

Southern Illinois University Carbondale
OpenSIUC

Research Papers

Graduate School

Spring 5-14-2016

User Determinism: A Study of the Determination of Gratifications on the Uses of China's WeChat

Bowen Gao

Southern Illinois University Carbondale, kevingao@siu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/gs_rp

Recommended Citation

Gao, Bowen. "User Determinism: A Study of the Determination of Gratifications on the Uses of China's WeChat." (Spring 2016).

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at OpenSIUC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Research Papers by an authorized administrator of OpenSIUC. For more information, please contact opensiuc@lib.siu.edu.

USER DETERMINISM: A STUDY OF THE DETERMINATION OF
GRATIFICATIONS ON THE USES OF CHINA'S WECHAT

by

Bowen Gao

B.A., Northeast Normal University, 2014

A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Science

Department of Mass Communication and Media Arts
in the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
May 2016

RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

USER DETERMINISM: A STUDY OF THE DETERMINATION OF
GRATIFICATIONS ON THE USES OF CHINA'S WECHAT

By

Bowen Gao

A Research Paper Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Science

in the field of Professional Media and Media Management

Approved by:

Wenjing Xie, Chair

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
March 30, 2016

AN ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH PAPER OF

BOWEN GAO, for the Master of Science degree in PROFESSIONAL MEDIA AND MEDIA MANAGEMENT, presented on MARCH 30, 2016, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: USER DETERMINISM: A STUDY OF THE DETERMINATION OF GRATIFICATIONS ON THE USES OF CHINA'S WECHAT

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Wenjing Xie

Modern social media have been being multi-functionalized. Some social media companies add more functions to their products in order to gratify more personal needs of their customers.

Contrary to devoting to gratify users' needs, some other media companies make smart marketing strategies, which aim to influence consumers' behavior for motivating them to conduct financial transactions. However, marketing strategies are only effective in a certain period on a certain group of people. In contrast, gratifying users' needs is always an effective way to obtain a large amount of users.

China's WeChat, one currently dominant social messaging application in Chinese Mainland, as is such an multi-functionalized social medium that keeps adding more features for gratifying user needs in order to earn large usage, rather than applies marketing strategies to attract users. I conducted a survey and received 788 responses.

From the results, it can be seen that how important WeChat features are to users; why users chose to use WeChat more than other social media; and what other needs users want WeChat to gratify. The results point out that a large number of people choose to use a social medium frequently is because this social medium is capable to gratify a variety of their needs. Gratifying user needs is a more effective and everlasting way to earn more users and usage, rather than influencing user behavior through smart marketing strategies.

Key Words: Social Media, Gratification, User Need, WeChat

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Wenjing Xie for her guidance, support, and patience. I also would like to thank my colleagues and best friends, Miss Abimbola Iyun Roberts and Miss Danyelle Greene for their friendship, which helped me “survive” from graduate school. Thank all faculty and staff members at SIU who have ever helped me complete my master’s study. At last, thank my family members who have been always concerned about me thousands of miles away from the United States.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
ABSTRACT.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
LIST OF FIGURES	iv
SECTIONS	
SECTION 1 – Introduction.....	1
SECTION 2 – Preliminary Study	4
SECTION 3 – Method	10
SECTION 4 – Results.....	12
SECTION 5 – Conclusion	22
REFERENCES	24
APPENDICES	
Appendix A – Questionnaire	28
VITA	35

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>FIGURE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Figure 1	5
Figure 2	7
Figure 3	12
Figure 4	12
Figure 5	12
Figure 6	14
Figure 7	15
Figure 8	16
Figure 9	17
Figure 10	18
Figure 11	18
Figure 12	19
Figure 13	19

INTRODUCTION

“Social media” have been used as a common object of study in media studies. Many scholars admit “technological determinism” claiming that social media technologies determine users’ decision-making and performance. Scholars from academic institutions usually conduct their public sector research investigating the impacts of social media on users, while social media companies usually conduct their private sector research examining the effectiveness of their marketing strategies. Few researchers really conduct research entirely from the perspective of audience by asking such questions as whether a specific marketing strategy applied to a social media app generates a huge influence on users’ performance because this strategy gratifies users’ certain needs; what else do users expect from social media; and, in order to maximize the population of social media users and their use, which user need should social media companies gratify first.

Chinese academic scholars focus more on measuring the contribution of social media to news diffusion, but less on the studies of social media users as important agents in the process of news diffusion. Behind the behavior that social media users share a certain piece of news, there are many phenomena that need noticing, questioning and interpreting, such as why social media users share a certain piece of news more than they share other pieces; whether Chinese people follow news on social media more than they do on traditional media; what type of needs do social media gratify users by providing access to news and other information; etc.

Chinese scholars are usually silent on privacy and other concerns social media users have compared to U.S. scholars. They rarely investigate whether Chinese users lack the awareness of

the risk that their privacy can be seriously violated by using social media, and seek how users can increase this kind of awareness?

Technology determinism has been examined and practiced by numerous scholars, but I still doubt about it and assume it is user needs that promote the development of technology, and determine the direction of the development of technology. Specifically, my research will try to prove that WeChat growing in a tremendously fast speed is because it keeps adding or modifying features to effectively gratify its users' needs. Once my assumption was proved true, the result would clearly tell the decision makers of social media companies that only those marketing strategies made for the purpose of gratifying users' needs can guarantee a large amount of users and usage, and stable incomes, rather than those for the purpose of motivating users to conduct financial transactions with bonded money-consuming features.

MSN Messenger was shut down on October 31, 2014, and WhatsApp was bought by Facebook Incorporated and started to charge users an annual fee after the first-year of free use. According to the statistics from Statista (2015a), as of August 2015, Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp together had 1,500 million monthly active users worldwide (mutual users included) for Facebook, Inc. At the same time, QQ and WeChat, two dominant mobile messaging apps in Greater China area together had 1,203 million active users (mutual users included) for Tencent Holdings Ltd., one of the largest Chinese Internet service companies. By the end of 2014, Facebook, Inc. received 12.466 million U.S. dollars in revenue (Statista, 2015b) while Tencent received 12.899 million (Tencent, 2015).

What happened to MSN Messenger? What caused the purchase of WhatsApp and the generation of its subscription fee? Why and how Tencent earned more revenue with fewer users than Facebook, Inc.?

Users are the main source of revenue for social media companies. Regardless of any possible political element and accident, the decrease in the number of users, usage and online purchases must be vital reasons that led to the decline of these previously glory U.S. social messaging apps.

As Ashman et al. (2012) state, the degree of usability determines the usage of web products and services, and the population of users. Thus, a study of audience investigates in the assessment of users on the usability of MSN Messenger, WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger becomes necessary. Since Tencent could earn more with fewer users, a study on the marketing strategies Tencent implements to QQ and WeChat and the impacts of these strategies on QQ and WeChat users is needed as well. QQ and WeChat are free for download, installation and basic use. However, it is impossible that Tencent continues providing the services without having any stable financial support.

Most Tencent customers already realize that advertisers are contributing to a part of its incomes and that users themselves are the targeted consumers contributing to the benefits for both Tencent and cooperated businesses. This consciousness is a potential and huge threat to Tencent and cooperated businesses. Users who have this consciousness have raised the degree of their caution toward marketing strategies Tencent and cooperated businesses use to lead users to conduct financial transactions through QQ and WeChat. Reducing this consciousness happens to be one of the marketing strategies for Tencent and cooperated businesses.

Another statement Ashman et al. (2012) make is that web users do not clearly know what they really need and expect from social media, and also do not have the consciousness that social messaging apps can do more than merely providing instant messaging service.

PRELIMINARY STUDIES

Gamification

QQ was launched in 1999. Before WeChat was launched in 2011, QQ had been the most used instant messaging application in Chinese Mainland. Once WeChat was launched, it took over the position of QQ in an amazingly high speed. Why did WeChat become the dominant instant messaging app so fast? How did WeChat overrun QQ? Why did QQ users switch to use WeChat? To study WeChat, a preliminary study of QQ is necessary.

I chose and tested the effectiveness of two marketing strategies, “gamification” and “innocentification”, generated in terms of the analysis of the psychological activities of users’ consciousness, motivation and emotion; of how Tencent implements to the systems design and rules making for QQ and WeChat to maximize the number of users; and how to lead users “softly” to conduct financial transactions, in other words, to make users unconsciously, willingly and happily contribute to the incomes for the company and cooperated businesses that are doing advertising on QQ and WeChat as a platform for the promotion of their products and services.

“Gamification” refers to the action social media developers / designers / engineers apply the elements of game, which can influence human decision-making and behavior, to social media apps. “Innocentification” is a term I generated to refer to the action that designers set certain platforms in social media apps for third-party companies to do advertising there, and make the platforms look like an “innocent” fields that just provide users convenient services, rather than “exhibitions” for businessmen to play commercial tricks.

