The Influence of Social Platform Privacy on Self-Construction and Public Opinion Tendency -- Sina Weibo and WeChat as Examples

Siyuan Zhou*

School of European Studies, Beijing International Studies University, Beijing, 100024, China

*Corresponding author: 2019220363@stu.bisu.edu.cn

Abstract. In recent years, a number of social events have attracted widespread attention on various different social media platforms. Among them, the public perceptions of the same event are different on different media platforms. Because of the different privacy of different social media platforms, they have different degrees of influence on the self-construction of users, the composition of interpersonal relationships on social media platforms, and the tendency of public opinion on social media platforms. This paper focuses on two different social media, WeChat and Weibo, and examines the reasons for the phenomenon of "WeChat being silent and Weibo being active" from the perspective of their functions and characteristics and investigates the impact of this phenomenon on public opinion tendencies. This paper concludes that people are more neutral and conservative in commenting on socially focused events on social media platforms where privacy is disclosed to easy acquaintances because of the psychology of building a positive self-image, but on social media platforms with fewer acquaintances, people do not need to be responsible for their own statements, so they are less burdened when speaking, and therefore their statements have more obvious tendencies. Under the influence of this tendency, social media platforms with more privacy will have a more conservative opinion tendency and vice versa, a more aggressive opinion tendency.

Keywords: Social media platforms, Self-construction, Public opinion tendency.

1. Introduction

With the gradual improvement of network infrastructure, various media social platforms are widely used and have entered people's daily lives. According to the 49th Statistical Report on the Development Status of the Internet in China released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) in Beijing, the size of China's Internet users reached 1.032 billion as of December 2021. According to the Q1 2022 financial results released by Sina Weibo and Tencent Holdings, Weibo reached 582 million active users, and the combined monthly active accounts of WeChat and WeChat stood at 1,288.3 million. Sina Weibo and WeChat, as phenomenal social platforms, have become one of important ways for contemporary college students to show their self-image. Due to the different private nature of these two social platforms, the users are oriented to different social objects and modes. As an open platform, Weibo mainly focuses on the weak social relationship with strangers, and the content of its homepage is displayed to strangers, and comments and likes are also fully open; unlike Weibo, the main social objects of WeChat are mostly friends and relatives or classmates and colleagues, which is a social circle of acquaintances with a strong relationship. In WeChat's circle of friends, only common friends will show comments and likes. On these two platforms, users' self-representation is also very different.

Previously, most of the available literature has been an in-depth study of both the privacy of each social media platform and the self-constructed characteristics of users in different social media platforms. Among them, the studies on the privacy of social media platforms have mostly focused on users' privacy attitudes. In 2006, S. B. Barnes first used the term "privacy paradox" in social networking research to name the paradox between users' awareness and real behavior. Since then, based on this research system, a large number of scholars at home and abroad have studied the issue of the privacy paradox in social networking sites by quantifying users' privacy attitudes and detecting the influence of their attitudes on their behaviors. However, their aim is mostly to make suggestions

for users' privacy security and the optimal development of social networking sites. Regarding users' self-construction on different social media platforms, most studies in China focus on the influence of the external environment on their self-presentation. Self-presentation was first introduced by the sociologist Goffman and referred to "the effort to present oneself in front of others in order to make them see oneself as they wish." People's efforts to present themselves are realized through role-playing. In the role-playing process, people will systematically control and create their own role performance according to the stage situation, social regulations, and others' expectations of their roles to achieve the desired purpose. The ultimate goal is to maintain their positive character image in the minds of others [1]. Unlike the one-to-one information dissemination channel in the traditional media era, with the development of network technology, various emerging social media platforms have emerged, and the release of information has become more flexible. On emerging platforms such as Baidu, forums, QQ, microblogs, and WeChat, users can not only watch the information content posted by others but also participate in it themselves. Under the influence of this interactive social model, individuals' comments on public events on the Internet also become a process of constructing their own identity. At the same time, in the age of social media, the forwarding of information becomes easier, and the identity of users can shift flexibly between publishers and disseminators of information. A message may be widely spread in society and cause a buzz through the forwarding and commenting of a few influential users with a large number of followers. With the intersection of these three situations, users' content posted on social platforms with different privacy and comments on content posted by others may vary out of the psychological desire to project a positive image in front of others. This paper focuses on the influence brought to them by two platforms, WeChat and Weibo, in terms of privacy. Further, it explores the differences in what college students say and share under the such influence and the impact of their performance on the current trend of public opinion.

