A Network Analysis to Young Social Media Users in China[*]

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This study is a brief review of possible reasons for the nature of Weibo posting anxiety and WeChat posting anxiety in China. Based on Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), this study examines posting anxiety of Sina Weibo and WeChat users and compares diverse influences exerted by the determinants (i.e., micro-blogging self-efficacy, instant messaging self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and prior experience). The data of this study are still waiting for collection, thus only some possible explanations for inactive young social media users in China are examined in this study.

Keywords: social media, posting anxiety, Weibo, WeChat, young users, China

Introduction

It is unquestionable that the internet has evolved into a "social technology" which reminds researchers to investigate its effects on numerous parts of social life (Mazalin & Moore, 2004). Currently it is hard to imagine a young adult's life without social media. In China, social media also spawned in this decade.

According to a recent report from China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC hereafter) (2018), in 2017 around 670 million people are WeChat, an kind of instant messaging tool, users in China. Among them, active users in every month reached 376 million (CNNIC, 2018). While the number of Sina Weibo, a Chinese micro-blogging as Twitter, users is near the half to WeChat users (300 million) at the same time (CNNIC, 2018). Social media platform is becoming a platform integrating community service and information, entertainment, instant messaging, video lives, and paying function, the influence of which on users' lives also is increasing (CNNIC, 2018). Yet, for Sina Weibo, the number of its users seems stable compared to 280 million four years ago (CNNIC, 2014). And the number of its active users in every month also is not positive, even in 2014, nearly 60% users are inactive users and among 57% of the sample have no posting in the timeline (Fu & Chau, 2013). Interestingly, for WeChat, also nearly 50% users are inactive users in every month (CNNIC, 2018).

There are multiple reasons for the inactivity of Weibo and WeChat users. In addition to censorship on posting in Weibo (Li & Lin, 2016), and WeChat, losing novelty of users, distracting by other on-line activities such as cellphone games, might be responsible for this situation. However, besides these reasons, some scholars remind us that the posting anxiety might be one of reasons of inactive users' coldness to update (Li & Lin, 2016). Yet, current studies focus on posting anxiety in Weibo and blogging (e.g. Li & Lin, 2016; Liu, 2010). Researches on WeChat mostly focus on its user pattern or users' behavior; few studies focus on its inactive

users, since it almost dominates the social networking market in Mainland China (CNNIC, 2018). Given this situation, this study intends to investigate posting anxiety in Sina Weibo and WeChat, and attempts to examine whether posting anxiety determinants influence users of Sina Weibo and WeChat, and if the effects exist, whether and how they influence their using behaviors.

Posting Anxiety and Social Cognitive Theory

There are diverse interpretations and perspectives to regard the term of anxiety in psychology (Brown, Fuller, & Vician, 2004). Anxiety could be regarded as a state, an emotional process, or a personality trait (Spielberger, 1972). Mostly, the term anxiety is referred to describe "an unpleasant emotional state or condition which is characterized by subjective feelings of tension, apprehension, and worry, and by activation or arousal of the autonomies nervous system" (Spielberger, 1972, p. 482).

Based on Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), human behaviors are observable, and the performance of behaviors is determined by the expected outcomes of these behaviors. While the expectations of behavior stem from our prior experience and observations from others' experiences (LaRose & Eastin, 2004). Following this perceptive, anxiety stems from coping inefficacy and negative expectations, which bring to avoidance of individual behaviors (Bandura, Reese, & Adams, 1982; Bandura, 1986). This kind of avoidance would intensify individuals' negative expectations on the object (Bandura et al., 1982; Bandura, 1986; Epstein, 1972). In other words, anxiety is associated with expectations, and they influence each other (Bandura, 1986).

Thus, self-efficacy and outcome expectations are the two important determinants related to anxiety (Bandura, 1997; Li & Lin, 2016; Liu, 2010). In later researches, scholars added prior experience as the third variable (Li & Lin, 2016; Liu, 2010; Bandura, 1997). Totally, there are three variables: self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and prior experience, which are related to anxiety. Among them, self-efficacy refers to a person's evaluation on his own ability to deal with technological problems and complete a particular task (Bandura, 1997). While outcome expectations mean an individual's judgement of the possible consequence of an action (Bandura, 1997). Outcome expectations are divided into six types of incentive categories. These incentives include activity incentive (e.g. entertainment), social incentive (e.g. seeking emotional support), status incentive, novel incentive, self-reactive incentive, and monetary incentive (Bandura, 1986; LaRose & Eastin, 2004).

