

Descriptive Analysis Regarding Use of Wechat among University Students in China

Xing Yu Zhu¹ & Abdul Razaque Chhachhar¹

¹ School of Journalism and Communication, Tsinghua University, Beijing, China

Correspondence: Abdul Razaque Chhachhar, School of Journalism and Communication, Tsinghua University, Beijing, China. E-mail: archhachhar@gmail.com

Received: December 7, 2015 Accepted: December 22, 2015 Online Published: January 12, 2016

doi:10.5539/ass.v12n2p151

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ass.v12n2p151>

Abstract

The main purpose this study is to explore that how the international students use Wechat in China and what kind of functions and social networking apply on Wechat. Furthermore the study indicated regarding what was most important opinion and information students adopt on Wechat. This research study is descriptive analysis about usage and Wechat as source of communication and contact with family, friends and teacher is highlighted in the paper. Total 200 international students respondents randomly were selected for data collection from Tsinghua University Beijing, China the 65.5% male and 34.5% of the female participated in the study the main findings of the study 94.5% of the respondents use Wechat to contact with friends and main purpose of use Wechat is the result showed 97.5% send message their friends and teachers. However, the 44% of the respondents agree the information that people tag and write on Wechat could be reliable. Furthermore, there many functions are available on Wechat where people can get benefit like call the taxi, transfer money recharge money in mobile phone and games but most of the respondents did not use it properly due to lack of Chinese language bearer among international students. Therefore it is possible that Wechat can introduce some new Apps where international students can get more benefit from it.

Keywords: social media, wechat, mobile media

1. Introduction

Social Media is the product of information revolution and growing rapidly in the last decade. It has changed the way of people's communication and information flowing. The facts that motivate people to use social media are about information, entertainment, convenience, and social interaction. (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000, Ko et al., 2005, Ahrama et al., 2011). Facebook and Myspace is the symbol of the power of social media and they are widely studied. At the very beginning, people use them mainly to meet friends and to seek information. (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008) As the development of social media, it is becoming an inerasable part of modern people and its tentacles have extended beyond communication. According to Cromity (2012) the social media is mainly used in 22 aspects of people's life including business, advertising, education, news, entertainment, research, etc. It has become one of the most important tools for many professionals, decision makers, companies, and consultants, who try to target their customers, analyze the market and earn higher profit (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media networking is creating lot of platform for young people to communicate with each other and share their experience and take more interest to get more information about different issues of society by interacting with each other. Social networking sites allow every one to share its feelings ideas and new creativity approaches for people. Social networking enhances the capacity of students to pursue the things and sharing important things among student for more information. Webcam, video and other functions are more famous and easy to access and communicate with friends without any hindrance on social media (Awake, 2011).

Nowadays China is a rising for social media market. The rapid growth of Internet users in China is based on the massive population and the popularization of Internet. According to the 34th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China, by the end of June 2014, China has had 632 million Internet users, with an increase of 14.42 million in the past half year (Note 1). More scholars currently turn their eyes on China. Wang (2015) starts a program called NGO2.0 to test how Chinese NGOs to use social media to increase transparency and the efficiency of sending information. He also shows a clear map of the usage of social media of Chinese NGOs. Ding (2014) also investigates on the social media practices of taxi drivers in Shenzhen. Schulte (2015) has

studied the correlation between the information communication technology and rural education in China. Wallis' (2015) study explores the connections between micro-entrepreneurship, new media technologies, and gender in rural China. We can see that the research of social media in China already has a wide range field, but mostly are focusing on the correlation of age, place, gender, class, or organization. Not many are paying attention on the foreigners in the country while the number of foreigners in China is rising quickly. So, we think there is a need of filling this blank and this article focuses on the International students' usage of one of the most successful social media, Wechat, in China.