This paper investigates the impact of privacy differences between WeChat and Weibo on the self-construction of college students' groups. WeChat, as a more private platform, is distinctly different from the relatively open platform characteristics of Weibo, and this difference impacts college students' self-presentation during their socialization. Using a literature review and combining theories from sociology, psychology, and communication, this paper selects Sina Weibo and WeChat as research objects to discuss the differences between the two platforms in terms of privacy, the characteristics of self-presentation behaviors of college student group users on the platforms and the construction of interpersonal relationships by their self-presentation, to further explore the differences in the content of social media presence on personal ways of being and This will further explore the impact of the difference in social media presence on personal existence and social opinion.

2. Privacy differences between Weibo and WeChat

2.1. Weibo

2.1.1 The development of Weibo

The first company to introduce the concept of microblogging in China was "FanFul", founded by Wang Xing. In the beginning, there was little difference between Fanful and Twitter in terms of functionality. Since 2008, when Twitter showed great influence in the Obama campaign, imitation Twitter sites started to sprout up in China. With the emergence of a large number of micro-blogging sites in August 2009, Sina has improved its competitiveness among its peers by modeling itself on Twitter and making a series of optimizations, such as creating a discussion module more in line with Chinese users' habits, adding a new function to send pictures, and inviting entertainment stars and social celebrities to join the site [2]. In addition, Sina Weibo has opened up the registration channel so that users can sign up for Sina Weibo through other websites' email addresses, which has laid a good foundation for the future rise of Sina Weibo.

2.1.2 Functions and Features of Weibo

2.1.2.1 Functions

With the continuous development of Sina Weibo, the functions that have been established so far are: posting content, liking, commenting, retweeting, helping on headlines, private messaging, and more.

Posting content: Users can post content (tweets, videos, articles) they want to post on their own homepage. The content posted by users will appear on the user's homepage after review, be marked as original, and be viewed by any user. Users can add the related topic with "#" when posting content and see all the content posted by other users who have added the topic in the related topic.

Likes: When viewing the information presented by Weibo, users can express their attitude towards the content by liking it. Weibo has now made more detailed categories for likes, such as "sad", "surprised", "hug ", "happy," and "like", so that users can classify the emotions they want to express more carefully.

Comments: Users can comment on any of the tweets they have skimmed. Comments only appear under the tweet they are commenting on, and the content of the comment will be presented to all other users who see the tweet.

Retweet: Users can comment on a tweet by retweeting it, and the comment and the original tweet will appear on their own homepage, and any user can view the comment.

Help make headlines: Users can purchase a Weibo to make headlines by recharging. The tweet that makes the headlines will appear first in the stream of the followers of the user who posted the tweet.

Private messaging: In June 2022, Sina Weibo changed the private messaging mechanism. Only one message can be sent until the private message recipient replies, and normal chat can only resume after the private message recipient follows or replies.

2.1.2.2 Features

Because Weibo has the features described above in terms of the functions they provide to users, the user community on Weibo can receive and distribute information content in a timely manner and engage in discussions with others on topics of interest at any time. As a result, Weibo also has characteristics that make them different from other social media platforms in terms of information dissemination.

2.1.2.2.1 Rapid information dissemination

In a net-like media platform, every Internet user is both a disseminator and a receiver and re-disseminator of information on the Internet. The identity boundary between information recipients and disseminators is not obvious, and the transformation is extremely easy and fast: every user can speak and comment. Because of the timely nature of microblogging information, this mode of communication often shows a fission-type of spread [3]. Once a core user retweets a message, its followers will quickly spread the message, and the spread will be received by other ordinary users. After this one-to-many to many-to-many spread, the information can create a sensation in a very short time.

2.1.2.2.2 More freedom of speech

For example, the same user can register multiple accounts directly through cell phone numbers, different website emails, WeChat, and QQ. IOS users can even log in to Sina Weibo through their Apple ID. In this context, real and online identities do not correspond, and the influence of communication theories such as agenda setting and the spiral of silence in social media applications is diminished, and Weibo users are more willing to express their opinions about social events reported on the web because they are not responsible for what they say [3].

