

Discussion on the Causes and Characteristics of the "Buddy Socializing" Phenomenon among Contemporary Youth

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Abstract: The "Buddy-style" socializing, as an emerging social paradigm, is characterized by flattened relationships and refined companionship with vertical domain segmentation. It facilitates the breakthrough of interpersonal communication from complex relational networks, gaining widespread favor and general acknowledgment among the youth. The formation of this social model can be primarily attributed to the "Need for Boundaries" in Interpersonal Relationships, self-release in a fast-paced society, the transformation of communication concepts in the digital age. Its distinct features are manifested in the following aspects: precision companionship-style, Appropriate boundary awareness, weak ties Replacing Strong Ties.

Keywords: Buddy Socializing; Social Characteristics; Weak Ties; Strong Ties

1. The Forming Causes of "Buddy-Style" Social Interaction among Youth

In April 2023, the term "buddy" emerged as a popular concept in internet discourse, gradually evolving into a social paradigm highly favored by youth demographics. A "buddy" denotes a provisional community formed by individuals with congruent hobbies or interests, oriented primarily around personal needs. Distinct from traditional friendships or professional relationships, this model sees members revert to their respective life trajectories without mutual interference upon the completion of a specific activity [1]. Buddies can be taxonomically categorized according to diverse activities or interests, encompassing exemplars such as "meal buddies," "travel buddies," "fitness buddies," and "shopping buddies," among others. The genesis and widespread adoption of "buddy-style"

socialization can be attributed to the following key factors.

1.1 The "Need for Boundaries" in Interpersonal Relationships

At present, youth groups increasingly emphasize interpersonal boundaries, as crossing safe social thresholds can induce anxiety and discomfort among young people. For instance, when a college student faces "marriage urging" or "salary inquiries" from relatives and friends, they may be reluctant to disclose truthful information while fearing that explicit refusal could damage existing relationships. Even with close friends, youth are averse to being questioned about sensitive topics and privacy, such as family background, romantic experiences, or personal income. "Buddy-style" socializing emphasizes the maintenance of social distance: "buddies" gather based on one or several shared hobbies, interacting only during specific activities and disbanding afterward without inquiring into each other's family background, emotional history, or income — thereby avoiding mutual embarrassment and providing a sense of security in social boundaries. This model alleviates psychological burdens and stress, contributing to its popularity among youth demographics.

1.2 Self-Release in a Fast-Paced Society

In the context of accelerating social rhythms, an increasing number of relationships have assumed a "fast-food-style" nature, with youth groups finding their free time encroached upon by unproductive social connections. As a result, the time available for personal disposal has shrunk, leaving young people with limited capacity to navigate complex and sticky interpersonal networks. Concurrently, a growing segment prioritizes self-improvement over investing financial resources, energy, and emotion in

maintaining social interactions. Youth aspire to liberate themselves from the stable yet "viscous social entanglements" of traditional interpersonal relationships, seeking "weak ties" that entail mutual independence and minimal investment of time, energy, or emotion. "Buddy-style" socializing precisely caters to the youth's need for self-relief and emotional release, offering a model that aligns with their desire for low-cost, boundary-maintained companionship in the face of modernity's time constraints and relational pressures.

1.3 The Transformation of Communication Concepts in the Digital Age

Traditional concepts of social interaction are rooted in the acquaintance society, with a longing for stable and intimate relationships. For example, if A and B are good friends, there is an expectation to disclose everything to each other, engaging in inseparable activities such as dining, traveling, and shopping together. However, with the rapid development of the internet, an increasing number of new social concepts have been rapidly disseminated to households through digital channels, becoming familiar to youth groups. Concurrently, Western values of "independence" and "individuality" have influenced their social attitudes. A segment of youth has gradually recognized that interpersonal relationships can also achieve "low-cost" and "high independence." Consequently, leveraging the internet, they have become enthusiastic about seeking "buddies" from diverse backgrounds online, satisfying personal curiosity and emotional needs. This shift reflects a departure from traditional relational norms, as youth embrace digital-mediated interactions that prioritize flexibility and minimal emotional investment, aligning with the evolving landscape of modern social cognition.

2. The Characteristics of Buddy Social Interaction among Contemporary Youth Groups

In the digital age marked by rapid social changes, contemporary youth are embracing a novel social paradigm — "buddy-style interaction" — shaped by their pursuit of efficient companionship and clear interpersonal boundaries. This emerging trend, characterized by task-based engagement, flexible relationships, and "weak ties" dynamics, reflects how youth

navigate the tensions between emotional needs and individual autonomy in fast-paced society. Rooted in shared activities rather than deep emotional entanglement, such social patterns highlight a paradigm shift in youth's communication concepts, warranting exploration of their psychological motivations and sociocultural implications.