These two strategies are cleverly used in QQ and WeChat. However, they work not only because they can blind users at some points, but in fact, because they truly gratify user needs and

improve experiences. I proposed uses and gratifications theory to seek what users essentially need.

Gamification is a very efficient approach Tencent use to influence the consciousness of QQ users. The “level up” system is one common element of game, which Tencent applies to QQ to enlarge the population of users and increase its incomes. Specifically, Figure 1 shows the profile of a random QQ user. This user is a level-6 QQ VIP member and has already got one throne and three stars, which indicates his achievement in QQ community. QQ uses “day” instead of “experience points” as a measurement to update users’ level. This user has had his update process speeded up through his VIP membership purchase, and completing other “tasks”, such as keeping the QQ account logged in on a computer for consistently 2 hours will receive 0.5 day as experience point, etc.



Figure 1 QQ Level-up System

Klosowski (2014) claims that when game players complete a task, they will be given appropriate rewards, and the “rewards” are just the factors that cause the pleasure from players. When a human experience pleasure, his/her body will release a chemical sign named “dopamine” that motivates this person to complete more tasks. Lazzaro (2012) confirms that emotion is capable enough to influence a person’s enjoyment and decision-making. A higher level or score that indicates a great progress of a game player creates positive emotions.

The QQ user mentioned previously must have spent a large amount of money and time for his QQ level upgrade. She is one of many loyal contributors to Tencent. In return, what this user obtained from Tencent were merely a highly fictitious frame and pleasure.

Innocentification

Besides gamification, innocentification reduces WeChat users’ consciousness that they are facing clever businessmen who are trying to get money from customers’ pockets, and who are definitely not volunteers that purely provide convenient services. The “Wallet” feature in WeChat happens to have such an innocent-look interface. As Figure 2 shows, it gives a grid view to users with icons and key words indicating what goals users can achieve by clicking each of them, like “Utilities”, “Order Taxi”, “Movie Tickets”, “Group Buy”, etc.

WeChat Wallet represents Tencent’s care for its customers through providing such convenient services. From the interface, users can easily see what services can fulfill their needs. However, users are generally not aware that by using these services, their freedom of choice is constrained, and their privacy is violated. For instance, clicking “Order Taxi” will lead users to the index page of a third-party online taxi-order company called “Di Di Da Che”. Anyone who wants to order a taxi has to type in his/her location and destination. By doing this, this user’s location and planned route will be exposed. Besides that, users are also limited to use Di Di Da

Che rather than other taxi-order apps, because there are no other apps in WeChat Wallet to choose from.

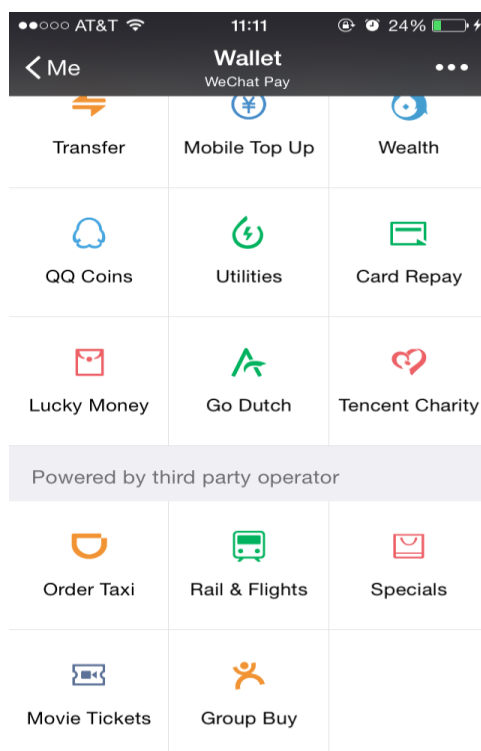


Figure 2 WeChat Wallet Interface

Two social media marketing strategies, gamification and innocentification, both follow the norm of reciprocity (Lee, 2014). This mutual benefit mode exists between social media companies and their product users, the companies and third-party businesses, and the users as targeted customers and the third-party businesses. It is a simple and important theory in business world. At the same time businesses are earning money from customers, they have to appropriately “pay back” their income contributors in order to maintain in a long-term relationship. Social media, as a bridge connecting users and businesses, are benefited directly from businesses advertising and build portals on them. It seems like social media do not benefit from users directly; play a role as a spectator that only provides users with information,

convenience and free choices; and does not force users to conduct financial transactions with businesses. In fact, these social media are not “innocent”, but “innocentified”.

Uses and Gratifications

Social media become increasingly popular and multi-functional, but there are still a group of people who avoid using them. What prevents users from using social media? What do platform owners need to notice and to do in order not to lose consumers? Alan Norton (2012) lists ten reasons he refuses to use social networking services, and the first one is privacy concerns. However, Chinese people lack of the awareness of privacy protections when using social media. Journalist Zheng Qi (2014) points out that Chinese people like to show off their happiness and luxury life via social platforms, and only 6.7% of users think social media make their life “worse”. Fortunately, the *China Social Media Impact 2015* (2015) indicates that an increasing number of Chinese users choose to highly protect their privacy when attending activities on social media, but that number is still small. Besides privacy, people need to be aware of the safety of WeChat payments. *Bandao Morning News* (2015) reports that WeChat “One-click Payment” function is very risky since there is no password needed (Xiang, 2014) when making a payment via WeChat.

Yes, WeChat inevitably has the privacy issue as most social media do, but it is still attractive to users. Marco (2009) indicates, “when mobile devices are enriched by multiple functions and applications, this entire ecosystem is what actually influences the overall experience of the user.” QQ and WeChat are able to gratify more user needs than Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp.

Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974) quote one statement made by two Swedish researchers in 1968 that “the media compete with other sources of need gratification.” Here are

five types of needs Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas (1973) conclude that users use media for, in terms of the uses and gratification theory: cognitive needs, affective needs, personal integrative needs, social integrative needs, and tension free needs. Specifically, people have a basic need for knowledge and information. WeChat is a good example that fulfills these needs of users. Users either can subscribe to the official account of a newsagent on WeChat and receive electronic news regularly, or randomly see news shared by others in WeChat “Moments” field, which is similar as the “News Feed” field of Facebook web-page version. As for QQ, it is packaged with additional applications, such as QQ Music, QQ Zones, QQ Games, to fulfill all the above five needs of users. Mobile messaging apps, such as MSN Messenger, Facebook Messenger and Whatsapp are only capable for meeting users’ social integrative needs. According to Marco (2009), I assume Facebook customers’ overall experience is not as good as Tencent customers.

Although Tencent applies clever and effective strategies absorbing users and earning benefits, it still needs to prove that users are willing to give money to Tencent because Tencent knows how to gratify user needs, and Facebook, Inc. knows less or cares less. The final hypothesis, which users choose to use a certain social medium depends on how many and how well their needs are gratified by it rather than the effectiveness of the marketing strategies it applies, needs further examining.

METHOD

Research Questions

RQ1: What is the usage of WeChat?

RQ2: What user needs do these frequently used features of WeChat gratify?

RQ3: How important are WeChat's specific features to users?

RQ4: What factors motivate users to use or prevent from using WeChat?

RQ5: What other needs do users expect WeChat to gratify?

Survey

In order to answer those research questions and draw reliable conclusions, a large number of respondents were needed. In addition, survey has the quality that it is “not constrained by geographic boundaries” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). Thus, I chose survey as my method of research.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was initially designed in English and contained such questions as “How often do you conduct the following activities on WeChat in the past three months?”; “How likely would you reduce the frequency using WeChat if one of the following features was disabled?”; “Why do you use WeChat more often than others?”; “What other feature(s) do you expect WeChat to add? What else do you expect social media to do?” Having considered of the limited English proficiency of Chinese respondents, the questionnaire was translated from English to Simplified Chinese.

Both English and Chinese versions of the questionnaire were reviewed by my colleague who was proficient in English and Chinese. She attended a four-year undergraduate program in

English in China, and earned a master's degree in Media Theory and Research from the United States. She was currently a Ph.D. student in Mass Communication and Media Arts in the United States. She had never got involved in my research, except merely checking the accuracy and consistency of the translation. She checked the translation and proved both versions were consistent.

The Chinese questionnaire was created through Teng Xun Wen Juan (Tencent Survey), a Chinese online survey tool.

Sampling

All the respondents to the survey were recruited from any possible ethnic group, gender, and nation. However, because my research focused on the usage of WeChat and WeChat is only widely used in Mainland China, nearly all the respondents were WeChat users and from Mainland China.

