

Intrapersonal Communication in the Perspective of WeChat's Circle of Friends Self-presentation Analysis

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Abstract. In the mobile Internet era, social media as a medium based on virtual platforms has dramatically changed the form of people's social interaction. The Circle of Friends, as an essential social module in the most used instant messaging software, carries the function of users' self-presentation and communication and creates an online social platform for WeChat users that is not only in line with the actual social relations but also relies on the virtual platform. The expression of the "self" relies on the regulation of the "guest me" to the real reflection of the "master me", and the online socialization platform provided by WeChat's Friend Circle encourages users to express their own emotions, and the same time, it also encourages users to express their emotions. The online social platform provided by the WeChat Friendship Circle encourages users to express their own emotions and provides users with social feedback with personal cognitive significance due to its social interaction method that is both dependent on the virtual network environment and rooted in real social relationships. Through the comparison of different sharing contents and personal expression forms, users can obtain more accurate psychological expectations of social feedback and a form of self-presentation that is more in line with their personal psychological needs, to realize their needs for a good social experience and the regulation and development of self-expression within the social media platform. This paper takes the social media context provided by WeChat's Circle of Friends as the entry point, starts from the perspective of intra-personal communication, disassembles the process of self-perception and presentation, the two comparative cognitive methods of "vertical" and "horizontal" are used to categorize the process of WeChat users' self-recognition on the platform of the Circle of Friends and the regulation of self-expression in the online environment, and to discuss the situation of users' self-representation in the online social environment of the Circle of Friends.

1. Introduction

In the mobile Internet era, the development of media technology has continuously impacted the traditional mode of information dissemination and reception and invisibly changed how people perceive and express themselves. Among them, social media, relying on the Internet platform, creates a new type of social communication situation for people that transcends geographical limitations and eliminates the need to be "physically present". According to the 51st Statistical Report on Internet Development in China released by China Internet Network Information Centre (CNNIC), as of December 2022, the number of Internet users in China has reached 1.067 billion, and the number of instant messaging users has reached 1.007 billion, accounting for 97.2% of the overall number of Internet users [1]. Among them, WeChat is full-featured, private, and based on the continuation of the social relationship between acquaintances, with high user adhesion, becoming the most used instant messaging tool in China. As a social service derived from WeChat, WeChat Friend Circle is based on a semi-acquaintance circle that extends genuine social relationships, providing a platform for users'

record sharing, self-presentation, and communication and interaction. As online social networking has become an essential part of interpersonal communication, the virtual image that users shape and display in the Circle of Friends is gradually integrated into the personal image of daily social interaction. Charles Horton Cooley proposed in his 1902 book *Human Nature and Social Order* that people form an awareness of themselves through social interaction with others and that understanding of themselves determines human behavior to a large extent [2]. The Circle of Friends in the WeChat user's online social network is perfect for assuming the role of the "mirror", the user, through the friends of their friends on their Circle of Friends presented in the content of the feedback and interaction, the formation of the "guest me" of the cognition. This perception influences and regulates people's self-presentation in the Circle of Friends. This paper combines the previous literature and adopts the observation method to conduct the study, taking the researcher's own WeChat account as the field point, observing the self-presentation mode and effect of 374 friends in the Circle of Friends, and analyzing and discussing it from the perspective of intrapersonal communication, exploring the balance between the

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online virtual image and the presentation of personal expression in the era of social media by sorting out the regulating mechanism of user's subjective expression by the online social environment constructed by the Circle of Friends.

2. Self-perception and self-presentation in social media contexts

2.1. Modulation of the "master me" expression by the "guest me".

George Herbert Mead divided the construction of the human "self" into two parts: the "guest me" and the "master me". He believed that the self is a social structure arising from social experience [3]. The "master me" is the subject of thought and action, the creator and founder. The "guest me" is the perception of the self-formed by receiving social evaluations and social expectations from others. The interaction between the two presents an external and complete "self", but the interaction process requires a specific social context [4]. In this process, the "master me" is the internal reflection and experience of the individual, which stimulates change and active behavior in self-presentation. The "guest me" has social constraints, which, to a certain extent, influence and constrain the individual's expression and presentation of the "master me".

Therefore, self-presentation behavior relies on regulating the "master me" by the "guest me", whilst "guest me" itself is shaped by interactions with society, obtaining feedback from other people's evaluations and attitudes through interactions with others, and generating an image of the self. This cognitive process then relies on specific social contexts for interaction. As Bettina Perregaard says in her study, "From a phenomenological perspective I argue that a sign gets its perceived identity from its experienced appearances." [5] In social interactions or interactions with social contexts, people can acquire and continuously adjust and complement their perceptions of themselves, and through their perceptions of themselves and their surroundings, they can regulate their processing of their real reflections and experiences.