Bandura and other scholars suggested that self-efficacy and outcome expectations could be predictors to the level of anxiety which people have in particular situations or face particular objects (LaRose & Eastin, 2004; Bandura, 1986). Some studies applied the anxiety to computer mediated communication (CMC) researches and found similar results. Scholars found diverse level of posting anxiety in use of social media, and CMC, including in China (Zhang & Pentina, 2012; Shu, Hu, Zhang, Ma, & Chen, 2017). Some evidence directed that social incentive is largely responsible for the anxiety in use of social media and CMC. Similarly, Li and Lin (2016) stated that negative social, active and self-reactive outcomes are main negative outcome expectations of Chinese Weibo users and might contribute to the high level of posting anxiety in Chinese Weibo users (Li & Lin, 2016). Liu (2010) also found that for Chinese bloggers, the most frequent posting anxiety is social anxiety, while their main negative outcome expectations also include social outcome expectations, which are obviously worse than American users. This result reminds us also that social anxiety in social media users is widespread in the world; Chinese might be the high level of anxious users. While their anxiety, posting anxiety in this study, sometimes is related to social outcome expectations.

Weibo and WeChat

Although both WeChat and Weibo are categorized as social media academically (e.g. Li & Lin, 2016; Shu et al., 2017) , their functions and the community they constructed are diverse. Weibo, firstly launched in 2009, is a social media platform which supports users to post personalized information, including text, image, videos, publicly, which is like Twitter. The leading of Weibo service in Weibo is provided by Sina, on which this study investigates (Zhang & Pentina, 2012). Weibo users could follow any user's account and access to the posts of this account without his or her permission (Li & Lin, 2016). Socializing function in Weibo is mainly between users and its strange audience (Zhang & Pentina, 2012; Li & Lin, 2016; Shu et al., 2017), which leads to "a wide range of interpersonal relationship" (Shu et al., 2017, p. 268).

While WeChat is an instant messaging tool to facilitate users and their real social circles which integrates the social function (Shu et al., 2017). It is based on a mutual actual mechanism similar to Facebook (Shu et al., 2017). WeChat users cannot follow others as Weibo. If they want to access to others' accounts, they must request their permission to be in other users' circle. A user's information is not open to anyone, but to those friends who have been permitted into the circle (Deluca, Brunner, & Sun, 2016). Thus, most of contacts on WeChat happen between acquaintances in real life (Shu et al., 2017). In a word, the biggest difference between Weibo and WeChat is that the former could be seen as a "stranger community", and the latter as an "acquaintance community" in which mostly social circles are private and exclusive (Shu et al., 2017).

Besides the different community Weibo and WeChat constructed, they both share many characteristics of social network sites, such as contacts or news sharing, and with friends. Social motivation is also key driver of users to use Weibo and WeChat (Lee & Ma, 2012; Zhang & Pentina, 2012; Shu et al., 2017). Yet, Bandura and other psychologist categorized social incentive into outcome expectations without differentiating the existing social relationship from contacts with strangers. Both of them are classified to "social" incentive group. However, they might lead to different emotions and actions of social media users. Thus, they also might lead to diverse level of anxiety in media users, which is also testified by some works. LaRose, Eastin, and Gregg (2001), for example, found that for acquaintances, internet use might decrease their social depression (LaRose et al., 2001). Conversely, for strangers, internet use could be associated with social isolation (LaRose et al., 2001). Meanwhile, among evidences offered on negative social outcome expectations by studies on social media users or SMC users, most of negative social outcome expectations are on users' acquaintances, such as parents or colleagues, not strangers (e.g. Liu, 2010).

Although there are contradictory evidences (e.g. Li & Lin, 2016), it reminds us that, at least at some environment, the careful evaluation of the diverse influence of acquaintance and strangers to individuals' social incentive is necessary. Firstly, it focuses on the particular social objects of social media users rather than a group in general. Secondly, it represents a proximal evaluation on an individual's social network and cognitions in their context, thus enriching current explanation and prediction of posting anxiety in Chinese social media. That is why this study attempts to do this work and evaluate whether the acquaintance and strangers influence the posting anxiety level of users in different social media platforms and their using behaviors.

Conclusions

Given the situation that the data are still waiting for collection, it is too early to argue that posting anxiety exists in young social media users in China. Yet, after the brief review of the related concepts, the development,

and inactive users of Weibo and WeChat, posting anxiety is still a possible explanation for inactive young adult social media users in China, particularly in Weibo and WeChat. The future researches need use qualitative or quantitative methods to measure the posting anxiety accurately in inactive young adult social media users and provide detailed results.

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