

# Study on the Self-presentation in the Use of the Netizens' Micro-blog Alternate Accounts from the Perspective of Dramaturgical Theory

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**Abstract:** In recent years, with the expansion of the user scale of micro-blog and the improvement of socialization, micro-blog has evolved into an important socially influential social media platform from a personal life sharing platform. Facing social pressure and the risk of privacy disclosure, the users have begun to seek more private and personalized communication means, thus micro-blog alternate accounts emerged as the time require. This thesis explores the self-presentation behaviors of micro-blog users in both their main and alternative accounts and studies their behavior through snowball sampling and semi-structured interviews. From the perspective of dramaturgical theory, it compares the performance differences between netizens in the “front stage” and the “back stage”. The study found that the emergence of micro-blog alternate accounts is to meet the diverse needs of users in privacy protection, information screening and social interaction. Meanwhile, users also need to follow corresponding principles when using micro-blog alternate accounts.

**Keywords:** Dramaturgical Theory, Micro-blog Alternate Accounts, Self-presentation.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. The Research Background

Since the micro-blog launched in August, 2009, micro-blog has quickly become one of the most popular social media platforms among young people. At first, it was mainly used as a platform to record and share personal life, allowing users to share what they ever seen and experienced anytime and anywhere. With the expansion of the user scale of micro-blog and the improvement of socialization, micro-blog has evolved into an important socially influential social media platform. Nowadays, micro-blog contains a dazzling array of content, from political issues to current news, to entertainment gossip and sports games, almost everything. It has become an important channel for the majority of netizens to obtain information and express their opinions[1]. In addition to the richness of content, micro-blog also provides a variety of interactive capabilities, such as likes, comments, shares and private messages, which enable users to interact with their families and friends in real time and even make new friends. At the same time, however, as an open platform with nearly 600 million active users, every interaction may be observed by others, thus the risk of “cyberstark” has led some users to seek more private and personalized communication means.

In order to meet the diverse demands, the micro-blog alternate accounts emerged as the time require. Different from the usual practice of using only one real-name registered account to log in, the emergence of micro-blog shows that a single account can no longer meet the needs of users in terms of privacy protection, information screening and social interaction. The problems of personal privacy disclosure, information overload and social fatigue on social networking platforms are becoming more and more prominent, causing users to face increasing social pressure. Therefore, by establishing a micro-blog alternative account, users can relieve these pressure to a certain extent, protect their privacy, and express their opinions and emotions more freely. In social interactions, people tend to play different roles according to

different contexts and purposes in order to shape their desired impressions. This is what we often refer to as self-presentation behavior, in which an individual arouses the interest and favorable impression of others by presenting aspects of their own images and traits, thereby enhancing their influence and status in social situations. On the social media platform of micro-blog, the motivation, strategies and effects of users' self-presentation in both main and alternative accounts are worth exploring in depth.

### 1.2. The Research Significance

#### 1.2.1. Theoretical Significance

The understanding of the dramaturgical theory can be further deepened by researching the self-presentation behaviors of micro-blog users in both main and alternative accounts. The dramaturgical theory suggests that people play roles in social interactions to shape their desired impressions. By observing and analyzing the self-presentation behaviors of micro-blog users on different platforms, it is possible to understand more concretely the application of the dramaturgical theory in social media environment, to reveal how users manage their own images through acting in cyberspace, and to better comprehend the psychological mechanisms behind the behaviors of social media users[2]. By analyzing users' motivations, strategies and effects of self-presentation on different platforms, it is of great significance to understand deeply the emotional needs, social expectations and privacy protection needs of individuals in cyberspace, which is important for understanding and explaining the behavioral characteristics and psychological needs of social media users. Meanwhile, this study can provide new cases and perspectives for the enrichment and development of self-presentation theory, especially for self-presentation behaviors in the emerging environment of social media, which can further expand the scope of application and explanatory strength of self-presentation theory. An in-depth study of the self-presentation behaviors of micro-blog users between the main and alternative accounts can help us understand more

deeply the specific operating mode of dramaturgical theory in the social media environment. The dramaturgical theory emphasizes that people play different roles in social interactions and use this to shape the impression they expect to leave in the minds of others<sup>[1]</sup>. By carefully observing and analyzing the ways in which micro-blog users present themselves on different platforms, we are able to paint a more concrete picture of their performative behaviors in cyberspace and understand how they manage their online images in this way.