Respondents must have be at least 18 years old to participate in the survey. I used the “snowball effect” (Weis & Fine, 2000) to recruit my survey respondents in order to enlarge the number and enrich the diversity of and respondents.

By having used the “snowball effect”, people I already knew, such as my family members and friends, were the first ones I contacted through WeChat and QQ. I posted the link to my survey on my WeChat and QQ Moments sections with a statement indicated the purpose of my research, the request for completing and sharing the survey, and the qualifications of participation. People whom my first participants knew were the following respondents. I did not limit the ways my first participants used to contact those following ones.

RESULTS

Demographic Information

Because the link to the survey was posted and shared through WeChat, all the respondents were WeChat users for sure.

By the end of the survey response collecting, 788 responses were obtained in total.

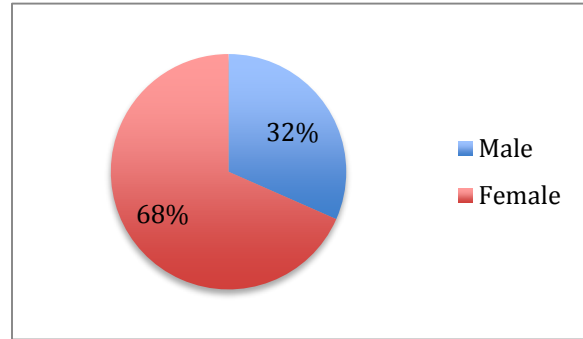


Figure 3 Gender Distribution

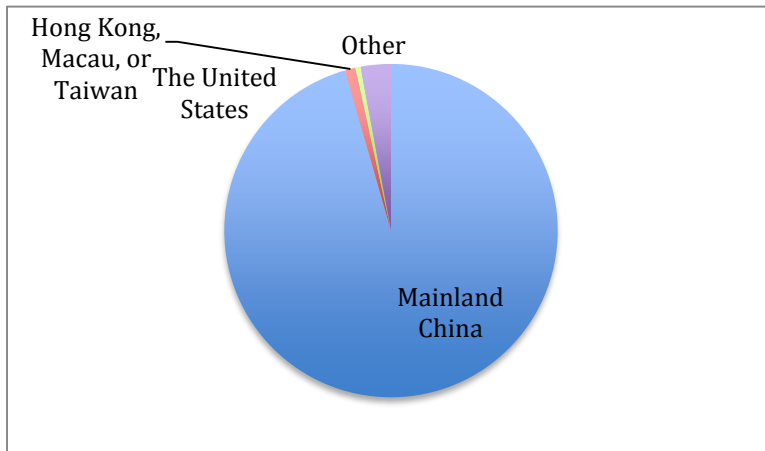


Figure 4 Citizenship Distribution

States (0.5%), and 23 were from other countries (2.9%). In addition, 730 respondent were currently living, studying or working in the Mainland China (92.6%), 9 in Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan (1.1%), 20 in the United States (2.5%), and 29 in other countries

249 respondents were male (31.6%), and 539 were female (68.4%). 753 respondents were originally from Mainland China (95.6%), 8 were from Chinese Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan (1%), 4 were from the United

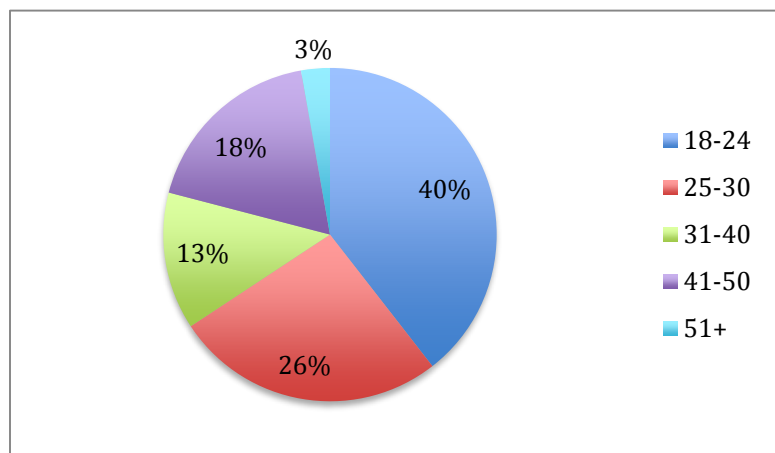


Figure 5 Age Distribution

(3.7%). 311 respondents were at the age of 18-24 (39.5%), 207 at the age of 25-30 (26.3%), and the rest (270) were above age 31 (34.2%).

Usage of WeChat

All the responses to the survey can only represent the contemporary feelings and memory of respondents, and indicate their most recent usage of and the comments about WeChat. 692 respondents indicated they sent text or voice messages, or conducted video chat almost every day in the past three months (87.8%), 58 several times a week (7.4%), 12 once a week (1.5%), 17 several times a month (2.2%), 7 once a month (0.9%), and 2 never (0.3%).

686 respondents viewed WeChat Moments almost every day (87.1%), 63 several times a week (8.0%), 16 once a week (2.0%), 17 several times a month (2.2%), 3 once a month (0.4%), and 3 never (0.4%).

195 respondents posted status, or pictures; or shared information in WeChat Moments almost every day (25.7%), 185 several times a week (23.5%), 109 once a week (13.8%), 203 several times a month (25.8%), 63 once a month (8.0%), and 33 never (4.2%).

127 respondents sent or received Red Envelope almost every day (16.1%), 288 several times a week (36.5%), 102 once a week (12.9%), 235 several times a month (29.8%), 74 once a month (9.4%), and 22 never (2.8%). Due to the Chinese New Year was in the past three months prior to the date respondents completed the survey, people sent and received Red Envelope much more than other months.

56 respondents used WeChat Wallet for such purposes as buying a movie ticket or ordering a taxi almost every day (7.1%), 95 several times a week (12.1%), 116 once a week (14.7%), 248 several times a month (31.5%), 72 once a month (9.1%), and 201 never (25.5%).