2. Social Media

Facebook, Twitter and linkden are the most popular social media in American and Europe, but they can hardly enter China because of the Internet control policy. So Chinese market breeds many local social media such as Wechat (Chinese Whatsapp), Weibo (Chinese Twitter) and Renren (Chinese Facebook). Among them, Wechat is currently in a dominated position than others. The Chinese technology tycoon, Tencent, created it in 2011. According to the report of The Statistic Portal, until the end of 2014, the active users of Wechat had reached 500 millions from 50 millions in 2011. (Note 2) Although it is a Whatsapp-like App, Wechat combines the features of Facebook, Whatsapp, entertainment, and financial system and make it more than a communication tool.

'The main objective of content communities is the sharing of media content between users. Content communities exist for a wide range of different media types, including text (e.g., BookCrossing, via which 750,000+ people from over 130 countries share books), photos (e.g., Flickr), videos (e.g., YouTube), and PowerPoint presentations (e.g., Slideshare).' (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010)

Wechat adopts the concept of content communities. Every user has a homepage like Facebook. They can share videos, pictures, and texts with all friends and make comments or 'like' others'. Users can download many games and play with all friends. By using Wechat, people can do online shopping, paying their bills, purchasing financial products, calling taxis and even giving red pockets through the App.

On average the popularity peak of social media is attained after 219 weeks, which is about 4 years.' (Franses, 2014) Wechat now has reached its peak and it is obviously a strong App with a huge market, but it does not get enough academic attention as it deserves. Chinese scholars currently have done most of the study on Wechat. Chen's (2013) study explores how does library system use Wechat to improve the service with lower cost, easier operation and higher customers loyalty. 'Wechat is able to send the more interesting, more privacy information faster. So people are more willing to use the app than other social media.' (Tong, 2013) Wechat use the logic of 'Mouth to Mouth' to make users became both information sender and receiver. Because of the convenient and anonymous nature, social media users are exposed in the danger of cyber criminals of fraud, phish and prostitution and users' privacies are threatened. Gao and Zhang (2013) examined and analyzed the data of Wechat on iPhone to provide a foundation for digital forensics. Although Wechat has caught more attention, most of the study is similar to the social media studies in the west by focusing on crisis communication, customers' behavior and the influence to the society. None of them are focusing on the rising new customers, foreigners, of the software.

3. Material and Methods

The quantitative study approach survey using self-administered questionnaire was applied for data collection in this study. The total sample size of the data collection was 200 international students were selected from Tsinghua University Beijing China while the simple random sampling was used for data collection in this study. The main objective of the study was to know that how the international students use Wechat and what kind of application and function they use on their mobile phones. The data was analyzed by using SPSS software version 21.

4. Result and Discussion

There are 200 respondents participated in this research. Because the surveys were handed out in Tsinghua University, most of the participants are students (n=183 students, n=17 other careers) and young generation. There were 62% of the respondents aging was from 20 to 25 while the 25.5% of the respondents age were from 26 to 30, while 10.5% of the respondents age were from 31 to 40 and only 2% of the respondents age was above 40 with the mean value of 1.52 .673. However, 33.5% of the respondents education level were bachelor degree, 44% of the respondents were master degree, while 11% of the respondents were with a PhD degree and 11.5% were under bachelor. The mean level was (2.00.Std 0.95). However, the respondents were also asked about their family number of members the result indicated that 45.3% have less than 3 family members (immediate family), 17% have 3 family members, 12.5% have 4 family members and 25% have more than 4 family members while

the mean was 2.91 Std 1.03) moreover the 29% of the respondents participants in this study were Christian, 11.5% of the respondents were Muslim, 1.5% were Judaism, 47.5% have no religion and 10.5% are others.