This kind of behavioral research can not only help us better grasp the psychological mechanisms behind social media users' behaviors, but also provide us with a deeper understanding of individuals' affection needs, social expectations and privacy protection needs. Analyzing users' motivation for self-presentation on different platforms, the strategies they adopt, and the effects they ultimately present can reveal to us the complex psychological process of users' pursuit of self-expression, social identity and privacy protection in social media.

### 1.2.2. Practical Significance

An in-depth study of micro-blog users' self-presentation behaviors in the main and alternative accounts can provide a reference basis for the optimization of social media platforms' functions. Understanding users' behavioral preferences and needs on different platforms can help platforms provide services and functions that are more personalized and in line with users' expectations, enhancing users' experience and satisfaction. For example, to meet the needs of different user groups, more flexible privacy settings and personal information management tools can be designed to help users better protect their privacy and information security. Meanwhile, users can also strengthen their awareness of personal information management and privacy protection. Understanding the patterns of information dissemination and usage on different platforms can help users manage their personal information and behavioral trace more carefully and reduce the risk of information disclosure and privacy invasion. At the same time, through education and publicity, users' attention to Internet security and privacy protection can be raised to promote the healthy development and good order of cyberspace.

Social media has become an important part of people's daily life and has a profound impact on individuals' social, emotional and professional development. The harmonious development of social media and personal life can be promoted by studying the self-presentation behaviors of micro-blog users in the main and alternative accounts. Understanding users' behavioral habits and psychological needs on different platforms can help balance the relationship between the usage of social media and real life, reduce the negative impact of social media on personal life, and achieve positive interaction and mutual development between social media and personal life.

## 1.3. Research Overview of Domestic and Abroad

### 1.3.1. Application of the Dramaturgical Theory

Most of thesis searched in CNKI take the dramaturgical theory as an entry perspective, treating a social situation as a stage, analyzing a character's performance behavior, and discussing it from the sociological point of the view of interpersonal interaction. With reference to Goffman's framework of the dramaturgical theory, Wang Yunjiao(2014)

respectively analyzes the theatrical framework of the skip-generation raising of the "only two generations" as a performing repertoire from the perspective of the script, the drama class, and the performance area.

Goffman's dramaturgical theory has been refined into many combinations of theories, including "front stage and back stage", "impression management" theories and so on. The theory of front stage and back stage has been widely used as a research framework in essay writing. Zhou Yan(2015) considers micro-blog as the front stage of performance in comparison with Goffman's dramaturgical theory, and specifically explores how young people present themselves on the diversified micro-blog platform.

In addition, the dramaturgical theory has also been applied to research in the field of communication, some researchers using the dramaturgical theory as a framework to explore how individual or group images are created; Tang Qi(2021) analyzes how Li Ziqi's image was constructed in the video from the component factor of impression management based on the dramaturgical theory. In addition, there are also female celebrities' behaviors that how to conduct the self-presentation in the micro-blog domain. Liang Ying(2013) used the dramaturgical theory and gender theory to analyze female celebrities' self-presentation in the front stage of micro-blog and psychological activities implied by gender discourse in the back stage.

### 1.3.2. Domestic Research Status

With the continuous development of China's social media, more and more scholars began to pay attention to the user's social media using behavior, these studies are closer to the actual situation in China, and the study of the self-presentation behavior of China's netizens is also more targeted. At present, most of the studies on the self-presentation behaviors in the use of netizens' alternate accounts focus on the motivation, strategy, effect and the impact of self-presentation in reality and so on. Regarding the motivation of netizens' self-presentation behavior, Wang Danna(2022) argued that netizens' use of micro-blog is mainly to satisfy the need for anonymous expression and to release their pressure in the social environment. Regarding the strategies of netizens' self-presentation behaviors, Cheng Shiyu(2022) classified social media users' alternative account using behaviors into four types, anonymous participation, instrumental use, emotional expression and ritual performance, which satisfy the need for "invisibility" in the public sphere, the convenience of "two accounts are used together", the express of "emotional tree-hole", and the online disclosure of "private-self".

