minimizes the effectiveness of strangers in the exchange of social support.^{48,49}

Limitations and Future Research

For future research, it is essential to address certain limitations that surfaced during this study. First and foremost, the participants in our study were predominantly college students in China, which could potentially restrict the applicability and generalizability of our findings to a broader context. Different cultural backgrounds and variations in access to SNSs among college students across different countries can shape their preferences and patterns of seeking social support. To mitigate this issue, future research is suggested to encompass cross-cultural analyses to gain a more holistic perspective. In addition, our study mainly considered the mediating roles of SNSs activities and interactants. However, it should be noted that the functionalities and community atmospheres embedded within different SNSs can significantly influence how individuals seek social support. This underscores the need for future research to explore how SNSs platforms' functional and cultural differences affect their users' seeking of social support. Finally, although our study incorporated attending a comparatively prestigious school as a control variable, we did not delve into the potential effects of academic performance and future career prospects on incentivizing the pursuit of social support. These factors are intricately linked to support seekers' purposes and motivations. A deeper examination of their impacts might generate valuable insights into the complex interplay between education, career goals, and the quest for social support.

Conclusion

This study explored the relationship between college students' propensity to seek social support and their psychological resilience, mediated through distinct SNS activities and interactants on Douyin. The results demonstrated that students in need of social support tended to engage in active behaviors on SNSs, such as updating their social media status. They also preferred to interact with familiar individuals, regardless of their geographical proximity to campus. Moreover, active SNS usage had a significantly positive impact on resilience levels, wherein communication with friends from the same campus was identified as a reliable mediator. Our study contributes to the existing body of literature on social support and adolescent health by highlighting that the effectiveness of social support on psychosocial well-being depends on the specific types of SNS activities and interactants involved.

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Disclosure

The authors report no conflicts of interest in this work.

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