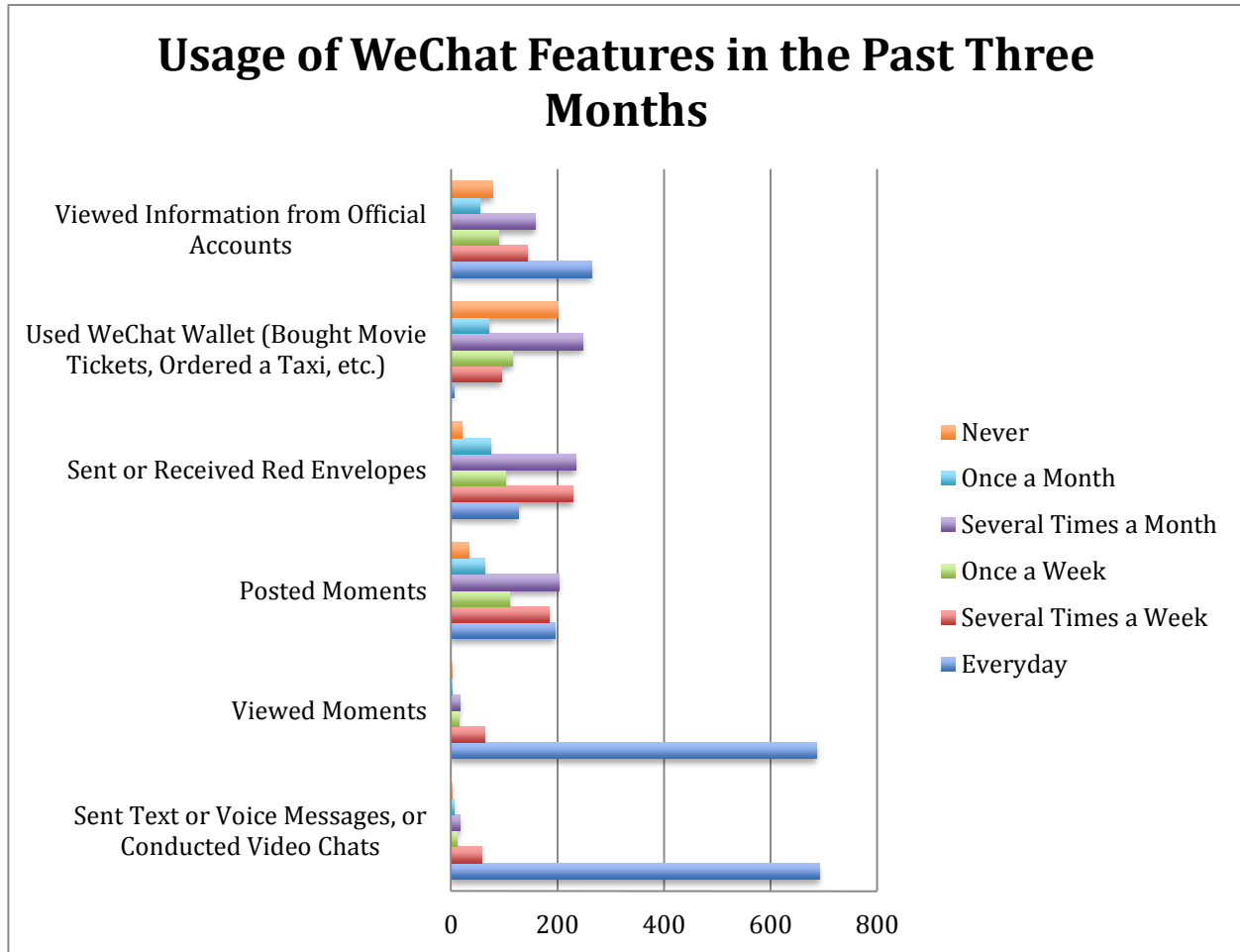


Figure 6 WeChat Usage

Importance of WeChat Features

643 respondents (81.6%) first heard of WeChat from relatives or friends. 407 respondents (51.6%) indicated they used WeChat more than other social media. As for the question asking for the reasons that these 407 respondents chose to use WeChat more often than other social media, respondents were allowed to choose more than one given reason. The most chosen reason (83.0%) was that more friends or family members were using WeChat more than using other social media. The second most chosen reason (51.4%) was that WeChat could gratify more personal needs. The third most chosen reason (36.1%) was that WeChat had more functions. And the fourth most chosen reason (34.9%) was that WeChat was more customized.

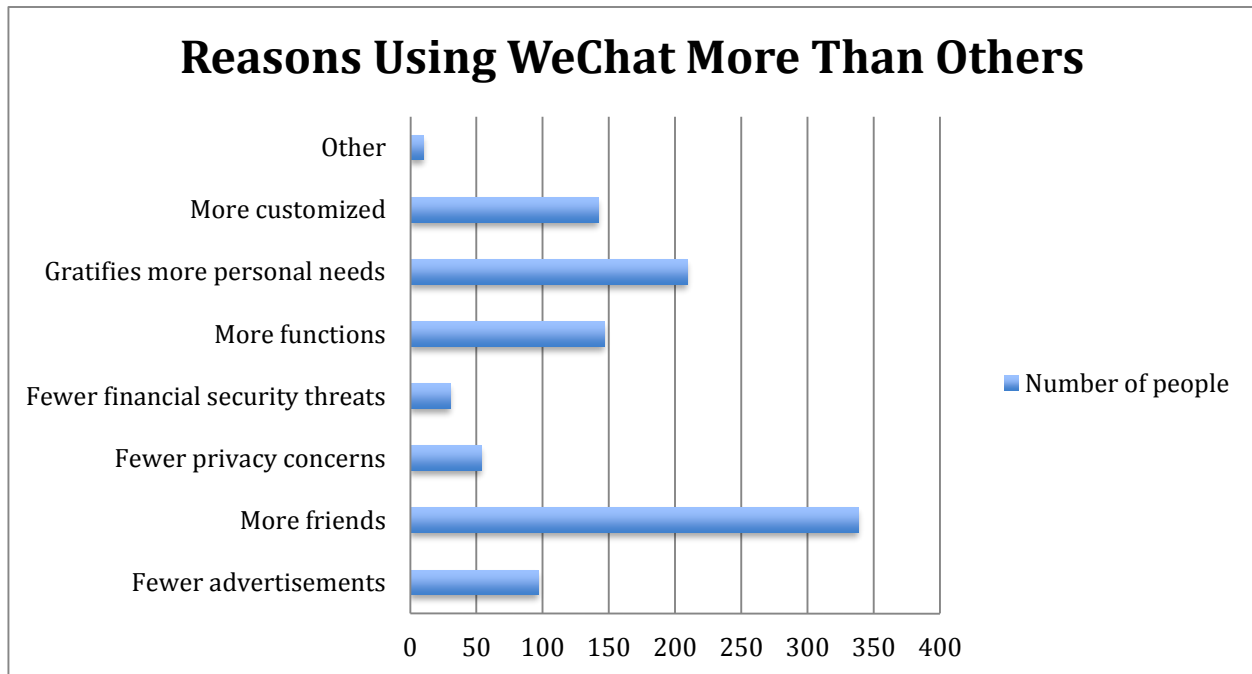


Figure 7 Use Purposes

If the voice messaging service was disabled, 321 respondents (40.7%) claimed that they would extremely likely to reduce the frequency of or even stop using WeChat, and 323 (41.0%) would slightly likely to do so. Only 13 respondents (1.6%) claimed that they would extremely unlikely to do so, and 41 (5.2%) would slightly unlikely to do so.

If the text messaging service was disabled, 546 respondents (69.3%) claimed that they would extremely likely to reduce the frequency of or even stop using WeChat, and 178 (22.6%) would slightly likely to do so. Only 9 respondents (1.1%) claimed that they would extremely unlikely to do so, and 18 (2.3%) would slightly unlikely to do so.

If the video chat service was disabled, 229 respondents (29.1%) claimed that they would extremely likely to reduce the frequency of or even stop using WeChat, and 288 (36.5%) would slightly likely to do so. Only 19 respondents (2.4%) claimed that they would extremely unlikely to do so, and 57 (7.2%) would slightly unlikely to do so.

If the Moments service was disabled, 316 respondents (40.1%) claimed that they would extremely likely to reduce the frequency of or even stop using WeChat, and 312 (39.6%) would slightly likely to do so. Only 16 respondents (2.0%) claimed that they would extremely unlikely to do so, and 48 (6.1%) would slightly unlikely to do so.

If the official account subscription service was disabled, 167 respondents (21.2%) claimed that they would extremely likely to reduce the frequency of or even stop using WeChat, and 294 (37.3%) would slightly likely to do so. Only 34 respondents (4.3%) claimed that they would extremely unlikely to do so, and 90 (11.4%) would slightly unlikely to do so.

If the Wallet service (including sending Red Envelopes) was disabled, 156 respondents (19.8%) claimed that they would extremely likely to reduce the frequency of or even stop using WeChat, and 323 (41.0%) would slightly likely to do so. Only 41 respondents (5.2%) claimed that they would extremely unlikely to do so, and 119 (25.3%) would slightly unlikely to do so.