2.2. The interaction between self-perception and self-presentation in social media contexts

The new media environment brought about by information technology represented by the Internet has profoundly changed people's way of living, socializing, and acquiring information and has also brought about a new social context for the construction of the "self". From the face-to-face interaction that relies on actual experience, reflection, and inhibition to the mimetic environment of "generalized otherness" brought about by mass media that does not require personal experience, the existence of social media has mediated the individual's experience to the extreme [4,6]. The experience of being social does not have to depend on what one hears and

sees in terms of expressions and gestures, nor is it confined to the purely visual and imaginative aspects of unidirectional communication. The popularity of a shared topic can be seen through likes and comments, and the degree of overlap between one's social circle and that of another friend can be seen through the common friends visible in the likes.

Social media have created cognitive possibilities not bound by time and space. This space lacks solid reference objects and boundaries, spliced together through fragmented pieces of information, and relies on the audience's imagination to fill in the blanks so that the content expressed by an individual in this environment can have a highly variable effect in the eyes of different people. This creates the possibility of constructing a virtual image that differs significantly from the image of the actual individual. In order to control the bias in a manageable way, people selectively filter the information provided or provide it selectively. For example, copywriting is repeatedly modified to achieve better expression or the visible population of the shared content is filtered. By sensing the popularity of the content through the feedback of the published content, people regulate the next self-presentation towards a more desirable self-image.

3. Self-presentation of WeChat Friend Circle Based on Social Feedback

3.1. The social interaction context of WeChat's Circle of Friends

WeChat Circle of Friends is a social service platform based on the circle of WeChat friends, with record sharing, self-presentation, and communication and interaction as the main functions. The audience base of the Circle of Friends is based on the relationship of WeChat friends, the social relationship is extended chiefly from the real social relationship, but since the Circle of Friends is based on the online virtual social environment, the Circle of Friends possesses both the influence of reality and the freedom and idealization of the virtual environment. Irving Goffman put forward the "Theory of Mimetic Theatre" that society is like a stage, and the process of interpersonal interaction is the process of actors using symbols to display themselves and perform [7]. In the traditional social context, changing the "stage settings" of each person is often difficult. However, in the Circle of Friends environment, people can easily change their stage settings by changing their avatars, personal signatures, nicknames, backgrounds, etc. They, therefore, can more easily adjust their role image to present a perfect version of themselves [8].

In WeChat's Circle of Friends, the user can easily classify and filter social relationships, easily add, delete, and block friends, group and classify them, control the recipients of the content they share by blocking or "visible only", and control the "shelf life" of the information shared by setting the time limit for the display of the Circle of Friends. The "shelf life" of the

information shared can be controlled by setting a time limit for the display of the circle. Therefore, in the social environment of WeChat's Circle of Friends, people believe that their own will can dictate their activities in the virtual social environment. In this environment, the self is an active creator of online social relationships rather than a passive subordinate [9].

In the WeChat Circle of Friends, the composition of an individual's image not only comes from the content he or she posts but also relies on the likes and comments of mutual friends as a side effect of the individual's image and network. When a user likes and comments on the content of his or her circle, only the social interactions between the content publisher and the user's mutual friends are displayed in the circle. After liking or commenting on a piece of content in the Circle of Friends, if the rest of the mutual friends also interact with the content, the person who liked the content receives a reminder message. In this process, the social interaction between the publisher and his/her friends also serves as an essential form of presentation of his/her personal image.

3.2.Social feedback process for self-presentation

The Circle of Friends creates a social space for people based on the extension of real social relations and with the idea of virtual space, so compared with the traditional way of socializing, the Circle of Friends creates a social space for users with more autonomy and control and a greater sense of security of expression. In this context, people tend to express themselves more freely. In the process of self-expression and presentation, the "main self" carries the real reflection and experience of the individual's inner self and is also the source of change and active behavior in the process of self-expression. When people encounter wonderful life moments, insights, or information worth sharing, they desire to share and express, and the Circle of Friends, with its environment of security of expression, carries on the desire of the "master self" to share and express.