Meanwhile, some researchers have also conducted a comparative study on the contents posted by the micro-blog main and alternative accounts, and found that the alternative accounts mainly express themselves in text form, accounting for 96.4% of the types of posts, while the main account users more often use pictures in the form of blog posts, accounting for only 33.3%. In addition, the analysis of textual morphology reveals that the content posted by micro-blog is mostly presented in the first-person perspective, with negative emotions as the main mode of expression. Therefore, from the point of view of the posting content of the alternative account, users of the alternative account are closely related to personal emotions, and they tend to drain their emotions and express their inner thoughts on the alternative account. In social media, from ordinary users to entertainment stars, it is very common to use the pattern of the main and alternative accounts.

**1.3.3. Foreign Research in the Field**

With the arrival of the Internet era, users’ self-presentation on social media has also received attention from foreign scholars, and most of their related studies have focused on the purpose of self-presentation, the behavior of self-presentation, the influence of self-presentation, the effect of self-presentation, etc. Jung(2007) et al. categorized the motivation of online self-presentation into entertainment, self-expression, professional advancement,time spending and communication with family members and friends, etc. through the study of users on Cyworld website. Jones and Pittman(2007), on the basis of their research on online self-presentation strategies, systematically categorized interpersonal interaction strategies as ingratiation, competence, intimidation, supplication and exemplification. Scott Counts(2012) and others pointed out that during self-presentation people prefer to present a positive image of themselves and show more subjective awareness in the presentation of their images. Jennifer L Gibbs(2012) and others analyzed and described online self-presentation behavior and studied the differences between online interpersonal communication and offline interpersonal communication. Therefore, foreign scholars’ related researches on self-presentation have certain referential significance for this study. However, due to the micro-blog users are mainly domestic users, foreign scholars have less research on this platform, and the social environment of domestic and foreign users of social media platforms and their social habits are different, and most of the foreign research on the alternative account of social account focuses on the

definition of the alternative account, there is less relevant literature to obtain in the use of micro-blog alternative account.

**1.4. Research Method**

In this study, snowball sampling and semi-structured interviews were used to study the performance of Internet users’ use of micro-blog alternative account. The main criteria for sampling are that the netizens have a micro-blog alternative account and have been using it for more than one year, and that there should be a clear difference between the content and concerned objects posted by their micro-blog alternative account and those posted by their micro-blog main account. Through snowball sampling, this study finally selected 10 micro-blog alternative account users from different cities, and numbered the Interviewees according to A-J, with the age of the Interviewees concentrated in the age range of 16-25 years old. 80% of the 12 Interviewees were female, 20% were male, 20% were high school students, 20% were office workers, and 60% were college students. At the beginning of the study, a one-month field observation was conducted on the micro-blog accounts of several selected Interviewees, on the basis of which semi-structured interviews were conducted with them by means of WeChat voice calls, which lasted for 1-2 hours. The interviews lasted for 1-2 hours. The content involving the privacy of the interviewees has been technically processed.

The interview outline is organized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The interview outline

Purpose of creating a alternative account	1.What was your initial purpose for setting up a micro-blog alternative account?
	2.Do you want your friends and family to follow your micro-blog alternative account? Why?
Content and the follower situation of the micro-blog alternative account	3.Which type of content would you post on the micro-blog alternative account and why wouldn’t you post that content on the main account?
	4.Do you have followers on your alternative account?
Differences between the main account and alternative account	5.Will there be a difference in the users you follow on your main account and alternative account?
	6.Is there a difference in the image presented by your main account and alternative account? What do you think of the image respectively?
	7.Which do you think is a more realistic image presented by the main account and alternative account? Why?