Table 1. Demographic profile

Variable	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age				
20—25	124	62.0	1.52	
26—30	51	25.5		.763
31—40	21	10.5		
Above 40	4	2.0		
Gender				
Male	131	65.5	1.35	
Female	69	34.5		.476
Career				
Student	183	91	1.08	
Others	17	8.5		.279
Education				
Bachelor	67	33.5		
Master	88	44.0	2.00	
PhD	22	11.0		.953
Under Bachelor	23	11.5		
Monthly Income (USD)				
Lower than 500	117	58.5	1.66	
600-1000	33	16.5		.852
Over 1000	50	25		
Number of Family Members				
Less than 3	27	45.3		
3 Members	35	17	2.91	
4 Members	67	12.5		1.03
More than 4	71	25		
Religion				
Christian	58	29		
Muslim	23	11.5	2.99	
Judaism	3	1.5		1.47
None	95	47.5		
Others	21	10.5		

5. Use of Wechat

Table 2 result indicated regarding the usage and stay of the respondents in China where result showed that 45.5% of the respondents are staying in China less than one year, while 17% of respondents are living last one year 12.5% of the respondents are living last tow years in China. However, 25% of the respondents are living last three years here it shows that the students who are living last three years most of them are Master students. The respondents were also asked about how long they are using Wechat where the result indicated that 67% of the respondents are using Wechat less than one year while 7% of the respondents one year 8.5% two years and 15% last three years are using Wechat. Furthermore, respondents were also asked about why they are using Wechat where result

showed that 94.5% of the respondents use Wechat to chat with their friends, which is very easy to contact with friends without any disturbance. Wechat, is more easy access to communicate with friends. While 20% of the respondents use Webcam with their family mostly respondents use webcam video chat with their family. Similarly 20% of the respondents seek information by of their friends by using Wechat and only 10% of the respondents use gets other information. The respondents were also inquired about how long time they use Wechat every day where result indicated that 39.5% of the respondents use Wechat every day less than one hour in a day 32.5% of the respondents use one to two hours in a day. However, it was showed that 28% of the respondents use Wechat more than three hour every day. The respondents were also asked about most function use of on Wechat 97.5% of the respondents were using sending the message to family, friends and teachers on the Wechat is the famous source of communication with each others in university students. The second function of the Wechat is moments where respondents use this function frequently where result revealed that 22.5% of the respondents use moments and tag their activities and only 6% of the respondents use their financial banking system on Wechat while it was showed that no any one respondent were playing any game on Wechat

Table 2. Use of Wechat among international students

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
How long have you been in China?		
Less than one year	91	45.5
One year	34	17.0
Two years	25	12.5
More than three years	50	25.0
From how many months or years you are using Wechat?		
Less than one year	134	67.0
One year	14	7.0
Two years	17	8.5
Three years	5	2.5
More than three years	30	15.
Why do you use Wechat?		
Chat with friends	189	94.5
Webcam with family	40	20.0
Seeking information	40	20.0
Others	20	10.0
How long you use Wechat every day?		
Less than 1 hour	79	39.5
One to two hours	65	32.5
More than two hours	56	28.0
Which function do you use the most in Wechat?		
Sending message	195	97.5
Moments	45	22.5
Webcam	23	11.5
Games	0	0
Financial services and banking	12	6.0

6. Usage and Importance of Wechat

Data from table 3 shows the information regarding the usage and importance of Wechat. Among all the participants, 13.5% of the respondents were strongly agree and 28% agree regarding Wechat as a good tool as

compare traditional media while 32.5% of the respondents were neutral about the good tool of Wechat and 17% were disagree and 9% were strongly disagree that Wechat is not good tool to get the information. However, respondents were asked about their own activities on moment the result revealed that 29.5% of the respondents were agree that they keep their own activities on moments while 36.5% did not understand that they only keep their moments on Wechat while 25.5% were disagree and 8.5% of the respondents were strongly disagree about it. Furthermore, the respondents were asked about the authenticity of the Wechat information where result indicated that 30% of the respondents were agree and 43% of the respondents were neutral about get the authenticity of Wechat information and only 4% were strongly disagree about the authenticity information on Wechat it was showed that many students give and send information in different groups and tag on moments therefore students did not confirm its authenticity on Wechat. The respondents were used to asked about read the comments on Wechat the result showed that 31% were strongly agree that they read different comments which write their friends on Wechat. The respondents were also inquired about their comments on different information where result indicated that 18.5% of the respondents agree and asked that they give comments on different information such as on news research papers and also on poetry while 36.5% of the respondents were disagree and said that they do not give comments without any much information regarding the subject while some of them were agree that they avoid to give comments on some sensitive issues of the society on Wechat while 25% of the respondents were neutral about to give comments on each published information on Wechat.

