Abstract

There has been diverse changes in the age of first criminal offense and both types and patterns of crimes amid the changes in social structure. In relation to that, this study was intended to provide explanation from the standpoint of anomie theory postulated by Emile Durkheim.

Anomie refers to a state in which there is an absence of dual standards or norms. In other words, dual standards or absence of norms arise from failure to establish new norms in the midst of weakening influence of previously prevailing norms, thereby causing a confusion reverberating throughout the society.

Particularly, the spread and use of SNS, spurred by advancement of ICT(Information and Communication Technology), are weakening social norms, and furthermore, online norms are still remained in unchartered territory.

Amid such confusion over norms, juvenile delinquency has been increasing.

Social media is characterized by far-reaching dissemination, openness, accessibility, relationship, and diversity of contents. This kind of social media, which grows like an organism, is not subject to ordinary mechanism for consumption and production. Rather, social media is characterized by two-way communication allowing users to participate spontaneously, share information, and create contents in the process.

In particular, social network service(SNS) has the characteristics of media influencing the mode of thinking and behavior of users.

Thus, cyber space improves solidarity, bond, and mutual understanding which bring down the wall of race, ethnicity, gender, and transforms the structure of consciousness, viewpoint, and lifestyles of people based on formation of shared values, and tear down traditional social structure.

Social media has far-reaching ripple effect and influence as it is a service enabling simultaneous interchange and communication with many unspecific people without any constraint on time and space. Especially, social media functions as a stepping stone to recognize the peer group norms while the recognized norms serve as barometer of social value and efficiency. Therefore, social media is likely to open the path to juvenile delinquency.

Friends in cyber space on social media platform have some extent of mutual psychological relevance and tend to share many things over specific matters.

This share ability may lead to norm recognition among peer groups, and the recognized norms will function as universal norms in society.

As social media is triggering this anemic social environment and strengthening online interpersonal relationship, creating a social network structure separately from offline relationship through solidarity reinforced via SNS.

Social media has been widely accepted as a tool for communication, information gathering/exchange, and contact among adolescents, which eventually increases the chances of contact resulting in juvenile delinquency.

In Korea, however, institutional regulations or policies have not been clearly laid out in Korea despite some research findings that social media has direct or indirect influence on youth crimes or realistic issues swirling over adolescent criminal offenses.
This reality suggests that social media has been used as hotbed of crime and that cyberspace is likely to see an upswing in number of youth crimes for the upcoming period.

[Keywords] Youth Crime, Anomie, Juvenile Delinquency, Social Media, SNS

1. Introduction

Recent years have witnessed changes in the age of first criminal offense and types and patterns of crimes amid the changes in social structure.

From the perspective of Emile Durkheim towards social structure, Anomie Theory assumes that social relationship, culture, technology transformation, etc., may have inherent elements triggering crimes, which is a theory providing an insight into relationship between social structure and crimes.

Currently, youth crimes are deemed to be fuelled by the influence of social network in contrast to the past when youth crimes were considered to be primarily attributable to broken families.

Anomie Theory is being leveraged as a tool to examine the factor of effect which the prevailing paradigm, such as social structure, social system, social institution, etc., may have on individual activities.

Thus, this study was intended to analyze juvenile delinquency which is triggered or induced by social environment of social media through the prism of anomie theory.

2. Informatization & Anomic Social Environment

Informatization refers to processing the knowledge and data, materials, etc., into any form of information to increase value[1], or means compiling the data/materials collected through observation or measurement in a useful form[1].

Therefore, the value of information is determined by the efficiency achieved in the course of such processing and use, rather than its value per se. This kind of information-based society is playing a decisive role in creating and ushering in future society.

The influence and risk of information throughout the society arise from such process. Internet and SNS(Social Network Service) are playing a pivotal role in bringing about changes and spur innovative changes in overall aspects ranging from daily lives of individuals to government systems.

In relation to that, cyber space opens up and expands boundaries of new virtual world, developing in a pattern contrary to real world.

Cyber space overcomes limitation of physical proximity, tears down the barriers of culture, expands the reach of personal area or local communities to a national or global level, and promotes value sharing in all fields including politics, economy, culture, etc., thereby bringing about devolution of monopolistic power of government or corporations[2].

Anomie theory, postulated by Emile Durkheim as mainstream Theory of Tension, refers to a state of dual standards or absence of norm. In other words, dual standards or absence of norms arise from failure to establish new norms in the midst of weakening influence of previously prevailing norms, thereby causing a confusion reverberating throughout the society[3].