Isil Poole states, "The matrix of social privacy networks produces 'psychological neighbors'" [10]. the Circle of Friends has a high level of environmental privacy, and users can independently control the audience and the length of time the information is shared; thus, they are wrapped in a relatively friendly and safe environment in the Circle of Friends. In this social context, most social interactions with the content posted by individuals are well-intentioned. At the same time, unlike offline social networking that relies on instant feedback or some social media that have a weaker degree of real-life connection with the audience, the feedback of social interactions in the Circle of Friends is based on acquaintances and groups of friends and does not require instant feedback from the audience. Thus, the neutral attitude of friends who neither like nor comment becomes a critical social feedback in the Circle of Friends. Through comments and likes within the Circle of Friends, users receive feedback from their friends on

the content they post. In addition to the direct social interactions of likes and comments, users will also compare other mutual friends horizontally and vertically with their own shares based on the number of interactions they have with the content they post so as to know the popularity of the content they post or the extent to which it resonates with their friends.

Likes are an intuitive form of social feedback in the Circle of Friends that expresses approval of the content being liked, but in the absence of other feedback behaviors, likes to convey relatively little information. Similarly, there is also the ritual of "read" likes that do not indicate that you have no feelings about the content but are done out of social courtesy. Nevertheless, beyond that, the number of likes is a good indicator of the level of interest and recognition of the content shared by a group of WeChat friends.

Commenting is an expression of one's own opinion on existing information, which is a one-to-many interaction in the Circle of Friends, and the content of comments can be interacted with each other among mutual friends, thus providing users with more explicit social feedback information. Comments are able to express more subtle emotional differences in text, ranging from disapproval to gossip to agreement. Comments can express a more holistic social attitude, and the interactions between mutual friends can also structure online social relationships closer to real social networks.

Ignoring is a special attitude in WeChat's friend circle. The information in the Circle of Friends is fragmented, and as the number of WeChat friends increases, the Circle of Friends will bring a considerable amount of information, so users will only pay attention to the latest updates or part of the news of individual friends in the process of using the Circle of Friends, or only pay serious attention to the part of the news that arouses personal interest, and therefore ignore what the subject does not necessary or is not interested in. Thus, for the subject who posts content, the fact that the information posted is ignored is itself a form of feedback from WeChat friends about the content they have posted, representing an expression of "self" that is not opposed by the social environment, but equally does not attract the interest or recognition of others. Therefore, in order to get more social recognition or attention for the presentation of "self", "self" will change the way or content of the presentation to regulate the form of self-presentation.

3.3.Characteristics of self-presentation under social feedback

The "master me" carries the emotions and experiences of the "self" as the source of motivation in the process of self-expression. In contrast, the "guest me" is shaped by social interaction and obtains evaluation and feedback through interaction with others. The "master me" is shaped by interaction with society and obtains evaluation and feedback through interaction with others, thus creating constraints on the expression of the "master me".

This constraint is based on feedback from others and aims to adjust the expression and presentation of the "self" by the "master me" to a more acceptable and popular direction. Based on the popularity of their own content, users can analyze which of their views and content are more popular, which photos and shares resonate with others, and which text and graphics get more recognition and comments. Society is like a stage where people use impression management to create the image they want in the minds of others. Thus, through social feedback in the Circle of Friends, users are able to get to know the "guest me" better and create a more desirable form of self-presentation based on the moderation of the "guest me".

3.3.1. Generate psychological expectations of social feedback based on vertical comparison

By comparing the contents of their shares, users can analyze the popularity of their self-expression based on the popularity of different shares. According to the perceptual control theory, people will make epistemic predictions about the outcome of their behaviors in the process of perceiving things, for example, they will make predictions about the state of the back of a cup when they rotate it, and this kind of cognitive prediction also occurs in the process of posting a sharing post on WeChat [11]. The purpose of this kind of brain reasoning, whether autonomous or passive, is to regulate the intrinsic feelings of the subject, to learn by comparing the actual situation with the cognitive predictions, and to continuously improve the cognitive reasoning model of the subject [12]. When this regulation mechanism is shown in social media sharing and interaction, users can generate cognitive preconceptions about the popularity of new posts based on the average number of likes and comments on previous posts, and obtain the gap or difference between the cognitive preconceptions and the actual results through actual social feedback. After obtaining the difference between the psychological preconceptions and the actual results, users can improve and adjust the reasoning model of their online social cognitive preconceptions, and obtain the psychological expectations of the social feedback that are closer to the actual results as well as the more accurate online social "guest me" image cognition. Based on this, when sharing daily life or inner thoughts or appreciation content, users can adjust the form of the posted content more reasonably according to their own needs for social feedback, to obtain better self-expression effects and online social experiences.