Combined with the interview responses, the uses of the alternative accounts, are organized in Table 2. Interviewees’ micro-blogs, both main accounts and

**Table 2.** Use of main accounts and alternative accounts

	Reception	post
The main account	Forwarding and sharing of family and friends	Positive and sunny plog
	Social, entertainment, sports and other news	Learning related content
	Friends life news	Skill sharing
	Video of online celebrity blogger	Advertisement Promotion
	Celebrity news	Interactive content with friends
The alternative account	“Stalk” other people’s micro-blog	Emotional “tree holes”, complain
	Focus on specific areas of information	Chasing stars for data
	Follow the news of the top fans of stars	Love record

## 2. Motivations of Self-Presentation in Netizens' Micro-blog alternate accounts

### 2.1. The Privacy Requirements: Establish a Privacy Personal Space

In real life, the need for socializing has led most netizens to follow each other with their friends and family on micro-blog, forming a close online social circle. However, individuals feel overwhelmed when their behavior and speech are excessively concerned, so netizens need to take a break through a relatively secluded back stage, briefly escaping from an audience-filled stage to gain a relatively private space for self-presentation.

"When I was a freshman, I post a blog to complain our league branch secretary of the class, but it turned out that after a few days the league branch secretary knew about it and came to ask me face-to-face, so certainly some of my classmates who were following me must have told her about it, so I created a alternative account specifically because I didn't want to be monitored by these classmates." (Interviewee H). Browsing the interviewee H's main account can be found, three years ago, H did post a blog that complaining the league branch secretary in a high rack, and since then it is rare to continue to post blogs related to his/her own lives and moods.

In addition, in recent years, the rapid development of social media brings convenience, but meanwhile it also exacerbated the phenomenon of cyber-violence, the arrival of the era of big data makes the individuals in the network as if they have become transparent, a person's academic qualifications, occupations, family in the network are not a secret, the people who are interested in following the traces will be able to find out all of this information. "I really don't dare to use my main account to argue with people on the Internet because my main account follows the official micro-blog of our school, and I also follow a lot of my classmates, so in case my information was slipped out by cyber-violence, it's really not worth the loss" (Interviewee B).

At the same time, some interviewees said that the excessive attention of their loved ones also puts them under pressure, "My mum follows my micro-blog, so I don't dare to complain about the bad things I encountered in school on it for fear that she will worry about me if she sees my blog." In this case, they need a private corner more than ever to balance and reconcile the need for emotional communication and self-protection with their loved ones.

### 2.2. The Tool Properties: Meeting the Needs for Convenience

With the advent of the information age, the Internet is no longer just a platform for people's entertainment, more and more netizens have begun to use the Internet as a tool to collect information, find resources and satisfy their hobbies. Most of the netizens' micro-blog alternative accounts were registered at the stage when the real-name system of the Internet was not yet popular, thus micro-blog alternative accounts have become a powerful tool for netizens to satisfy their needs for basic convenience in addition to social needs.

"Firstly I built this account for star chasing, I would share many blogs related to my favourite star every day, and I would

also use micro-blog for data, I was afraid that some of my friends who are not star chasers would get annoyed when they saw me share these every day, so I built a alternative account specifically for star chasing." (Interviewee E).

Micro-blog platform is chased after by celebrity fans due to the large number of celebrities settled on the platform. Various marketing accounts and the main celebrity fans have become active users on the platform, and even become the main force driving the growth of the micro-blog KPI. However, many netizens do not want their star chasing to be known by people around them, or do not want their frequent star chasing blog to disturb other people, so they use the alternative account to satisfy their star chasing needs.

"I'm a beauty blogger, I don't have a lot of fans, I built this alternative account mainly because I want to draw the distance close between me and my fans, I sometimes post some adverts in my main account, but not in my alternative account, I will talk to my fans as if they were my friends, but I actually still hope that they can know me better through my alternative account and then pay more attention to my main account, after all, the main account is the source of my daily income!" (Interviewee C).

The micro-blog alternative account as back stage sometimes complement the front stage performances. As Interviewee C said, as a blogger, an emerging Internet profession, she needs to use the alternative account to better shape her own character setting and increase the stickiness of her followers, so as to better run her own main account. For online celebrity bloggers like Interviewee C, the images displayed by main accounts and alternative accounts are not the real them, just a means adopted to realize their interests.

"I often use my alternative account to stalk my ex-boyfriend's micro-blog to see if he is doing well these days, and I am relieved to see that he is not doing well, after all, he has hurt me before." (Interviewee A).