Social media is triggering such anomic social environment. Such social environment characterized by absence of norm(anomic state) arises from failure of existing prevailing norms or failure in establishing new cyber norms, and has a direct normative influence on adolescents familiar to social media.

Thus, social media on a path to expansion can serve as platform promoting creative and unrestrained expression of ideas and innovation of new values while it is also used to satisfy individual desires under the cover of anonymity and non face-to-face nature of
cyber space not regulated institutionally and even used for deviations such as slander, fraud, illegal substance abuse, obscene materials, etc., which give rises to adverse effect on society[4].

According to a survey by Korea National Youth Policy Institute(2012) on current use of social media among adolescents, the adolescents with experience in using the SNS comprised 52.4% of all respondents.

Moreover, the study by Lee Bok-hee, et al., showed that the adolescents who had used SNS for 1-3 years accounted for 48.2%, the highest proportion, followed by those having used SNS for more than 3 years(23.2%) and those having used SNS for 6 months to 1 year(15.6%). Based on the time spent on the use of SNS per day, the adolescents who answered that they spent 2-5 hours per day, both weekdays and weekends, comprised the highest proportion(31.4%), followed by those who answered that they spent less than 1 hour(30.7%) and those that they spent 1-2 hours(25%) per day[5].

Social media has far-reaching ripple effect and influence throughout society as it is a service enabling simultaneous interchange and communication with many unspecific people without any constraint on time and space.

Especially, social media functions as a stepping stone to recognize the peer group norms while the recognized norms serve as bellwether of social value and efficiency. Therefore, social media is likely to open up the way for juvenile delinquency. Friends in cyber space on social media platform have some extent of mutual psychological relevance and tend to share many things over specific matters[6].

This shareability may lead to norm recognition among peer groups, and the recognized norms will function as universal norms in society.

Albert Bandura explains in the Theory of Social Learning(1977) that the attitude and behavior of peer group can be learned indirectly by observer without having first-hand experience[6][7].

A survey(2015), conducted by Korea National Statistical Office on current use of internet and social media among adolescents, showed that average time spent on use of internet per week was 14.4 hours among teenagers(20.5 hours among those in their 20s) in 2014 and that adolescent using the internet at least once a day accounted for over 97%, the highest proportion[8].

According to this survey, harmful media used by middle and high school students at least once in 2014 was obscene materials on mobile phone(52.6%), the highest percentage, followed by adult programs on cable TV(42.7%) and adult periodical publications(34.1%).

The number of adolescents who pointed to obscene materials on mobile phones and adult programs on cable TV, etc., as harmful media increased almost two-fold compared to 2012[8]. The data published by the Ministry of Health & Welfare of Korea Republic suggested that there has been a surge in use of adult games or speculative games amid the increased use of harmful media among adolescents.

81% of adolescents who played games indicated that they experienced disruption to external activities(31.7%) and learning(25.7%) or violent impulse(23.6%) as adverse effect of games[9]. Thus, contact with various social media, including internet, may be considered as the factor triggering speculative/adventitious crimes or curiosity-induced crimes among adolescents.

3. Characteristics of Juvenile Delinquency in Korea Based on Informatization Elements

3.1. Lowered average age of criminal offense

As the focus of youth culture is shifting towards cyber environment, the age of youth crime has been lowered.

The data, published by Korea’s Supreme Public Prosecutor’s Office for 2014, showed that the age of adolescent offenders in violent crimes was 17 in 471 cases accounting
for 13.7%, the highest proportion, followed by the age of 16 in 397 cases(11.5%), the age of 15 in 373 cases(10.8%), and the age of 18 in 369 cases(10.7%).

Youth crimes tended to imitate adult crimes in many cases, and particularly, were influenced much by cyber environment.

Cyber environment represents a place and space that allows adolescents to log onto and act under the cover of anonymity without much restriction and special filtration process. That is considered attributable to the fact that SNS is a tool facilitating such login for adolescents.

3.2. Increase in violent crimes

The data, published by Korean National Police Agency, showed that 13,846 teenagers(aged from 10 to 18) were arrested on charges of violent crimes, such as homicide, burglary, rape, and arson, etc., between 2011 and 2014, out of whom more than 1,000 adolescents committed homicide and arson and 2/3 of them were sexual offenders.

The surge in violent crimes was found driven by the use of various informatization media not subject to special regulations on login, and this trend is likely to continue in the period ahead.

3.3. Organized crime

As cyber environment expands rapidly, youth crimes tend to be increasingly organized. This tendency of organized crimes is fueled by the characteristics of adolescents who are easily influenced by friends or circumstances and their desire to belong to a group, and particularly, is driven by the desire to find a social breakthrough abnormally by joining abnormal groups(delinquent groups) through cyber connection when they are not recognized by normal groups.