According to observation, WeChat Friend Circle posts are mainly in the form of text-only sharing, picture-only sharing, graphic-text combination, and link sharing. Among these forms of sharing, posts with pictures are generally popular, especially those closely related to real life. Photo content, such as selfies, daily sharing, traveling photos, etc., can help friends intuitively understand the user's recent situation and interact with the user, such as comments. Real-life topics are also more likely to attract the attention of friends with weaker

ties in real-life social relationships, deepening their impression of their reality and transforming such friends from a "neglectful" attitude to a more realistic one. This will change these friends' "neglectful" attitude towards them to a more intimate one. Link sharing usually receives the least amount of likes and comments. Since link sharing cannot display the full content of the sharing and requires additional operations such as opening other interfaces, only friends with a high interest in the shared content will learn more about the content of the link sharing. Plain text sharing is mainly related to the user's psychological experience, which is more personal and emotional than sharing photos or links, so it is easier to get friends' emotional resonance and generate deeper social interactions. However, text-only content is less visually appealing, so many friends will ignore it or read only a portion of a longer paragraph.

As a result, under the vertical comparison of various types of content, users can generate more appropriate sharing methods for their different types of content and generate different expectations for social recognition from friends. For example, when posting beautiful daily routines and selfies in nine frames, they would expect more likes or short complimentary interactions from their friends; when posting purely textual content related to their feelings and emotions, they would expect to get more in-depth exchanges; and when posting links, they would have a lower expectation for likes and comments. After getting likes and comments, users are able to analyze in more detail the degree of recognition and resonance of their own content by comparing it with their psychological expectations. Therefore, in the process of user self-expression, to satisfy the expression psychology of online socialization, users can choose or design the expression form of sharing content to obtain a better social feedback experience. For example, when users want to express their emotional tendencies and gain empathetic comments from their friends, the form of sharing with textual descriptions is more favorable; while when they want to express their self-image and share their daily life to achieve the purpose of sharing and conveying the tone of daily life or their aesthetic attitudes, the form of sharing with pictures or links is more suitable for the users' needs of self-expression.

3.3.2. Optimisation of self-presentation forms based on cross-sectional comparisons

Users can adjust the sharing style and format of similar content by horizontally comparing the popularity of their own content with that of other friends. Meanwhile, users can be informed of more creative ways of sharing, which encourages users to make more diversified and personalized attempts at personal expression.

By observing the content and social feedback of the circles posted by users, the specific layout or sharing format affects the level of social feedback of the content. When sharing daily photos, photos arranged in a specific format such as a tangle or nine-panel grid are more attractive to those who see the post. The overall tone of the content is presented in the form of groups of photos,

which not only makes the content and personal style tendencies more distinct, but also improves the overall sophistication of the post in a neat layout. Even if your friends don't click on the photo itself to enlarge it, it still visually conveys the main content and style of the photo. When adding selfies or group photos that contain information about the person's image, the photo is more likely to be noticed and read by more friends. On the one hand, friends on the WeChat list who know each other socially in real life will be able to learn about the user's recent image changes and social network through such photos, and on the other hand, friends on the WeChat list who only rely on the online platform for communication will also be able to visually complement the flattened image of the "netizen" based on such photos. Setting up copy with a sense of atmosphere or personal characteristics can make friends feel more intuitive about the content and the user's online image. Compared with images, text can express a more distinctive emotional orientation, and when combined with image content, it can also complement the image in terms of information accuracy. When text content expresses stronger emotions, or uses more prominent text content such as Internet hot trending slang, highly personalized language, dialect, emoji, or face characters, the post is more likely to attract the attention of friends who browse the content of the circle of friends. In addition, more refined processing of photos, such as the use of filters, adding text, and PS processing, can make photos show a more obvious personal attitude, enhance the degree of sophistication and atmosphere of the shared content, and make it easier to express personal aesthetic tendencies and more memorable personal online image shaping.

By comparing with other friends' content, users can recognize the changes and adjustments they can make when posting content so that they can better combine the content and form of posting to get more popular content or try to express themselves differently from their previous self-expression, which is innovative or personal breakthroughs. The tendency to post selfies or group photos in the circle of friends has been shown to correlate with the degree of extroversion and exhibitionism of users, with those who are more introverted or have a higher level of privacy being less likely to post selfies or group photos [13]. However, in a cross-sectional comparison of the postings of WeChat friends, the posting of personal photos by other users or the special treatment of such photos by other users, such as PS modification or partial blocking, helped users who were ashamed or nervous about posting personal photos to express themselves more courageously online. Introverted or privacy-conscious users can overcome their shyness or insecurity and try more diversified online self-expression by beautifying their selfies or group photos or partially obscuring their faces. At the same time, through the horizontal comparison of other WeChat friends' circles, the creative content and layout used by other friends in posting their circles can also provide users with more creative and personalized self-expression options. For example, the creative use of emojis and face characters for text layout, creative and

artistic image production and compositing methods, and meme pictures that match the content of the text. By observing the innovative posting forms of other friends, users are also able to generate more creative personal expressions based on them.