2.2. WeChat

2.2.1 The development of WeChat

In January 2011, Tencent developed and launched WeChat. Initially, WeChat mainly focused on real-time communication, photo sharing, changing avatars, multi-person calls, sending voice messages, and more. Its main contacts were also added by importing QQ friends, cell phone contacts, and searching for WeChat signals. In the subsequent development, WeChat also launched various functions such as "shake" and "drift bottle" to enrich its shortage of stranger friendships. In this way, WeChat established a strong social relationship chain with acquaintances as the core and built a strong communication and sharing system under the influence of one-to-one communication, group chat, and circle of friends [4]. In addition to upgrading communication and social aspects, WeChat has also realized the expansion in information services, life services, business and industrial services, such as WeChat Public, various small programs, government mobile information platform, payment functions, and suchlike.

2.2.2 Functions and Features of WeChat

2.2.2.1 Functions

With the continuous development of WeChat, the functions established so far are chat, friend circle, public number, small program, payment function, and more.

Chat: Users can communicate with people they know in real-time through cell phone contacts, QQ friends, and suchlike. They can also meet the social needs of strangers through "people nearby" and other functions. At the same time, users can also invite friends through WeChat, face-to-face group building, QR code scanning, and other channels for group chat.

Friend circle: Users can post what they want to post in their own friend circle, which can appear in their friend circle and the friend circle of their WeChat friends after review. Most users will choose to manage their circle of friends; for example, only show one month's circle of friends, only six months' circle of friends, and set the circle of friends of non-WeChat friends not visible. The new release of the circle of friends will also set the visible crowd and will have the option to block some WeChat friends.

Public number: The emergence of public numbers provides a new communication channel for traditional mass media and new self-media. Individuals, governments, enterprises, and media organizations can become the subject of public accounts and push messages to subscribers [5]. Subscribers can selectively forward and share the information of articles they think are valuable to their WeChat friends, WeChat groups, or within their circle of friends.

Applets: WeChat applets are a kind of application that can be used without downloading the corresponding software, which greatly reduces the burden of too many applications on users' cell phone memory. Since WeChat has bound and authenticated users' real identities on a one-to-one basis, only personal information needs to be authorized for normal use when using the app.

Payment function: Users can use WeChat's payment function after associating with their bank cards and can make purchases, transfer money, send red envelopes, and such. They can also transfer money from their WeChat wallets to Zero Money for financial management.

2.2.2.2 Features

Because WeChat has the features described above in terms of the functions it provides to its users; the WeChat user community also has characteristics that are different from those of other social media platforms when they engage in social activities.

2.2.2.2.1 Strong links and high interaction

Mark Granovetter, a famous American sociologist, proposed the "strong and weak relationship theory" in 1974. Granovetter called the more stable and close relationships such as relatives, classmates, friends, and colleagues "Strong Ties". The members of a network of strong ties interact more frequently because they are more intimate in certain forms of interaction. WeChat's channel of

forming WeChat friends based on cell phone address book and QQ friends makes WeChat social obtain a strongly connected social relationship [5]. Moreover, a strong connection takes more time to maintain, so users will choose the information content familiar to each other to enhance each other's feelings. In the social circle of close relationships, more emotional expression flows between users than the high transmission line of information.

2.2.2.2.2 More accurate information delivery

Because the users of WeChat are more closely connected, and the channels for obtaining information are relatively private, the dissemination of a message within WeChat is less likely to receive interference from outside. Since WeChat's communication targets are mostly acquaintances, friends and relatives in the cell phone address book. Weibo focuses on mass communication, and the target of communication is usually an uncertain and unfamiliar majority; therefore, the credibility of information is higher than that of Weibo [6]. For example, there are almost no online hirelings and ghost followers in WeChat, so the transmission of information in WeChat is more accurate, and credibility is relatively high.

2.3. Differences between Weibo and Wechat in terms of the privacy

As mentioned above, WeChat is more private than Weibo in terms of personal information. The use of WeChat requires a cell phone and ID card, while the use of Weibo does not require much. Therefore, WeChat usually has one account for one person, while Weibo can have multiple accounts for one person. In terms of information dissemination, WeChat is more private than Weibo. Only friends can like and comment on the information posted in WeChat's circle of friends, and only mutual friends can see the content of their likes and comments, while all users of the microblogging platform can see the information once it is posted. Therefore, WeChat naturally screens out fake accounts that may be manipulated by capital, which greatly improves the accuracy of information delivery and reduces the efficiency of information dissemination.