In addition to being used by netizens to satisfy something, alternative accounts are also sometimes used as a tool to satisfy the curiosity of stalking other people's privacy[2]. In the era of big data, it has become normal to pay attention to other people's moments through social media, but many interviewees still said that for their classmates who have had contradictions, colleagues, ex-boyfriends or ex-girlfriends, etc., they are still in an antagonistic relationship with themselves, they don't want the other group to find out that they are still paying attention to, they think it is a kind of bowing down or a manifestation of admitting defeat, and even a bit of shame, so they will use alternative account as a more secretive tool to satisfy their curiosity of stalking others' privacy. Thus they will use alternative account as a more secretive way to follow each other's social accounts. "After the micro-blog can view the visitor record, I have found once our classmate who has a general relationship with me often look at my micro-blog, but she did not follow me, in fact, there will be questions in mind: why is she always peeking at the micro-blog? So when I peek at my ex-girlfriend's micro-blog, I will definitely use alternative account, just to avoid this embarrassment of being discovered." (Interviewee H).

### 2.3. The Affection Needs: "Tree holes" for Free Speech

Goffman put forward the concept of mystification performance, he believes that the more familiar an individual is with a person, the easier it is to make light of him, so the

individual should keep a proper distance from others in daily interactions, so as to make the others have a kind of reverence psychology for him. The use of micro-blog alternative account precisely meets the need for mystifying performances of netizens.

“After sharing a lot of worries with others, others may not certainly be able to understand, may also tell your secrets to others, so a lot of things I sent in the micro-blog, like the feeling of dialogue with yourself, there will be more of a sense of security, and after a period of time, and then backward, looking at my own micro-blog, there will be a kind of feelings, just like a light boat has crossed the mountains, just also a kind of record of life.” (Interviewee D).

At the same time, with the rapid development of the Internet, our lives have entered a fast-paced era, and the pressure of contemporary young people’s lives has increased, in the face of sharp criticism of the leadership, heavy academic pressure, complex interpersonal relationships, they need to look for a breakthrough to drain their dissatisfaction, and pressure in hearts, and micro-blog alternative account is just right for them to provide a platform, the fans of alternative account are less, there are not monitor of others, so they can pour out their voices here. Micro-blog serve as their “tree holes” to satisfy their desire to drain in their daily lives. It is also an effective way for them to perform mystification, and keep a distance from others.

“I’m really annoyed with my roommate, she often calls her boyfriend at night for at least an hour, making me couldn’t sleep, and she won’t change even after telling her, so I can only complain her in my micro-blog alternative account, which can’t change anything, but I feel like sending it out to make myself a little bit less irritable, just a kind of outlet for my emotions”(Interviewee G) Observing interviewee G’s micro-blog, we can find that in the main account, she and her roommate Xiaobai(a pseudonym) are inseparable, they do everything together, they are good friends who take lessons together, but in the alternative account, Xiaobai is the drain object of her every now and then. This is one of the reasons why many young people choose to use micro-blog alternative account. Through the alternative account, they can freely express their thoughts and feelings without revealing their real identity, so as to find a kind of spiritual solace.

### 3. Self-presentation in the use of the Netizens’ Micro-blog Alternate Accounts from the Perspective of Dramaturgical Theory

#### 3.1. Impression Management of the multifaceted images

The interviews revealed the multifaceted images presented by the Interviewees on both the micro-blog main account and alternative account, as shown in Table 3.

Goffman’s dramaturgical theory suggests that people perform in order to shape a desired impression of themselves in the minds of others. Impression management is the process of how to create a desired impression in the minds of others, or how they should behave when people observe them. The images that netizens present in their micro-blog main accounts are often different from those in their micro-blog alternative accounts, as the main account has large numbers of followers and friends, i.e., that is to say the “performance audience” are more numerous, so netizens are more cautious

in shaping their images of main accounts, and need to consider a wider range of factors. On the other hand, micro-blog alternative accounts have relatively fewer fans and friends, which means fewer “performance audiences”, so netizens are more free to shape their alternative accounts images, and they are able to show their true selves more realistically compared to their main accounts[5]. “I seldom display my affection on my main account because I am worried that my friends will get annoyed if they see too much of me, but on my alternative account, I often post my daily love life. My alternative account is like a love diary now because my fans are strangers, so I don’t have to care too much about what do they think of me.” (Interviewee I) Meanwhile, browsing Interviewee I’s micro-blog we found that although she often commented and liked her friends’ micro-blogs on her main account, she had only posted one amour-related official announcement micro-blog in the past three years, while her alternative account almost updated three or four times a week, and every blog was related to her boyfriend.