But at the same time, the excessive horizontal comparison may cause social anxiety, and excessive concern about the popularity of their content among common friends will not only have an impact on their own social psychology and self-confidence in the real world but also may produce a lack of self-confidence in self-expression, to share the content of the elaborate, overly modified, resulting in the suppression of the "self". Self is suppressed, creating psychological obstacles and constraints to self-expression and presentation.

3.3.3. Presentation information adjustment based on instant social feedback

When sharing daily life or feelings, users will set the audience groups for the content they post to present different personal images to different social groups. Users exclude some of their WeChat friends from the Circle of Friends environment by closing their Circle of Friends to individual friends or adding them to a blacklist and control the visibility of some of the shared content by setting up groups of friends or individual "invisible" or "visible only" for some of the Circle of Friends. Visible people. For example, during the process of sharing a more personal experience with greater relevance to one's own emotions, users can select the visible group of people for that sharing and make their more private sharing more audience-directed by specifying that their closer friends can see the content or excluding friends who do not want the other to know about the sharing content. This also helps users to create different personal images in different social circles, achieving a more idealized and free self-presentation and self-image building. In this process, the "self" that users do not want to show to some of their friends can be invisible.

Users can also instantly change the content they share based on social feedback from their friends. If a friend suggests a controversial part of the posted content or a better copy setting, the user can instantly modify the posted content to present a better expression. Alternatively, suppose some of your friends find that some of your friends do not want some of the content during the interaction process. In that case, you can also instantly modify the visible group of the shared content to reduce the extent of the spread of the private content.

4. Conclusion

Due to its dual characteristics of being based on the extension of real social relationships and relying on a virtual social platform, the Circle of Friends creates a social situation that is both realistic and ideal. In the social context of the Circle of Friends, users have greater control over their social relationships, and most of their interpersonal relationships are with people they know in

reality, so they are in a social environment with a sense of security. They have a stronger desire to express their "selves". In the process of self-expression, the "guest me" and the "master me" together constitute the presentation of the "self" process. As the subject of self-expression, the "master me" is regulated by the "guest me". The "guest me" is based on the evaluation and feedback of others in social interactions, so that in the process of self-presentation in the circle of friends, users are aware of the degree of attention and recognition of others on the content of their expressions through interactions with their WeChat friends. Through vertical comparison, users analyze the degree of attention to the different contents they post, and obtain more accurate cognitive presuppositions under different forms of expression, to generate more reasonable psychological expectations of social feedback for their expressions, and produce better psychological experiences of social feedback. By comparing the difference between the self-expression form and the self-expression form of the list of friends horizontally, the user adjusts the self-expression form to produce a self-expression form that is more in line with the needs of online image molding, personal psychological needs, and the needs of content expression. At the same time, by controlling the visible population of personal expression content, users shape their online social image in a more precise way, differentiating or adjusting the virtual image of individuals in the WeChat circle of friends from the image of individuals in real social environments, which not only beautifies the image of individuals in online virtual social environments but also realizes the connection between the online image of individuals and the presentation of the image of individuals in offline social relationships.

Although the environment of WeChat's circle of friends brings more forms and possibilities of expression for the presentation of the user's image and provides a platform for self-expression, if the virtual image of the individual's social platform is overly shaped or the social feedback of the friends on the list is overly concerned, the user may also suffer from social anxiety or panic about his or her persona. Not only may the use of online social media produce pressure and anxiety, but also has an impact on socialization in the real world, such as the social phobia of offline social interaction, or question the acceptance of the environment for the self, and anxiety and inferiority complex for the real-life image of the individual, which in turn hinders the process of presenting the self with constraints. However, to maintain a healthy social media psychology, WeChat's circle of friends can provide users with a more comprehensive understanding of the "self" and have a driving influence on the expression of the "self", making the "self" of the users more attractive. It can provide users with a more comprehensive understanding of the "self" and have a driving influence on the expression of "self", making the presentation of the "self" more accurate and comfortable, and enabling users to obtain social feedback that realizes the need for expression with psychological satisfaction in the online social environment.

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