2.1 Precision Companionship-Style Emotional Experience

As a form of emotional companionship, social "buddies" not only address individual needs with precision but also generate positive subjective experiences and spiritual enjoyment, enriching youth emotional landscapes. Need Satisfaction under Spatiotemporal Matching Contrasting with traditional acquaintance-based socializing, youth "buddy" socializing emphasizes precise companionship in spatiotemporal dimensions and targeted fulfillment of social needs, confining interactions to specific contextual fields. Currently, youth face misalignments in life trajectories due to academic transitions, career mobility, etc., making long-term stable companionship difficult to sustain — thus rendering "episodic friendships an unavoidable reality, with deep social bonds becoming increasingly arduous to form" [2]. Consequently, youth prefer "buddies" that align with their spatiotemporal schedules to meet daily needs for sharing, emotional venting, and interactive communication. Leveraging digital technologies like big data and algorithmic recommendation, cross-time-space interactions have become more convenient, satisfying youth demands for efficient, free, and instantaneous socializing. This circumvents the "emotional void" caused by spatiotemporal mismatches in traditional socializing, offering a delicate and warm emotional substitute [3]. Emotional Companionship under Comfortable Boundaries Modern youth prioritize social boundary awareness, with establishing clear and comfortable interpersonal boundaries emerging as a key social norm. Social boundaries — distinct from "social barriers" — denote the optimal physical and psychological distance in interactions, serving as "self-protective mechanisms in interpersonal relationships" that balance defensive exclusion with communicative permeability [4]. For social "buddies," comfortable boundaries form the prerequisite for

emotional engagement. Unlike traditional ambiguous boundary models, "buddies" are utility-oriented, rejecting excessive emotional involvement or intrusive inquiry; any unilateral boundary violation triggers immediate disconnection. For youth, the "familiar yet respectful" boundary awareness equates to security, shielding them from implicit "emotional blackmail" while satisfying needs for group interaction, emotional exchange, and precise companionship. Psychological Soothing amid Collective Loneliness. With accelerating social rhythms and escalating uncertainties, youth anxiety and alienation have evolved into inexpressible "collective loneliness."

2.2 Appropriate Boundary Awareness

The rising emphasis on "social boundary awareness" in the social practices of contemporary youth reflects their pursuit of maintaining appropriate interpersonal distances across diverse life scenarios, as they increasingly seek new social paradigms that integrate a sense of propriety, bottom-line thinking, and quality. The "buddy-style social model" emerges against this backdrop: it establishes connections through shared interest profiles or companionship needs, achieves precise identification and aggregation of homogeneous groups via segmented interest tags, and proactively constructs interpersonal networks with clear boundary attributes. Characterized by "scenario-based interactions," this social form focuses each engagement on specific tasks (such as shared meals or companionate studying), neither intruding into each other's private lives nor violating the youth's demand for personal privacy protection. From a sociopsychological perspective, "buddies" have become a communicative vehicle for some youth to break free from the constraints of traditional social conventions, enabling emotional release and self-expression through lightweight connections. In the fast-paced modern society, this model serves as a "delicate and warm emotional substitute," satisfying immediate companionship needs while avoiding emotional entanglements in strong-tie relationships. Amid the deepening tide of individualization, youth aspire to both shape unique social identities and seek group recognition for self-expression. Allocating needs from different scenarios—study, entertainment, daily life—to exclusive "buddies" does not

signify a degradation of social quality but a paradigm shift toward higher-level social experiences. The unique value of this model lies in allowing youth to express demands more naturally and directly: it meets practical needs through "task-oriented companionship" while maintaining individual independence via "low emotional dependency." When youth share dining pleasures with "meal buddies," achieve fitness goals under the supervision of "workout buddies," or alleviate emotional stress through resonance with "drama-watching buddies," "buddy-style socializing" leverages its flexible adaptability to provide a life path for contemporary youth to return to their authentic selves. This enables individuals to maintain social connections while safeguarding inner independence, achieving the precise upgrading of social experiences in the balance of "companionship without boundary transgression."

2.3 Weak Ties Replacing Strong Ties

The "Weak Ties" theory, proposed by Mark Granovetter in *The Strength of Weak Ties*, refers to interpersonal interactions featuring low frequency of contact, weakened intimacy, and minimal emotional investment, which allow individuals to disengage flexibly without incurring significant emotional costs. In contrast, strong ties denote close, stable, and interdependent relationships typically found among family members, close friends, colleagues, or long-term partners [5]. The prevailing "buddy-style" socializing among today's youth is essentially in high alignment with the Weak Ties theory: social models represented by "meal buddies," "study buddies," and "fitness buddies" center on precise companionship in vertical domains, maintaining low-frequency situational interactions—connecting only when specific needs (such as dining or studying) arise—while adhering to the principle of light emotional investment by focusing on concrete tasks rather than deep emotional exchanges. These relationships also feature flexible terminability, as their establishment and dissolution are entirely based on immediate needs without requiring long-term maintenance. With the accelerating pace of modern life and the deep penetration of internet information technology, such weak ties are expanding through digital carriers like short-

video platforms and interest-based communities, relying on the "safety boundaries" of a stranger society. [6] They are gradually replacing traditional strong-tie networks centered on kinship and geographical proximity, dominating the social space of youth. This "weak socializing" model enables participants to satisfy their companionship needs while avoiding the emotional pressures of strong ties, constructing new forms of weak-tie interpersonal relationships with a "non-intrusive" sense of boundaries. It reflects the profound shift in youth social concepts in the digital era — from "emotional entanglement" to "precise adaptation."

3. Summary

As a social landscape shaped by the new generation of youth, "buddy" socializing manifests the diversified social demands of youth from emotional experiences to interactive connections, from inner psychology to external behaviors, and from real-world fields to virtual spaces, mirroring the transformation of youth social psychology and behavioral patterns. In this regard, the new phenomenon in youth socializing should be viewed with a comprehensive, rational, and dialectical perspective. Through measures such as psychological adjustment, breaking barriers to expand social circles, and behavioral guidance, we should comprehensively enhance youth interpersonal interaction and social skills,

thereby promoting youth socialization and achieving all-round development.

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