**Table 3.** Interviewees’ images of main account and alternative account

Interviewee	Image on the main account	Image on the alternative account
Interviewee A	The monitor in class who studies hard	The beautiful girl who loves to play
Interviewee B	Positive and sunny girls	College students who go crazy all the time
Interviewee C	beauty blogger	Little girls who share her daily lives
Interviewee D	Serious employee	Corporate slave that drain the pressure of work
Interviewee E	The ordinary people who recording the daily life	The girl who is star chaser
Interviewee F	Infrequent postings	Main fan of the stars
Interviewee G	Lively and cheerful college students	College students who like to drain
Interviewee H	Gentle and literary girl	College students who like to drain
Interviewee I	College students who interact closely with her friends	The love brain girl who records love relationships every day
Interviewee J	Quiet netizen	Netizen who has sharp point of view

In addition, Interviewee C, who is a beauty blogger, said that because of the specificity of the profession of a blogger, there would be a very obvious difference between the content she posted on her main and alternative accounts. “I usually only post well-filmed beauty videos or make-up teaching on my main account, for most of my main account fans, I am a functional account, they just want to learn some make-up skills through my account, while most of my fans on my alternative account are top fans who have joined my micro-blog fan group, they are more like my personal fans, so I may share my daily life or post small random thoughts once again on my alternative account to bring me closer to my fans.”

One of the most liked blogs of Interviewee C’s main account was about summer festival makeup, and although there were a lot of users commenting on this blog, only about a third of them also followed the blogger. Observing the latest blog of the alternative account posted by Interviewee C, although the data of this micro-blog is general, the netizens commenting under the micro-blog almost all carry the logo of biggest fans. This shows that for the network celebrity bloggers, the image of alternative account is important for increasing fan stickiness.

"I often post about my study routine on my big number, and I do my daily vocabulary memorization and punching, because I'm the class monitor and a lot of my classmates follow me on micro-blog, and I want to build up my authority so that everyone thinks I'm a good student. But I would post pictures of me drawing pretty smokey eyes and hanging out in a slip dress on my alternative account, which was only followed by a few of my closer classmates, so I was able to take off the disguise of being a good student." (Interviewee A) Interviewee A is a studious merit student in her main account, but in her alternative account she is the image of a rebellious girl. After observation, it was found that during the period from August to October 2023, Interviewee A insisted on posting screenshots of her vocabulary punching cards on "Scallop Vocabulary" on micro-blogevery day, without interruption. Sometimes, after posting screenshots of her vocabulary memorization on her main account in the morning, she would post photos of her drinking at a bar in the evening on her alternative account.

Most of the interviewees said that because of the different fan profiles in the micro-blog main and alternative account, the contents they posted on these two accounts would also change as a result. People are complex, three-dimensional and multifaceted, and the images displayed by micro-blog main and alternative account are the real images of netizens, but the images displayed by netizens are also different when they face different "audiences" on micro-blog main and alternative account, and they display specific images to specific groups of people through the impression management of such multifaceted images to achieve their own specific purposes. As Goffman said, life and society is a huge stage, so as performers, netizens will substitute into the perspective of their fans, and hope to meet the audience's expectations and maintain their own good image by regulating and managing their behavior.

### 3.2. Extension of the "Back Stage"

In his theory, Goffman likens society and life to a grand stage, on which each of us is an actor, each playing a different role. Based on this viewpoint, Goffman proposed the concepts of "front stage" and "back stage". The front stage is the part of our social interactions that we show to others, the image that we deliberately create in order to gain social recognition and acceptance. In this area, we show the best of ourselves, presenting our bright and positive side to the public[6].

