The Design and Analysis of an Online Emotional Ethics Assessment

Li Li[1],   David Cruise Malloy[2],   Dongyan Ru Blachford[3]

Abstract: With the rapid development of the internet an online world of virtual society has emerged along with the phenomenon of online behaviors characterized by anonymity and none- physical presence. Therefore came the issues of the danger of online bullying and none-ethical behaviors as well as the issues of how to regulate online behaviors. One of the essential elements that affects one's online behavior is one's moral emotions. This research aims at developing a set of valid and reliable survey questions to measure people's online moral emotions. The method is first , to review related literature and theoretical frameworks, then develop and pilot a survey on randomly selected 200 university students and then follow up with interviews. The data was then checked by the fitness of relevant index to arrive at a final selected questions and scales to be used on the online public in China.

Key words: online ethics, assessment of online moral emotions, Chinese university students as online users

According to China Internet Network Information Center (CNIC), in its 41th "China Internet Development Statistics Report", by the end of 2017, there are 772 million online users. The rate of internet penetration is 55.8%. Among the users 753 million or 97.5% of them use smartphones. 35.2% users are at the ages between 18-24, followed by 19.7% users aged 25-30 and those below the age of 18. It is clear to see that the young people constitute the majority of the users and the trend is towards even younger users. University students are major users of internet as well. Therefore, the rapid spread of the online world has a great influence on their online moral cognition, moral emotions, moral awareness as well as their online behavior. Moral emotion is an important part of moral structure. Moral emotion is an intermediary that transfer moral cognition into moral behavior and an internal drive for one's moral will and behavior. Moral emotion is an internal warranty for individual moral development and the

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[1] **Li Li, PhD, Professor,** Administration college of Hunan Province in China.
E-mail: lili2059@163.com **Phone:** 13975876082.
[2] **David Cruise Malloy , PhD, Professor, University of Regina .**
3737 Wascana Parkway,Regina,Saskatchewan Canada ,S4S 0A2
E-**mail:** david.malloy@uregina.ca **Phone:** 306-585-5184
[3] **Dongyan Ru Blachford ,PhD,Professor, University of Regina .**
North residence,N 110.2, Regina,Saskatchewan Canada ,S4S 0A2
E-**mail:** dongyan.blachford@uregina.ca **Phone:** 306-585-5186

development of a healthy personality. This study focus on the university students online moral emotions.

Literature review and the research question

In the 1940s, a well-known expert in cybernetics, N. Wiener first raised the importance of ethics in computer science. In 1976, he developed the theory of "Computer Ethics" focusing on unique ethical issues emerged specifically from the field of computer technology.[4] J.H. Moor's 1985 article "What is computer Ethics" has been regarded as the mark of the beginning of the theory in computer ethics. In the 1990s the field was expanded to include new concepts such as information ethics, internet ethics, and cyber ethics, etc. According to H. T. Tavani, internet ethics is a field of applied ethics in the study of issues of ethics, law, and society in relation to internet technology. It analyzes the impact of such technology on the society, ethics and the law as well as analysis of relevant policies, regulations, and laws to address these issues. A Chinese scholar, Geng Yan, provided a definition in his book "internet ethics": it is a set of ethics that regulates social behavior of the users in the era of information technology (1998). Another Chinese scholar, Shouqi Liu, thinks that internet ethics is the principle which should be followed by the internet users and which is to form a new ethic relations between morality and ethics.

Since 1950's scholars from China and abroad have conducted research on online ethics and online moral emotions especially on evidence of online moral behavior. Online moral emotions refers to the emotional reactions and feelings positive or negative towards certain online materials and behavior based on one's intrinsic values and moral principles (Shuzhen Zhang, 2010). Such emotions if positive could strengthen online users' self-regulation and respect towards online ethics and rules at the same time have strong negative feelings towards bad online behavior and have strong positive feelings towards ethical online behavior. It is a sustainable individual value and inner experience. Online moral emotion is a reflection of one's general social moral emotions in real life. Therefore, it has the characteristics and forms of the moral emotions off line.

Studies on the essence and characteristics of moral emotions. In the ancient history of Chinese philosophy, many classic studies discovered the topic of moral emotions. It can be traced back as early as pre-Qin period in the work of Confucianism. "benevolence, ren" was regarded as the most important principle in Confucianism and the essence of "ren" is to love which is a moral feeling. Manchus once said conscience and benevolent knowledge were in fact kindness and compassion. Such is the

foundation of moral emotions. In addition, Manchus also explained that moral emotions are intrinsic which were not given by others. He believes that humans by nature are kind and therefore human feelings are intrinsically towards kindness and goodness. According to Manchus there were four intrinsic human emotions: compassion, shame, respect, and conscience. Different from Manchus, Xunzi believes the opposite that human nature is intrinsically evil. He describes human beings in two domains: physical and psychological. He further explains that as far as physical beings are concerned, one wishes to eat when hungry, longs for warmth when cold, and craves for rest responding to hard labour. Psychologically, all human beings prefer glory to shame and desires benefits and fears harm regardless one is a gentleman or a villain. To him the bottom line is that either from the aspect of physical or psychological, human beings were born evil. Another Chinese philosopher in the early Chinese history is Zhu Xi who believes that if one has the compassionate feeling, one has the tendency to be a kind person. A modern author, Xuegong Sun studies four aspects of moral emotions: its nature, characteristics, structure and function. He offered a discussion in relationships between moral emotions and the understanding of ethics. He also emphasizes the importance of cultivating moral emotions. His work has contributed to this area of study.