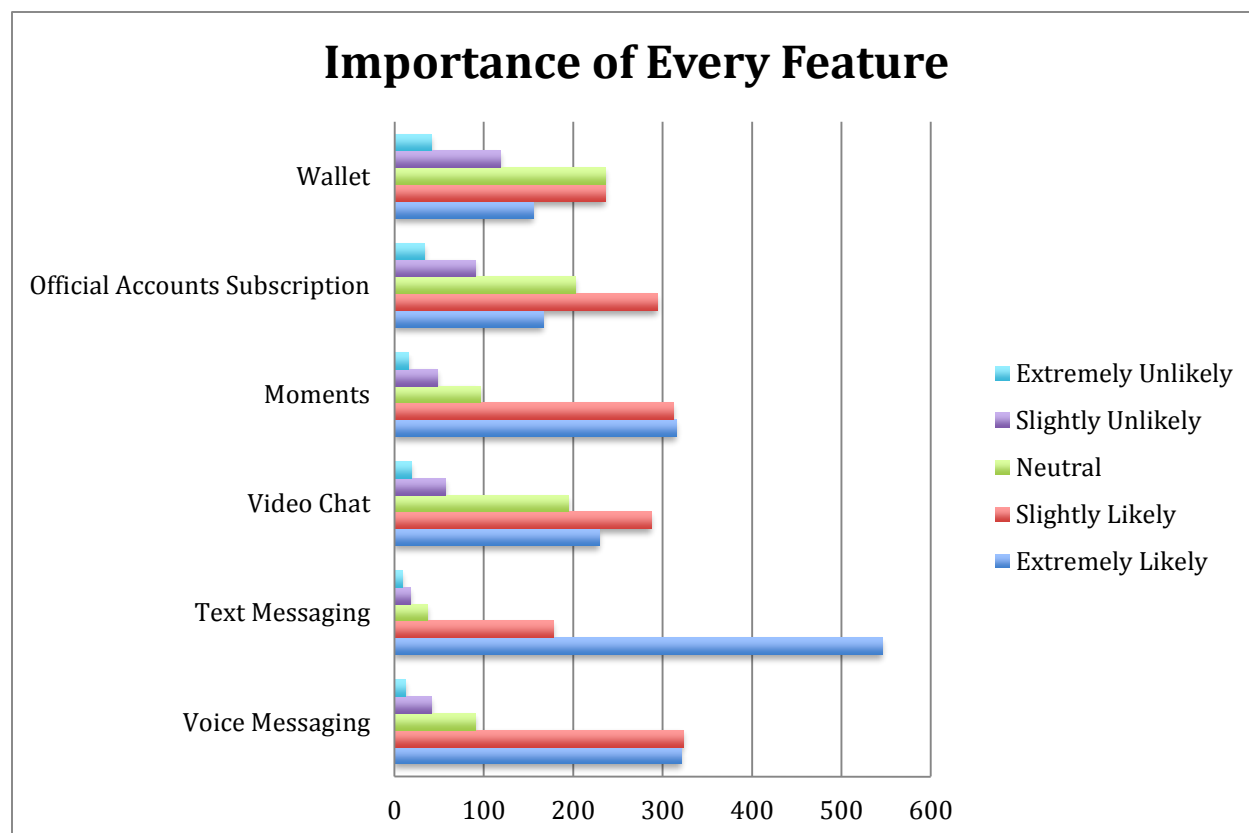


Figure 8 Importance of WeChat

As an instant messaging application, WeChat is mostly used for social networking for granted. However, the usage of WeChat Moments field is as frequent as messaging service. WeChat Moments provides similar service as Facebook News Feed. Statues that express self-feelings and emotions were the most posted type of moments (81.1%). Entertaining moments were the second type of moments respondents posted very often (79.9%). Pictures of food, cloths, and tours were the third type of moments respondents liked to post (69.2%). And, selfies were the fourth type (49.7%).

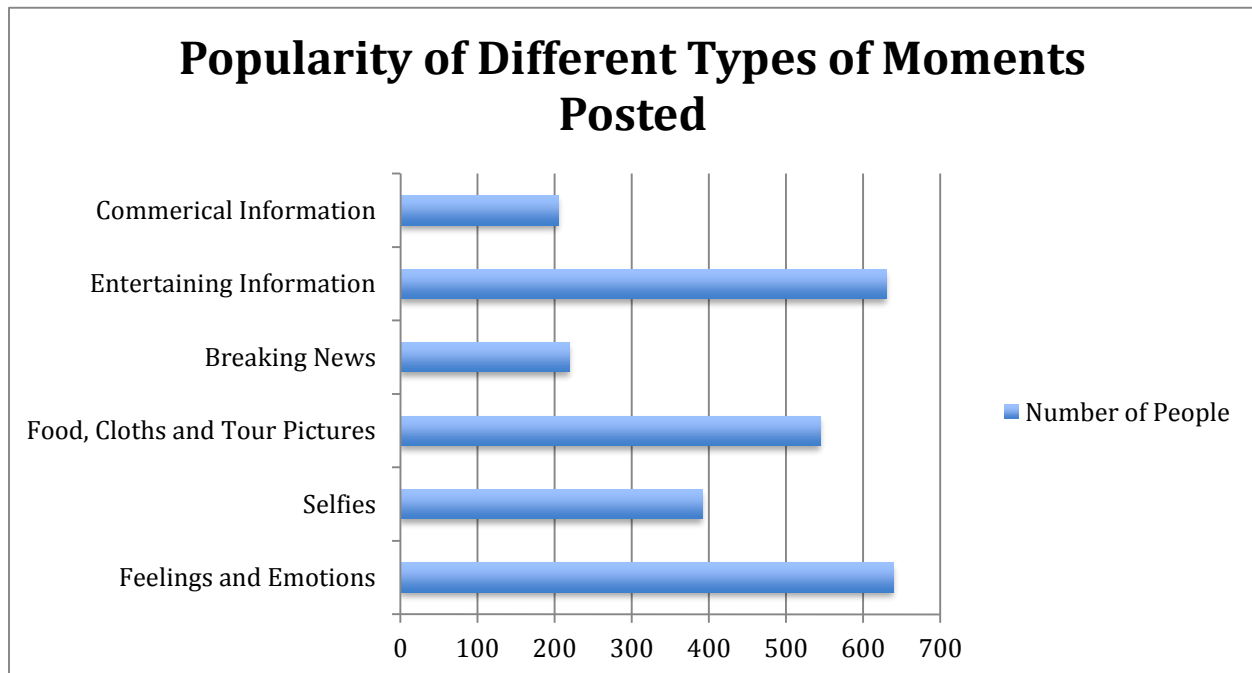


Figure 9 Popularity of Posting Moments

The option respondents chose the most as the purpose they posted moments was that they wanted to share entertaining information with WeChat friends (80.3%); The second most chosen option was that they posted moments when they wanted to share potentially important information with others (59.9%); the third was when they wanted their family members and friends know their recent situations (51.6%); the fourth was when they wanted to show off the good food, beautiful clothes, and leisure life (49.4%).

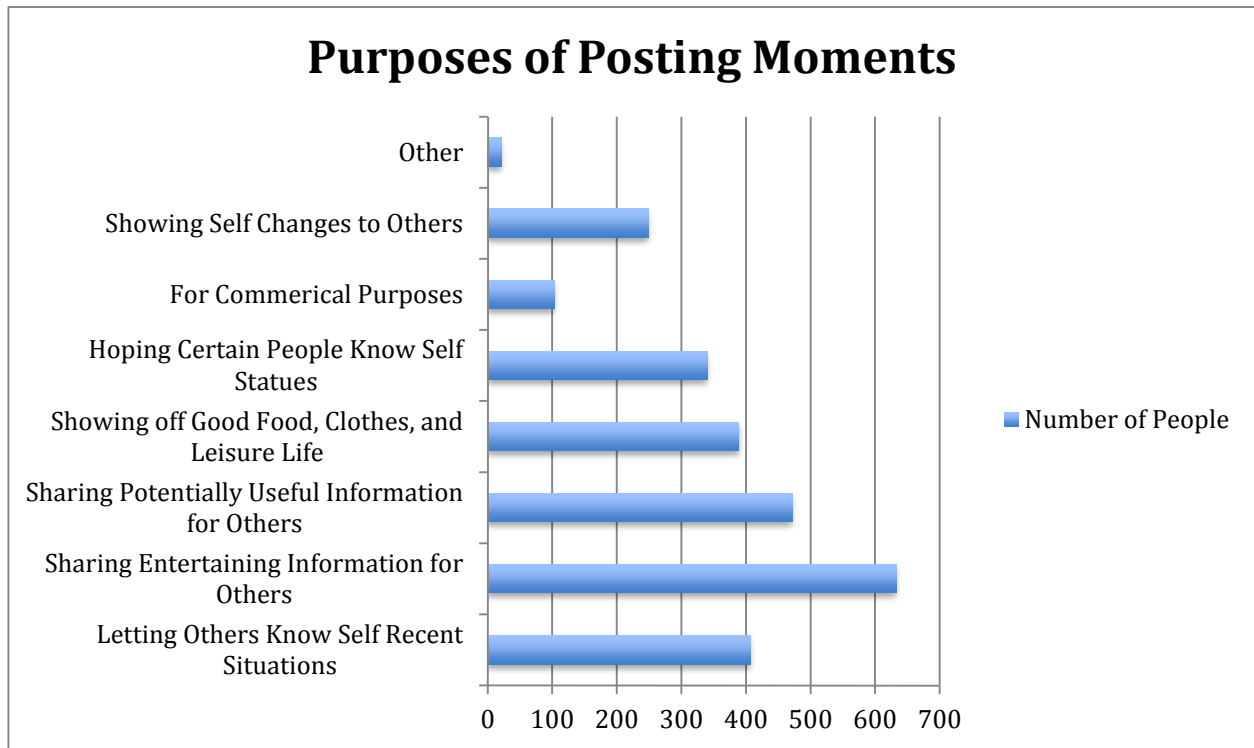


Figure 10 Purposes for Posting Moments

656 respondents (83.2%) always liked, shared, or comment on others’ entertaining posts; 643 (81.6%) did so on others’ statues of feelings and emotions; 592 (75.1%) did so on others’ pictures of food, clothes and tours; and 520 (66.0%) did so on others’ selfies.