2.4. Differences between users' privacy disclosure on Weibo and WeChat

Compared to WeChat, which focuses on acquaintance socialization, Weibo focuses more on shallow relationship socialization, which is mostly one-way communication, with Weibo users choosing to follow each other based on the same interests. Because of this, privacy leaks on Weibo are more prominent [7]. Although most people are concerned about the possibility of their privacy being compromised, they still do not stop disclosing their privacy on Weibo and WeChat. There is a clear difference in the self-disclosure and privacy protection of "personal information" between the two platforms, mainly to deal with the risk of "horizontal surveillance" from "others", especially "acquaintances", rather than to prevent "panoramic surveillance" from "platforms or other third-party organizations" [8]. This is why people choose Weibo, with its higher degree of privacy exposure, as a platform for their free speech.

3. The classification of social platform self-construction

3.1. Self-presentation

The concept of self-presentation and impression management theory first appeared in Canadian sociologist Goffman's Self-Presentation in Everyday Life. In that book, Goffman proposed that people want to present a respectable and noble personal image to others in human interaction. At the same time, expect to maintain the good image that the individual has originally established [4]. That is, self-presentation refers to the efforts made by individuals to present themselves in order to make others see them as they wish.

3.2. Motivation for self-presentation

Daily, people express themselves by posting or sharing content on social media platforms, liking or commenting on others, and the attention of others gives users the motivation to perform themselves. Users can guide each other to know themselves and make a good impression of themselves in the process of communicating with other individuals. Therefore, the intrinsic motivation of self-presentation is the beautification and modification of self-image [2].

3.3. Differences in self-presentation under different social platforms of WeChat and Weibo

By summarizing the existing literature, a very common phenomenon can be found: most users post positive content on WeChat, while they show more negative emotions on Weibo. This phenomenon is related to the privacy of interpersonal relationships on both WeChat and Weibo social media platforms. The differentiated presentation of individual images mainly satisfies the needs of individual self-presentation, emotional release, personal expression and gaining social recognition. In terms of platform perceptions of WeChat and Weibo, WeChat is considered to have certain behavioral norms and is mainly used for social interaction, while Weibo is used more casually and is mainly used for self-confession [9]. On a strong relationship platform like WeChat, people are more concerned about others' perceptions of them, so they are more cautious in posting their opinions and try their best to create a positive image of themselves, and tend to present an idealized self; while on a weak relationship social media platform like Weibo, information is published and spread very quickly, and everyone can freely express themselves in a large stream of information. At the same time, because there is no mandatory registration requirement for Weibo, it is effectively the equivalent of an anonymous social networking platform. Under anonymity, people are less worried about revealing their privacy in front of "others", less concerned about expressing their opinions, and more inclined to seek approval from other users [10]. At this point, people are less inclined to present only positive images of themselves.

4. Conclusions

In summary, Weibo and WeChat have very different characteristics in terms of user privacy and information dissemination patterns. Due to the different needs for personal information at the time of registration, a user can register multiple Weibo accounts in many different ways but can only be tied to at most one WeChat account on a one-to-one basis. The more connected a user is to an account, the closer the account's self is to the user's real self in the eyes of the user. Therefore, in order to idealize the self and portray a positive image in the eyes of others, users will make adjustments to the statements they make to reach their desired goals based on the privacy differences of the social media platforms they are on. In the course of reviewing the literature, there are numerous references to this phenomenon.

In this trend, because Weibo users' accounts are less connected to their real selves and their Weibo social circles do not overlap much with their real social circles, Weibo users have fewer concerns when making statements, and thus their tendency to make statements is more pronounced and aggressive. At the same time, since the information dissemination method of microblogs is net-like, information spreads faster, so when faced with a social event, users on microblogs will quickly find and join their own inclined opinion camp. Since WeChat users' accounts are closely related to their real selves, and their social circles overlap with their real social circles, WeChat users have more concerns when making comments, so they rarely have a clear tendency and are more conservative when making comments. However, because of this, the credibility of WeChat users' messages is higher than that of microblogs, and after all, in real-name social media, users are responsible for their own statements.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the privacy of social media does affect users' self-construction and thus indirectly affects what they say. Therefore, the trend of public opinion presented by social media with different privacy has become completely different. Meanwhile, in recent years in China,

the credibility of social media such as WeChat and Weibo has been enhanced as never before, and more and more people choose to voice their opinions on public media platforms to seek support and assistance from others. Under this trend, the impact of the privacy of individual social media platforms on the propensity of public opinion should be taken seriously, and at the same time, targeted research and proper management are urgently needed.

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