In an article "ethical psychology", the authors Zhaoxin Zeng and Jianhua Li provided a definition for moral emotions: it is one's positive or negative feelings or attitude based on one's understanding of morality. It is a psychological activity when one deals with ethical relations and assess oneself and other's behavior. Qingsong Sang (2010) offered another definition: it is an internal emotional experience accompanying moral behavior. He studied the negativity of moral emotions in the character/personality development of the university students. Xiaoman Zhu (2005) based on a comprehensive synthesis of related studies in moral emotions, comes to the conclusion that moral emotion is the core of human spirit. Its purpose is to express one's value of life and one's spiritual need. It is an internal experience, situational evaluation, response selection, empathy and compassion. Although there are different emphasis regarding moral emotions from various authors, we could see three commonalities: First, it is individual. It is one's internal experience, feelings, attitudes, moods and reactions. Although it is largely psychological, it can be physical as well; Secondly, it has the characteristic of subjectivity or one's subjective needs; Thirdly, it can be transferred or felt commonly via empathy and therefore it could influence one another through emotional communication. It reflects a construct need of oneself.

The British concept of moral emotions originated from the Scottish Enlightenment Movement in which two schools of thought emerged:

rationalism and emotivism. The impact of the latter far surpased the former. The major representatives for the Emotivism group is Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, Adam Smith etc. Moral emotions question if one's ethics need to satisfy one's internal experience or feelings as well as subjective attitudes. The earliest one to raise the concept of moral emotions is British Ethics Scholar Shaftesbury. His concept was later reorganized into a coherent system of theories which were further developed and improved upon by scholars like Joseph Butler, D. Hume, and A Smith. Shaftesbury believes that emotions are the foundation and origin of one's ethics and that is why he created the concept of moral emotions which were introduced as a core element to the study of ethics. Therefore it involves both rationalism as well as emotivism. Using Shaftesbury's concept, Hutcheson developed it further by pointing out that one's external experience has a stake with one's life, but one's internal moral judgement is based on one's inner emotions expressed through the process of moral judgment. He explained why this process establishes one's subjectivity of the ethics from its origin of emotions to one's moral emotion and finally ethical judgment. Hume added new elements to the concept. He thinks that moral emotions are one's internal positive or negative reactions/feelings and judgments based on a resonance of empathy and compassion. Hume stood out among the group of thinkers, because, not only he provided a systematic critic to the rationalism's idea of ethics, but also established the relationships between rationalism and emotivism and their relevancy to ethics. He comes to the conclusion that emotion is the source of all behavior and therefore it is the foundation for behavior related to morality.

Employing a scale for measure sympathy among junior high students designed by a Japanese psychology, Uchida Y, a Chinese researcher, Huixin Fu combines the ability of moral judgment and sympathy as an individual cognition to study the relationship between emotion and the behavior of helping others. Zeteng Xu proposed another way to cultivate moral emotions among current university students. He believes that the classroom could be a major venue where educators use noble feelings and personal integrity to arouse student's moral emotions and to strengthen students' emotional experience in morality. We noticed that these studies are limited only to certain aspects of moral emotions. The limitations were reflected by their research tools such as SES scale designed by Rosenberg translated and edited into Chinese. Another tool is "university students' shame scale" developed in 2000 by Mingyi Qian et al. In addition, there is also a "sense of responsibility survey" comes out of the educational research institute of Southwest University in China.

Studies on the Structure of Moral Emotionas

Before delving into the analysis of online moral emotions, it is essential to understand the content and structure of moral emotions. It