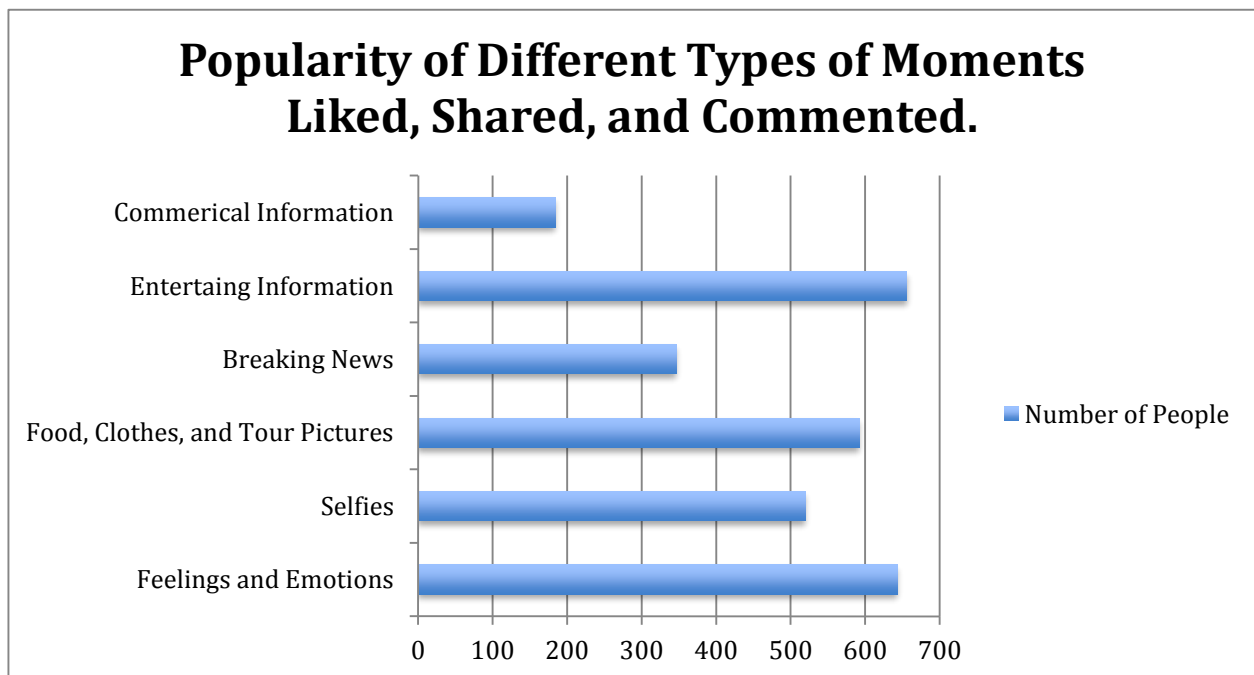


Figure 11 Popularity of Reacting to Moments

The option respondents chose the most as the purpose they viewed moments was that they wanted to know the recent situations of their WeChat friends (78.9%); The second most chosen option was that it had become a habit visiting WeChat Moments (71.1%); the third was to look for entertaining information (63.1%); the fourth was just to kill time (62.4%).

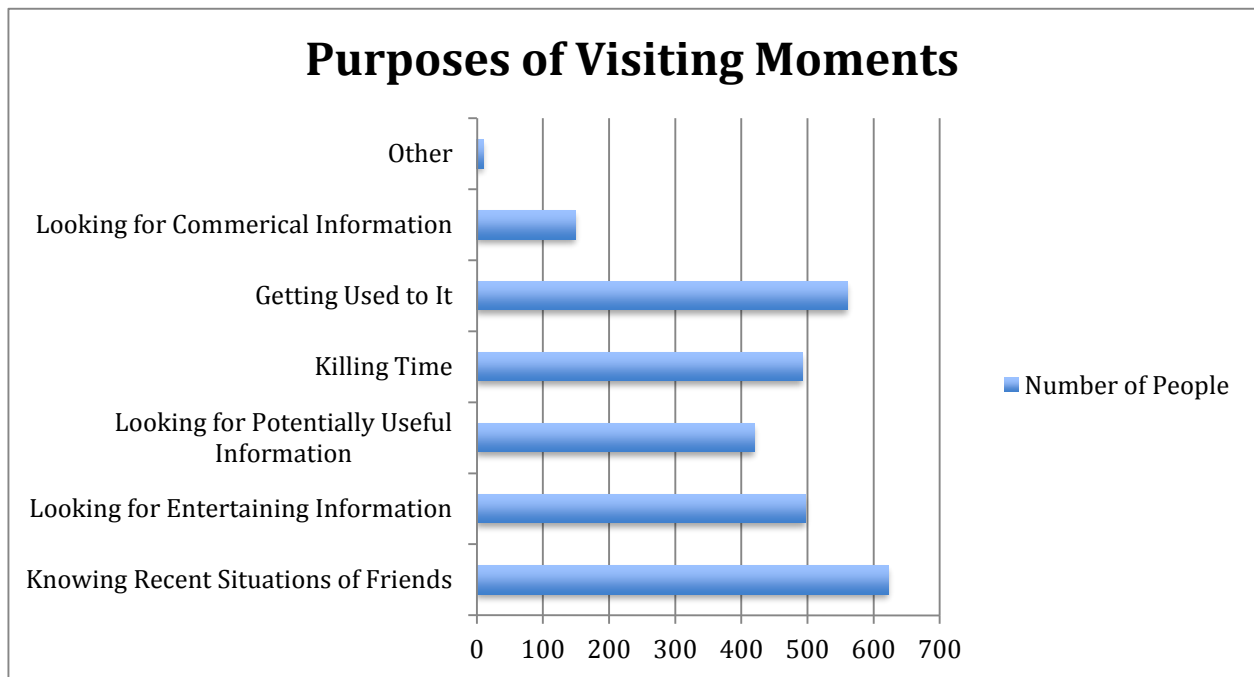


Figure 12 Purposes of Reacting to Moments

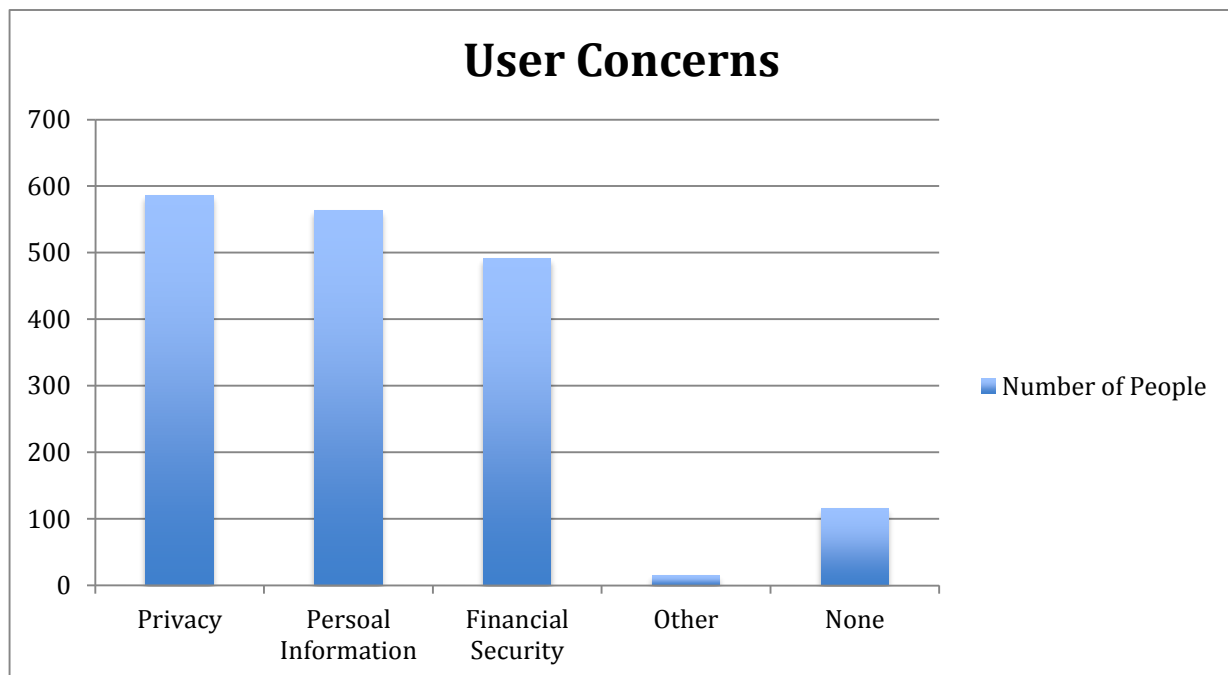


Figure 13 User Concerns

User Concerns

The largest concern respondents had was their privacy (74.4%), the second was their personal information (71.4%); and the third was financial security (62.3%). However, 116 respondents indicated they had no concerns while using WeChat (14.7%).

Additional Requests for Social Media

As time goes and environment changes, users come up with new expectations, requests and suggestions for social media.

Although WeChat had been tremendously multi-functionalized, users still requested WeChat to add more functions, such as Moments timeline, picture beautification, moments filter, weather change reminder, and traffic situation report. However, some thought that keeping adding more functions might not always be a good thing. Some users also expected WeChat to add functions that could help and promote users' health and study.

Some users suggested WeChat to keep developing and modifying current features, such as increasing the definition when having a video chat, reducing the data consuming, and making text and voice messaging more convenient.