Back stage, on the other hand, is a concept that is relative to the front stage. It is the place where we prepare and cover up for our front stage performances, the real, raw, unadorned side of us. Back stage is where we can remove all disguises and show our true selves, whether we are tired, frustrated or mad. Back stage provides a space for us to relax and rest, to adjust and compensate after an intense front stage performance.

For modern netizens, micro-blog main account is undoubtedly their front stage. Here, they post carefully selected and organized photos, convey positive and optimistic thoughts, and try to shape their image on micro-blog. They engage in impression management in the hope of gaining the favourable impression of others and being followed by more people[7]. "I often post some retouched plogs on my main account, as well as photos of I going out on trips, hoping that others will see me as positive and sunny." (Interviewee B).

However, at the same time, many netizens prefer to regard micro-blog alternative account as their back stage. Here they

don't have to worry about other people's comments anymore and can express their views and opinions as they like. Micro-blog alternative accounts have no fans and naturally no audience, so netizens do not have to maintain their image in others' mind here[8].

"I have no followers on my micro-blog alternative account and no family and friends who follow me, and I don't want them to find me on this account because I often 'go crazy here'." (Interviewee B).

On 15, December, 2023, Interviewee B posted a photo of her and her friends travelling in Changbais Mountain with the text "People should live in a place with no ceiling" on her micro-blog main account, and on the same day Interviewee B also posted a micro-blog on her alternative account with the content "I really think I'm so tired after I climb the mountain, I will never climb again, whoever likes to climb who climbs." Interviewee B hopes to create a enviable life on her main account, but only in her alternative account will she reveal her true thoughts and see the hardships behind her glamour.

"I would drain my disliked roommates and all kinds of messy and annoying assignments in the alternative account, the alternative account is like my tree hole, I can say whatever I want to say without worrying about it being known by others, and I feel much better after every drain." (Interviewee H).

This division between the front stage and back stage reflects the complex mindset of modern people on social media. They show their best side in the front stage to gain social recognition and acceptance; while in the back stage, they seek authenticity, freedom and relaxation. This switching the between front stage and backstage not only reflects their role positioning on social media, but also their psychological needs and pursuits in real life.

### 3.3. Negative Self-presentation

Most netizens are likely to play a very different role from their real-life identities in their micro-blog alternative account. Such a character is usually a more irritable, impulsive or angry image, in contrast to his or her real-life gentle and rational image. This role-playing behavior is often to release the suppressed negative emotions in the virtual world, so as to obtain a kind of psychological drain and satisfaction[9]. Micro-blog has become a gathering place of negative energy for netizens, receiving their anger about various encounters in the real world.

"I posted about 100 blogs from my trumpet, basically some foul-mouthed blogs, I can't help it, the pressure of work is just too much, and I don't like to fight with other people, so I can only drain it here." (Interviewee D).

At the same time, due to the lack of constraints of real social relationships, netizens may fabricate false episodes and conflicts in micro-blog alternative account to create a dramatic effect. They may deliberately provoke various controversies, disputes or conflicts so as to make up for their lack of attention that they do not get in the real world, and they may experience a sense of power and control by quarrelling or provoking others so as to gain a virtual sense of achievement and satisfaction.

"My main account is not really followed by many people, on the contrary, my alternative account is followed by quite a lot of people, because I am a big fan of one of the stars in the entertainment circle, and I often take my fans to fight with the other fans and tear each other apart, and I am like their leader, pointing and hitting wherever we want." (Interviewee F).

Interviewee F's main account hardly ever posts micro-

blogs, but her alternative account posts micro-blogs very frequently, sometimes up to 10 micro-blogs a day. It was observed that interviewee F not only makes data for her idol in her alternative account, but also often insults her idol's "rival", and every once in a while she will make suggestions for her idol and lead her fans to tear down the studio, which is different from most people's main and alternative accounts of followers, and the number of followers of her alternative account is almost 10,000 times more than the number of her main account. But F also confessed that she had been banned to post by micro-blog officials for about seven days for quarrelling too often.