is an integrated body of high level human feelings which have multiple levels and multiple dimensions. The dimensions were further divided into three aspects by Xiaoman Zhu: contents, forms, and abilities. First, contents include a sense of self awareness, a sense of sympathy to others, a sense of awe to the natural world, and a sense of responsibility. Second, the forms which again have four types: 1. one's natural sense of morality, 2. illusionary or imaginary sense of morality, 3. morality in social rationality, and 4. self-transcendence. Third, abilities which include: 1. ability to imagine, 2. ability in awareness, 3. ability to understand experience, 4. ability in empathy resonance, and 5. ability in response and regulation. Researchers, Jiamei Lu and Lei Xu compiled a "survey of moral emotions for youth" in which they analyzed exploratory elements and concluded that the youth moral emotions consist four elements: 1. patriotic feelings, 2. feelings of love and care, 3. honesty and justice, and 4. feeling of responsibility. The same two scholars also designed a similar survey for university students in China which in addition to the above four elements have extra elements such as feelings of contribution/self-sacrifice, public services, credibility, and fairness/justice etc. Another similar survey designed by Jiamei Lu and Wei Liu et al was tested on 10,056 graduate students from 51 universities across 14 major cities in China. The results indicated that the graduate students' moral emotions include the following similar elements: patriotic feelings, responsibility, integrity, sense of contribution and self-sacrifice, public services, credibility as well as fairness and justice etc. They found that the graduate students' moral emotions in general are developing well, but there is a greater need to be strengthened. These studies across one's life stages from youth, undergrad to graduate students identified that although they have an increased sense of responsibility, their integrity is decreased. Another scholar, Yan Dai (2004) pointed out that the content of moral emotions is extremely rich which can include relationships between humans and nature, humans and society, between humans themselves, as well as between self and others. These emotions can be manifested in feelings of internationalism, patriotic, honor, obligation, responsibility and friendship etc. Yan Dai and Haiyan Liu designed a similar study for elementary school students which focused on the basic human moral emotions such as feelings of self-respect, sympathy, responsibility and shame, etc. (Kai Gen) believes that there are five basic elements in moral emotions: anxiety, empathy, responsibility and guilty, tireness and resentment, and confusion and unsure.

Through a comprehensive literature review, we discovered that there are not many scholars in China studying structures moral emotions. Most scholars focused on elements of online moral emotions. For example, Xiaomei Fan thinks that moral emotions include mainly the feelings of

responsibility and guilty, resentment and enjoyment. Yanyong Li wrote that a good online moral emotions include a sense of responsibility, high level of national self-respect and patriotic feelings. Xiaohui Ma views the online moral emotions to have a positive feeling towards moral behavior and a negative feeling towards immoral behavior. Based on the extensive review of literature in China and abroad and combined it with the current social environment and online reality, this research intends to explore structures of online moral emotions by employing Chinese university students. The design of the survey so far divides the structure in four basic emotional aspects: an online sense of responsibility, sense of shame, sense of justice and fairness online, and online empathy.

Identified gaps in current research

Many philosophers, educators, psychologists and social scholars have all studied various aspects of moral emotions and recently online moral emotions. As a result, a theory of moral emotions have been studied systematically as well as analyzed and studied with empirical cases. The development of theories in emotional psychology provided a theoretical framework for the study of moral emotions education. Scholars abroad with a large number of studies and experiments, developed some educational models which are not only reliable but also practical. With the development of the IT industry, internet becomes an integral part of modern life and research on online ethics increased and achieved good results. But, there are still issues: first, there has been a lack of a clear definition of online moral emotions and its structures are different according to different scholars. Second, especially in China, the moral emotions are often studied within the framework of political thoughts with a focus of developing models for political education but rarely drawing the theories of ethics. Third, a large number of studies in China have a value orientation towards collective values, patriotic spirit and a strong sense of ethos emotional quality. And all educational models are based on such orientations. There has been a lack of studies in individual moral emotions. Forth, most studies are at the macro level with very few focuses on online moral emotions. Fifth, the current assessment tools do not differentiate moral cognition and moral emotion. It only measures a combination of the two aspects. Sixth, there is a need to develop an accurate assessment tool specially designed for online moral emotions. Up to now scholars in China and abroad have largely focused on aspects of moral emotions and its essence. What is lacking is a systematic study of overall moral emotions and their measurement tools, let alone such tools for evaluating online moral emotions.

Online morality has become a special focus for studies on ethics. The above reviews and analysis of the existing studies revealed that current studies have focused their attention on the concepts and behavior of online morality such as online bullying, online violence, online

addiction, and online immorality, etc. Very few focused on online moral emotions. A handful related studies are with a perspective of moral quality with individual elements such as empathy, shame, sense of responsibility or guilt, which lacked a focus on studies for overall quantitative assessment of online moral emotions. The method of the current studies are mainly speculative and provided discussions without employing survey and empirical studies. To our knowledge, there has not been a valid and reliable assessment model for online moral emotions. Therefore, it is the intention of the authors to work towards it. This research will design and pilot test such a model with university students in China as research subjects. The purpose is two folds: to develop a valid and reliable assessment tool and to discover and analyze the realities of online moral emotions for this group of online users.

Hypothesis and methodology

Hypothesis1: university students' moral emotions have multidimensional structures.

Hypothesis2: There is a significant demographic deviation of university students' moral emotions with regard to their sex, years at university, length of time of being an online user, daily online time, types of universities or programs enrolled, religious associations or moral orientations.

This study has two stages:

Stage one: with a consideration students' areas of studies, 50 open-ended questionnaires were sent to students from three universities in China. Forty-nine responses were received. Based on the results of the initial survey and literature review combined with interviews of students as well as experts in the field of psychology and testing, we designed a 52-item pilot survey questionnaire for university students to assessment their online moral emotions.

Stage two: with a consideration of students' major, age, sex, and years at the universities we sent out the pilot survey to 200 students at the same three universities. The responses were entered into spss17.0 for the results of exploratory factor analysis to secure its validity and reliability. As a result, a final questionnaire was developed.

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