Some users hoped WeChat could be more customized increase the usability. One hoped when deleting one WeChat friend, self could be deleted from this former friend's friend list automatically. Some suggested WeChat to recommend friends through current friends' friend lists. People also expected WeChat could allow users to post longer videos and more than nine pictures for each post. Some wanted to be able to recall deleted chat history. Some hoped WeChat could stop displaying the reminder for recalled messages. Some suggested that users could dislike moments as well. Some hoped users could post voice statuses in Moments.

WeChat has already combined messenger and news feed, some respondents still hoped WeChat could combine more features from other social media and connect to more third-party applications. For instance, some respondents hope WeChat could add a platform allows users to post, store and exhibit dairy, articles, pictures, etc., like Qzone and MySpace. Some expected users could also connect to and view posts of Weibo (micro blog).

In addition, some users hoped WeChat could stay free, and remove the fee for withdrawing the money in WeChat Wallet. People also expected higher security of privacy, personal information and finance on WeChat. Some suggested that if one wants to download others' profile photos and pictures posted, he has to obtain the consent from others and download with the permit.

CONCLUSION

As an instant messaging application, text and voice messaging services are the most used by WeChat users. Moments also plays an important role in WeChat users' life, since viewing others' moment has become many people's daily activity and a way to spend spare time. Moments also motivates users to interact and communicate with each other. Posts are topics for users to start conversations. Posts are interpreted multiple meanings by different people. Thus, a post can create more than one topic. People do not have to conduct a long conversation, but just several replies. Even if people do not want to type a comment or a reply, a "like" also has its meanings.

Moments provides a platform for those who promote their products or services as domestic or overseas purchasing agents, or employees of companies on WeChat. Although only 26% respondents have ever posted commercial information and 24.3% have ever liked, shared, or commented on commercial information in Moments, these numbers are good to be just relatively acceptable for users. Users could accept that around three out of ten friends' posts are advertisements. Since an increasing number of Chinese students go study abroad, an increasing number of Chinese students choose to be overseas luxury goods buyers. Thus, WeChat gratifies these users' need to promote their products and services.

Wallet is not used as frequent as messaging and Moments services. After all, using Wallet means conducting financial transactions, and people do not always need to pay for utilities, buy movie tickets, order a taxi, etc. Wallet does gratify certain users' needs.

From the open-ended question, it can be seen that some users still did not know WeChat completely, because they suggested WeChat to add features it had already had. Some

respondents requested more features, but forgot that mobile devices have their limitations comparing to computers. Thus, not all functions are suitable to WeChat. After all, WeChat mainly runs on mobile phones, and the sizes of mobile phones are not appreciate for users to edit Word, Excel, or PPT files. In addition, adding certain features would inevitably increase the disclosure of personal information. For example, some respondents hoped users could see who had ever visited their Moments. However, if this service was activated, visitors' activated would be recorded and exposed. And, the Friend Commendation service would provoke WeChat to extract users' contact lists and disclosed to others.

Overall, traditional media user needs concluded by previous scholars are still applicable. However, modern users have more needs beyond the traditional ones. WeChat as a dominant social networking platform keeps developing and modifying itself to gratify users' new needs. User needs determine how social media are designed and functioned. Decision-makers in social media companies and application designers need to investigate what users need and how to gratify their needs. Users also need to have the basic knowledge of new technology applied to social media, and raise requests based on a compressive consideration.

REFERENCES

- Ashman, H., Dagger, D., Brailsford, T., Goulding, J., O'Sullivan, D., Schmakeit, J., & Wade, V. (2012). Human-Computer Interaction and the Web. In J. A. Jacko (Ed.). *The Human-Computer Interaction Handbook: Fundamentals, Evolving Technologies, and Emerging Applications* (3rd ed.) (pp. 565-588). Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.
- Bandao Morning News. (2015, January 21). *Explore the Potential Risks of WeChat Payment*. Retrieved from: http://tech.gmw.cn/newspaper/2015-01/21/content_103910249.htm
- Kaipainen, M., Ravaja, N., Tikka, P., Vuori, R., Pugliese, R., Rapino, M., & Takala, T. (2011). *Enactive Systems and Enactive Media: Embodied Human-Machine Coupling beyond Interfaces*. *Leonardo*, 44(5), 433-438.
- Kantar. (2015). *China Social Media Impact 2015*. Retrieved from: http://us.kantar.com/media/909043/kantar_china_social_media_impact_2015.pdf
- Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1974). Utilization of Mass Communication by the Individual. In Blumler J. G. and Katz E. (eds.), *The Uses of Mass Communications: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research* (pp. 19-32). Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage.
- Katz, E., Gurevitch, M., & Haas, H. (1973). On the Use of the Mass Media for Important Things. *American Sociological Review*, 38 (2), 164-181.
- Klosowski, T. (2014, February 2). *The Psychology of Gamification: Can Apps Keep You Motivated?* Retrieved from: <http://lifehacker.com/the-psychology-of-gamification-can-apps-keep-you-motiv-1521754385>
- Lazzaro, N. (2012). Why We Play: Affect and the Fun of Games – Designing Emotions for Games, Entertainment Interfaces, and Interactive Products. In Jacko J. A. (3rd ed.), *The*

- Human-Computer Interaction Handbook: Fundamentals Evolving Technologies, and Emerging Applications* (pp. 725-747). Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.
- Lee, K. (2014, April 29). *How to Win Friends and Influence Your Audience: 10 Theories to Know For Greater Persuasion*. Retrieved from: <https://blog.bufferapp.com/social-media-influence>
- Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2011). *Qualitative Communication Research Methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Marco, S. (2009). Mobile Interaction Design in the Age of Experience Ecosystems Human-Computer Interaction In J. A. Jacko (Ed.). *The Human-Computer Interaction Handbook: Fundamentals, Evolving Technologies, and Emerging Applications* (3rd ed.) (pp. 131-140). Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.
- Norton, A. (2012, July 8). *10 Reasons Why I Avoid Social Networking Services*. Retrieved from: <http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/10-things/10-reasons-why-i-avoid-social-networking-services/>
- Qi, Z. (2014, February 7). *Chinese People Like to Use Social Media to Show Happiness*. Retrieved from: http://zqb.cyol.com/html/2014-02/07/nw.D110000zgqnb_20140207_8-11.htm
- Statista. (2015a). *Most Popular Global Mobile Messenger Apps as of August 2015, Based on Number of Monthly Active Users (in Millions)*. Retrieved from: <http://www.statista.com/statistics/258749/most-popular-global-mobile-messenger-apps/>
- Statista. (2015b). *Facebook's Revenue and Net Income from 2007 to 2014 (in Million U.S. Dollars)*. Retrieved from: <http://www.statista.com/statistics/277229/facebooks-annual-revenue-and-net-income/>

Tencent. (2015, March 18). *Tencent Announces 2014 Fourth Quarter and Annual Results*.

Retrieved from: <http://www.tencent.com/en-us/content/ir/news/2015/attachments/20150318.pdf>

Weis, L., & Fine, M. (2000). *Speed Bumps: A Student-Friendly Guide to Qualitative Research*.

New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Wimmer, R. D., & Dominick, J. R. (2011). *Mass Media Research* (9th ed.). Boston, MA:

Wadsworth.

Xiang, T. (2014, June 23). *WeChat Enables One-click Payment and Money Transfer Between*

Users. Retrieved from: <http://technode.com/2014/06/23/wechat-enables-one-click-payment-money-transfer-users/>

APPENDICES

Questionnaire

Introduction

Dear Respondent,

Hello, I am Bowen Gao from Southern Illinois University Carbondale. I am doing a research on a study of people's use of WeChat. I would be grateful if you could spare sometime to complete the questionnaire. The survey will take around 10 minutes to complete. All your responses will be kept confidential, no personal information will be used, and only the cumulative data will be used for analysis. Completion and submission of this survey indicate voluntary consent to participate in this study. Questions about this study can be directed to Bowen Gao, College of Mass Communication and Media Arts, SIUC.

Please note: You must be over age 18 to participate in this survey. You are free to withdraw at any time.

Thank you for taking the time to assist us in this research.

Instructions

Please complete the questionnaire by checking the letter of the answer closest to your opinion. If you choose 'Other', please give your specific answer on the line.

Please check only ONE box on each row

1. How often do you conduct the following activities on WeChat in the past three months?

	Almost Everyday	Several times a week	Once a week	Several Times a Month	Once a month	Never
Text, voice messaging, or video chat						
View Moments						
Post Moments						
Send or receive Red Envelopes						
Use Wallet (buy movie tickets, order a taxi, etc.)						