Groups formed in that way exhibit a tendency to hold informal meetings continuously and perform special rituals for stronger solidarity of members, and vent out dissatisfaction with society by engaging themselves in delinquent behaviors. Through such process, they feel recognized and secure within group and are swayed by mob psychology.

Those groups tend to have low morality and clouded judgment, and consequently, have high consciousness of resistance against the society and exhibit aggressive and irresponsible attitude towards criminal behaviors.

3.4. Low guilt consciousness

Adolescents have yet to establish their self-identity and therefore seek their self-identity through imitation of surrounding environment. Thus, surrounding environment is very important for adolescents and interested only in their consumptions as they are not equipped with production ability.

Moreover, adolescents pursue social relationship with a focus on their friends or colleagues rather than family, place an added importance on leisure more than works, show challenging attitude towards adult culture, and furthermore, experience conflict between ideal and reality and between tradition and Western culture.

Particularly, they tend to use social media excessively and have excessive reliance on social media.

These wandering characteristics of adolescents are also revealed clearly in their view on society. According to “2013 survey on honesty index of adolescents”, published by Young Korean Academy’s Transparency Movement Ethics Research Center which surveyed 21,000 elementary, middle, and high school students nationwide, 47% of high school students answered that it would be ok to go to jail if they were given KRW 1 billion.

Meanwhile, 19% of elementary school students, 27% of middle school students, and 36% of high school students answered “Yes, I think so” to the proposition “Difficulties facing the neighbors would not matter to me if I could live well.” This provides a window into awareness of adolescents towards crimes and shows the widespread tendency of self-centered thinking.
4. Countermeasures against Juvenile Delinquency

4.1. Institutional regulations

The Juvenile Protection Act in Korea specifies harmful media, harmful substances, harmful articles, and businesses harmful to adolescents, thus regulating distribution of harmful media, etc., and banning access to businesses harmful to adolescents and prohibiting employment in such businesses.

However, SNS is not regulated institutionally thus far, apart from government policies. There are pros and cons swirling around the regulation of SNS.

Those in favor of regulation of SNS point out that SNS is no more a private space and has already become a public space and therefore should be regulated in light of its far-reaching influence and ripple effect on contemporary society. By comparison, those against regulation of SNS lambaste the regulation for restricting the lives of the public who use the internet in their daily lives and infringing upon freedom of individuals, stating that SNS is a space to build community for private communication and therefore cannot fall under public realm.

However, minimal regulation may be deemed necessary to keep illegal contents or social harm at bay, like other media subject to regulations. Filtration may be needed to stave off negative effect caused by SNS in public realm, even when SNS falls under private realm.

4.2. Educational management

Education represents a process for development of wholesome persons and a means for social revamp. Specifically, education promotes formation of desirable personality, laying the cornerstone for happy and valuable lives in personal life, family life, and social life, and ultimately promoting advancement of society[10].

Education should be provided with consistent interconnectivity among family, school, community, guardian organization, etc. Particularly, adolescent period is characterized by sensitive reaction to social community tools such as mass media, internet, social media, etc., and unconditional following. Thus, family and school have important roles to play.

4.3. Self-regulations

Self-regulation can be the last resort for upholding social discipline in the absence of institutional systems and educational dysfunction. Self-control refers to the traits or characteristics with which a person performs works in accordance with his or her principles or exercises moderation by controlling himself or herself[1].

In other words, self-regulation relates to the thinking and behavior at their own free will without undue coercion or temptation of governmental authority or private groups, and always involves responsibility[1].

Thus, self-control refers to the freedom to act on his/her choice while upholding the principles for controlling and ruling his/her behaviors. The best solution to the issue of juvenile delinquency may be the self-regulation by which adolescents can control and rule themselves based on reasonable choice.

5. Conclusion

Youth crimes tend to become more violent and organized gradually.

Although social media has direct or indirect influence on such youth crimes, few unambiguous institutional regulations have been enacted to curb the youth crimes.

Thus, prevention of juvenile delinquency may hinge on enactment/enforcement of minimal institutional regulations, promotion of educational functions, and greater sense of responsibility on the part of adolescents for their delinquent behaviors.

6. References

6.1. Journal articles


6.2. Books


6.3. Additional references


Author
Gong Bae-wan / Kyungnam University Professor
B.A. Ecole des Hautes Études Internationales
M.A. University Liberty of Brussels
Ph.D. University of NancyII

Research field

Major career
- 2012~present. Korean Association for Public Security Administration, Vice President
- 2013~present. Korea Security Policy Association, Vice President