The respondents were asked about the comments of others on Wechat his own opinion where result showed that 33.5% of the respondents strongly agree that they change their own opinion to see others comments on different social and political issues while 25% were neutral and they disagree and understand that it is not necessary that they should change their own opinion on different comments on Wechat while 17% of the respondents were strongly disagree and said that it is not important that u depend on others and change your own statement. The respondents were asked about rely on the information the result showed that 44% of the respondents were strongly agree and said they believe that the information which tag on Wechat is reliable while 15.5% of the respondents were disagree and said that they cannot rely on everyone post on Wechat. However, the respondents were asked about the freedom of speech on Wechat where result revealed that 31% of the respondents were agree about the Wechat best place share its speech without any hesitation and 31.5% of the respondents were neutral about this statement and they are not either agree not disagree about the freedom of speech while 14.5% of the respondents were disagree about the freedom of speech and understand that Wechat is not suitable for the freedom of speech. The study further showed that 16.5% of the respondents were agree that the majority intend view in the Wechat of events while 44% of the respondents were neutral and understand that it not necessary to intend the majority of the events on Wechat while 18% of the respondents were disagree about the intend event on Wechat. The respondents results showed about the reliable information regarding celebrities indicated that 49% of the respondents were neutral and understand that they have not sure either it is right information or wrong information about the celebrities of media industries. Furthermore, 11% of the respondents were agree and understand the information can be true which post on Wechat by different people and users of Wechat. However, the respondents were also asked about the large number of comments people give on different issues and news so what is their statement regarding it either on the more comments can person rely on information where result indicated that 47% of the respondents disagree on it and said it is not very important that large number comments can motivated them to agree on it where further 17.5% of the respondents were agree and understand that large numbers comments on different things can be reliable the information (Refer Table 3).

Table 3. Information and opinion on Wechat

Statement	SA	A	N	DA	SD
I understand Wechat is a good tool for hotspot affairs. I compared with the traditional media, I prefer to use Wechat to understand current events	27 (13.5%)	56 (28%)	65 (32.5%)	34 (17%)	18 (9%)
I would use Wechat to publish my activities on moments and often use to forward information	20 (10%)	39 (29.5%)	73 (36.5%)	51 (25.5%)	17 (8.5%)
I will first confirm the authenticity of the Wechat in the information	21 (10.5%)	60 (30%)	86 (43%)	25 (12.5%)	8 (4%)
I often use to read comments on Wechat	62	32	14	56	36

Statement	SA	A	N	DA	SD
	(31)	(16%)	(7%)	(28%)	(18%)
I prefer to give comment on different information	37	32	50	73	8
	(18.5%)	(16%)	(25%)	(36.5%)	(4%)
On Wechat others comment on the different issues change my opinion	67	31	18	50	34
	(33.5%)	(15.5%)	(9%)	(25%)	(17%)
Do you rely the information post on wechat	89	46	24	31	10
	(44%)	(23%)	(12%)	(15.5%)	(5%)
Wechat is freedom of speech where you can write your opinion	34	62	63	29	12
	(17%)	(31%)	(31.5%)	(14.5%)	(6%)
I tend to agree with the majority view in the Wechat of events	21	33	88	36	22
	(10.5%)	(16.5%)	(44%)	(18%)	(11%)
I also agree with the majority view in the Wechat of events	15	32	99	40	14
	(7.5%)	(16%)	(49.5%)	(20%)	(7%)
Is the information published about celebrity reliable	17	22	98	38	25
	(8.5%)	(11%)	(49%)	(19%)	(12.5%)
Comments in large numbers information can be reliable	14	35	38	94	19
	(7%)	(17.5%)	(19%)	(47%)	(9.5%)
Wechat in everyone's opinion are somewhat positive rational	22	47	87	34	10
	(11%)	(23.5%)	(43.5%)	(17%)	(5%)
I think the prospects for the use of Wechat to participate in interactive hotspots considerable	25	69	73	23	10
	(12.5%)	(34.5%)	(36.5%)	(11.5%)	(5%)