#### 4. Conclusion

Using the dramaturgical theory, this thesis provides an in-depth discussion of netizens' behaviors of displaying themselves in micro-blog alternative accounts and analyzes their motivations. Through snowball sampling and semi-structured interview methods, it is found that netizens display different images in different platforms of main and alternative accounts to satisfy specific social and emotional needs.

Based on the summary and analysis of netizens' self-presentation in micro-blog alternative account, this study draws the following conclusions:

(1) Impression management of netizens' multifaceted images in main account and alternative account. The main account is the "front stage" where netizens display their well-built positive images to gain favourable impression and social recognition, while the alternative account is regarded as the "back stage", which provides a private space for netizens to drain themselves, express their negative emotions and their true thoughts. The motivations for netizens to use the alternative account mainly include privacy needs, tool properties and affection needs. With the popularity of social media and the advent of the information age, netizens face increasing social pressure and the risk of privacy disclosure in real life, so it has become a common choice to use micro-blog alternative account to build a private space. At the same time, micro-blog alternative accounts are also regarded as a tool to meet specific social and information needs, such as chasing stars and tracking ex-girlfriend or ex-boyfriend's movements. In addition, micro-blog alternative account also play the role of emotional drain, providing netizens with a "tree hole" to freely express their feelings and relieve their real-life pressures and worries.

(2) Micro-blog alternative account means that users are able to express their views more freely, but this freedom has certain boundaries, and in social media, network civilization and social etiquette are also crucial. Users should focus on respecting others' freedom of expression when using micro-blog. Even if they disagree with others, they should respect their views and avoid using offensive or insulting language. Pay attention to speech and behavior. Users should pay attention to the proper use of words and avoid using vulgar, insulting or discriminatory language when making comments or remarks, so as to avoid unnecessary disputes and conflicts. Handle sensitive topics with caution. When it comes to sensitive topics or hot events, users should speak carefully and avoid making rash statements or inappropriate remarks, so as not to cause unnecessary disputes and misunderstandings.

(3) Before using a micro-blog alternative account, users should first establish a clear purpose and principle of use, which will directly affect their behavior and expression on the

social media platform. Users need to think about why they need to use micro-blog alternative account. Is it to express a particular viewpoint or emotion? Is it to protect personal privacy? Or for other purposes? By clarifying the purpose of using a micro-blog alternative account, users can be more targeted in their subsequent behaviors and strategies. At the same time, users need to clearly manage the relationship between the main and alternative account. Distinguish between the purpose and function of the main and alternative account to avoid confusion, define the speaking style and content positioning of the main and alternative account to ensure that they do not conflict with each other, and reasonably allocate their time and energy so that we don't use the alternative account to the neglect of the management and maintenance of the main account. By establishing such clear purposes and principles of use, users can use micro-blog alternative account in a more targeted manner, avoid abuse or improper use, maintain a good social media image, and at the same time help maintain the health and order of the online community.

At the same time, there are some shortcomings in this study:

First, due to the size and diversity of the micro-blog users community, relying on snowball sampling alone may not adequately cover the various types and characteristics of netizens. User groups of micro-blog may have different social backgrounds, ages, interests, and other characteristics, and snowball sampling methods may result in a skewed sample that is not representative of the diversity of the entire micro-blog user group.

Secondly, semi-structured interviews may be influenced by the researcher's subjective biases and interpretations, leading to a degree of subjectivity in the understanding and analysis of Interviewees' answers. In addition, semi-structured interviews may not adequately capture a full range of information about the Interviewees. Interviewees' answers are affected by a number of factors and may be subject to memory bias, personal subjective awareness, etc., and therefore sufficiently comprehensive and accurate information may not be obtained.

In summary, netizens display different self-presentation behaviors in micro-blog main and alternative accounts, which are both influenced by social needs and tool properties, and driven by emotional needs. Through careful management and selective display of self-image, netizens construct an image that meets their goals and expectations on different platforms, and achieve self-identity and maintenance of social relationships. However, with the continuous development and popularity of social media, people's self-presentation behaviors may also be influenced by more factors, and future research can further explore its relationship with individual psychology, social culture and other aspects, in order to more comprehensively understand and explain the intrinsic mechanisms and dynamic changes of this phenomenon.

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