Subscribe official accounts						
-----------------------------	--	--	--	--	--	--

2. How likely would you reduce the frequency using WeChat if one of the following features was disabled?

	5 Extremely likely	4 Slightly likely	3 Neutral	2 Slightly unlikely	1 Extremely unlikely
Voice Messaging					
Text Messaging					
Video Chat					
Moments					
Official Accounts					
Wallet (including Red Packet)					

Please select ALL that apply

3. What kinds of moments have you ever posted?
 - A. Emotions and feelings
 - B. Selfies
 - C. Pictures of food, clothes, or tours
 - D. Breaking news
 - E. Entertaining information
 - F. Commercial information
4. What kinds of moments have you ever liked, shared, or commented on?
 - A. Emotions and feelings
 - B. Selfies
 - C. Pictures of food, clothes, or tours
 - D. Breaking news
 - E. Entertaining information
 - F. Commercial information
5. What are your purposes of posting moments?
 - A. For family members and friends to know my recent situations
 - B. Sharing entertaining information for others
 - C. Sharing potentially useful information for others
 - D. Showing off good food, clothes, or leisure life
 - E. Hoping certain people see my statues
 - F. For commercial purposes
 - G. Showing friends my changes

- H. Other
6. What are your purposes of viewing others moments?
- A. Checking friends' recent situations
 - B. Looking for entertaining information
 - C. Looking for potential useful information
 - D. Killing time
 - E. Getting used to it
 - F. Looking for commercial information
 - G. Other
7. What factor(s) prevent you from using WeChat?
- A. Privacy concerns
 - B. Too much advertising
 - C. Potential financial traps
 - D. Potential data mining
 - E. Other (please specify) _____.
 - F. Nothing prevents me from using it
8. What other social media do you use more frequently than WeChat?
- A. QQ
 - B. Weibo
 - C. Renren
 - D. WeChat is the most frequently used
 - E. Facebook
 - F. Twitter
 - G. SnapChat
 - H. WhatsApp
 - I. Instagram
 - J. Other
9. Why do you use it more than WeChat? (If you choose D in Q#9, please answer: Why do you use WeChat more often than others?)
- A. It has less advertising
 - B. More friends of mine are using it
 - C. Fewer privacy concerns when using it
 - D. Fewer financial traps
 - E. It has more functions
 - F. It gratifies more personal needs of mine
 - G. It is more customized
 - H. Other

Please select only ONE answer

10. How did you first hear WeChat?
- A. Through the recommendation of friends or family members
 - B. Through media
 - C. Through follow-up information
 - D. Other
11. Please indicate the country/region of your citizenship:
- A. Mainland China
 - B. Hong Kong, Macau, or Taiwan
 - C. The United States of America
 - D. Other
12. Please indicate the country/region you have been staying, studying, or working in for at least six months:
- A. Mainland China
 - B. Hong Kong, Macau, or Taiwan
 - C. The United States of America
 - D. Other
13. Please select the age range you are at:
- A. 18-24
 - B. 25-30
 - C. 31-40
 - D. 41-50
 - E. 51+
14. Please indicate your gender:
- A. Male
 - B. Female
 - C. Prefer not to tell

Open-ended question

15. What other functions do you expect WeChat to add? What other functions do you think social media should have to gratify users' needs?

Thank you for your participation. If you need any further information please feel free to contact me at kevingao@siu.edu or my supervisor Dr. Wenjing Xie at wxie@siu.edu.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Sponsored Projects Administration, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4533. E-mail: siuhsc@siu.edu

SIUC HSC FORM A

REQUEST FOR APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

By making this application, I certify that I have read and understand the University's policies and procedures governing research activities involving human subjects. I agree to comply with the letter and spirit of those policies. I acknowledge my obligation to:

- 1. Accept responsibility for the research described, including work by students under my direction.
2. Obtain written approval from the Human Subjects Committee of any changes from the originally approved protocol BEFORE implementing those changes.
3. Retain signed consent forms in a secure location separate from the data for at least three years after the completion of the research.
4. Immediately report any adverse effects of the study on the subjects to the Chairperson of the Human Subjects Committee, SIUC, Carbondale, Illinois - 618-453-4533 and to the Director of the Office of Sponsored Projects Administration, SIUC.
Phone 618-453-4531. E-mail: siuhsc@siu.edu

Project Title

User Determnism: A Study of the Determination of Gratications on the Uses of China's WeChat

RESEARCH ADVISOR'S ASSURANCE: My signature on this application certifies that the student is knowledgeable about the regulations and policies governing research with human subjects. I am aware of my obligations stated on Form A and will be available to supervise the research. When on sabbatical leave or vacation, I will arrange for an alternate faculty sponsor to assume responsibility during my absence. I will advise the Human Subjects Committee by letter of such arrangements.

Signature: Bowen Gao, Date: 02/15/2016
Researcher(s) or Project Director(s) Bowen Gao Date
Please print or type name below signature.

Signature: Wenjing Xie, Date: 02/15/2016
Researcher's Advisor (required for all student projects) Wenjing Xie Date
Please print or type name below signature.


The request submitted by the above-named researcher(s) was approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee.

This approval is valid for one year from the review date. Unless the protocol is approved as Category I (exempt), researchers must request an extension to continue the research after that date. This approval form must be included in all Master's theses/research papers and Doctoral dissertations involving human subjects that are submitted to the Graduate School.

Signature: [Handwritten Signature], Date: 3-9-16
Interim Chairperson, Southern Illinois University Human Subjects Committee Date

HSC Approval letter (exempt)

To: Bowen Gao

From: Wayne R. Glass, CRA 
Interim Chair, Human Subjects Committee

Date: March 9, 2016

Subject: *User Determinism: A Study of the Determination of Gratifications on the Uses of China's WeChat*

Protocol Number: 16103

The revisions to the above referenced study have been approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. The study is determined to be exempt according to 45 CFR 46.101(b)2. This approval does not have an expiration date; however, any future modifications to your protocol must be submitted to the Committee for review and approval prior to their implementation.

Your Form A approval is enclosed.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the USDHHS Office of Human Research Protection. The Assurance number is FWA00005334.

WG:kr

cc: Wenjing Xie

VITA

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University

Bowen Gao

gbwccc@gmail.com

Northeast Normal University
Bachelor of Arts, Broadcast and Television Directing, June 2014

Research Paper Title:

User Determinism: A Study of the Determination of Gratifications on the Uses of China's WeChat

Major Professor: Wenjing Xie

Publications:

Xie, W. & Kang, C. (2015). See you, see me: Teenagers' self-disclosure and regret of posting on social network site. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 52, 398-407.

Feng, Y. & Xie, W. (2015). Digital divide 2.0: The role of social networking sites in seeking health information online from a longitudinal perspective. *Journal of Health Communication*, 20(1), 60-68.

Xie, W. (2015). Privacy and self-disclosure on social media. *Journalism Evolution* (a peer-reviewed journal in China), 3, 70-76.

Xie, W. & Zhao, Y. (2014). Is seeing believing? Comparing media credibility of traditional and online media in China. *China Media Research*, 10(3), 64-73.

Xie, W. (2014). Social network site use, mobile personal talk and social capital among teenagers. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 41, 228-235.

Xie, W. & Newhagen, J. (2014). The effects of communication interface proximity on user anxiety for crime alerts received on desktop, laptop and hand-held devices. *Communication Research*, 41(3), 375-403.

Feng, Y. & Xie, W. (2014). Teens' concern for privacy when using social networking sites: An analysis of socialization agents and relationships with privacy-protecting behaviors. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 33, 153-162.

Xie, W. (2014). The effects of social media use and mobile communication on social capital: A review of research history, current situation and future research. *Journalism Evolution*, 2, 51-56.

Xie, W., Zhao, Y., & Xie, W. Y. (2013). The effects of interface design of hand-held devices on mobile advertising effectiveness among college students in China. *International Journal of Mobile Marketing*, 8(1), 46-61.

Xie, W. (2005). Virtual space, real identity: The negotiation of cultural identity of Chinese Diaspora in virtual community. *Telematics & Informatics*, 22(4), 395-404.

Xie, W. & Huang, Y. (2004). Internet, globalization, and media revolution: Media development and journalism education in the era of the Internet. *Chinese Journal of International Communication*, 25(2), 44-47.

Xie, W. (forthcoming). "I am blogging...": A qualitative study of bloggers' motivations of writing blogs. *Encyclopedia of E-Commerce Development, Implementation, and Management* (edited by I. Lee). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

Veenstra, A., Iyer, N., Xie, W., Lyons, B., Park, C., & Feng, Y. (forthcoming). Come Together, Right Now: Retweeting in the Social Model of Protest Mobilization. *Hashtag Publics: The Power and Politics of Networked Discourse Communities*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.