7. Conclusion

Although the study showed that most of the respondents use Wechat for sending a messages to friends and chat with each other, there are many other functions are available on Wechat where students can get more benefit from it. The biggest obstacle preventing foreigners using different function of Wechat is security issue and user habit. For example, the official public account, which is a cooperation and promotion service launched for famous persons, government, media and enterprises, requires registration of Chinese ID card in order to supervised by the Chinese government. Foreigners cannot get access by using passport. The function 'Moments', a personal homepage and sharing system like Facebook and Twitter is also extremely popular among Chinese people, but only 22.5% of the participants are using the system. Most of the foreigner students are used to use western social media like Facebook and Twitter, it is hard to change their behavior especially all their friends back to their hometown are using Facebook. According to the study, the incompleteness of using Wechat affects their opinion about the APP directly. In table 3, we can see a lot of people hold a neutral position on the questions about the information flowing and reliability in Wechat. Many participants never pay attention on news or information other than just chatting with friend on Wechat, so they do not have a clear idea about the informational ecosystem on Wechat. The study also indicates that some students have no proper information regarding use of Wechat and proper use of different functions. However, Wechat is not commonly use around the world like other social media but it can be expected that this will also be famous soon around the globe.

References

- Ahrama, T., Karwowskia, W., & Amabab, B., (2011). Collaborative systems engineering and social-networking approach to design and modeling of smarter products. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 30(1), 13-26.
- Awake. (2011, July). *What Should I know social networking?* (Part 1, pp. 24-25).
- Chen, Y. (2013). Wei Xin Gong Gong Ping Tai Ji Qi Tu Shu Guan Yi Dong Fu Wu Zhong De Ying Yong Ji Yan Jiu (The Use and Study of Wechat in Library Mobile Service). *Research on Library Science*, 20, 71-74.

- Cromity, J. (2012). The impact of social media in review. *New Review of Information Networking*, 17(1), 22-33
- Ding, W. (2014). *Liu dong de jia yuan (Mobile homelands)*. Beijing: Social Science Academic Press.
- Franses, P. H. (2014). The life cycle of social media. *Applied Economics Letters*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13504851.2014.978069>
- Gao, F., & Zhang, Y. (November, 2013). *Analysis of Wechat on iPhone*. Atlantis Press.
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons*, 53, 59-68.
- Ko, H., Cho, C., & Roberts, M. S. (2005). Internet uses and gratifications. *Journal of Advertising*, 34(2), 57-70.
- Papacharissi, Z., & Rubin, A. M. (2000). Predictors of Internet use. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 44(2), 175-196.
- Raacke, J., & Bonds-Raacke, J. (2008). MySpace and Facebook: Applying the uses and gratifications theory to exploring friend-networking sites. *Cyber Psychology & Behavior*, 11(2), 169-174.
- Schulte, B., (2015). (Dis) Empowering technologies: ICT for education (ICT4E) in China, past and present. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 8(1), 59-77.
- Tong, H. (2013). Research on Wechat according to communication study and its influence. *Research On Journalism Publication And Mass Communication*, 9, 61-66.
- Wallis, C. (2015). Micro-entrepreneurship, new media technologies, and the reproduction and reconfiguration of gender in rural China. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 8(1), 42-58.
- Wang, J. (2015). NGO2.0 and social media praxis: activist as researcher. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 8(1), 18-41.

Notes

Note 1. The report is done by China Internet Network Information Center. Retrieved from <http://www1.cnnic.cn/IDR/ReportDownloads/201411/P020141102574314897888.pdf>

Note 2. Number of monthly active WeChat users from 2nd quarter 2010 to 4th quarter 2014 (in millions). Retrieved from <http://www.statista.com/statistics/255778/number-of-active-wechat-messenger-accounts/>

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).