Causes and Enlightenments of the "Media Transfer" Phenomenon in the Age of Social Media-Taking WeChat Moments as an Example

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Keywords: Social media, WeChat moments, Media selection, Media transfer.

Abstract. With the increasing integration of WeChat and the real life, the media transfer phenomenon appears in users of WeChat Moments. There are 5 reasons for this phenomenon. Firstly, the fact that “both family members and friends can see WeChat Moments” leads the users to display “middle ground” and the users’ media image tends to show “the me”. Secondly, "Audience Isolation" function narrows the content of communication and leads to short-term effect. Thirdly, real social pressure shifts online social pressure, deviating from the original motivation of online social. Then weak-tie friends dilute strong social attributes, blurring privacy boundaries. Next, the rise of short video apps is replacing video display functions. Lastly, the rise of the "show" culture brings media anxiety and forms an "online silence spiral". And there are enlightenments we can get from the analysis above. First of all, verticalization and specialization are the development trends of social media. Second, complementary use of multi-platform is a manifestation of user initiative and the normal use of media in the future. Finally, alleviating media anxiety is a common problem in the development of all social media. In the future development of media, the phenomenon of media transfer may become the norm.

Introduction

Problem Presentation

Up to September 2019, the number of monthly active accounts on WeChat has reached 1.15 billion.\textsuperscript{[1]} After nearly 10 years of development, the integration of WeChat in real life has increased, WeChat moments are shown to more people with the increase of WeChat friends. The function of media has shifted from sharing emotion and recording life to the maintenance of realistic image. Users’ media image and reality image has become consistent gradually. Self-presenting group has immobilized. Some users of WeChat Moments have shown "weak use", "deprecation" or other behaviors and then switched to other social media.

"Media Transference" Phenomenon

The audience research perspective has evolved from passive to active, and audience selectivity and initiative have been confirmed continuously. Social media development brings more choices. British scholar Mirka believes that initiative does not limit users to a single media platform, but to switch between multiple media at the same time.\textsuperscript{[2]} Singapore scholar Edson calls this phenomenon "platform swing" or "media transfer".\textsuperscript{[3]} The emergence of media transfer further confirms the initiative of the audience, communication scholar Katz believes that users' media use is affected by needs such as cognition, emotion, personal integration, social integration, and stress relief. Whether it's the "face-to-face" social age in which Goffman was living, or the social media era, demands are
increasing as media functions are developing. Compared with other mainstream social media, WeChat is the only platform where positive reviews from users have declined, from 83.5% to 80.6%.[4] When the satisfaction cannot be obtained from the original media, or there is a better media to replace it, the users are more prone to have a media transfer.

American scholar Janet believes that social factors will affect the audience's attitude towards media use, and media use is the result of the audience's rational choice.[5] As the social media with the largest user base in China, WeChat's function of Moments has been spreading rapidly since its launch in 2012, and browsing on Moments has become the daily life of most users. As the growth of Internet users is slowing down, the number of WeChat users is saturated, and the number of application scenarios increases, the use of WeChat and Moments are affected by real factors, and the boundary between the private and public domains has begun to blur. Especially in recent years, the media transfer phenomenon of WeChat Moments has been happened frequently. And the number of "weak users" and "abandoners" has increased. Due to the similarity of the display function of social media in the market, the phenomenon of media transfer in WeChat Moments is affected by social environmental factors, and this kind of impact is greater than others.

Causes of Media Transfer

Friends and Relatives Together to Make the Media Image Moderate

In real social interactions, depending on the objects and scenes of the contacts, the people present different images in front of relatives, friends, work partners, and even strangers. However, WeChat brings family, classmates and colleagues together, resulting in the different displays of the WeChat Moments image. At the same time, different types of audiences must be taken into consideration by users, so the image of "The me" is not the image of "The I" showing the true heart. "Some words are not suitable for posting in WeChat Moments." "Fear of being seen by family members" are problems faced by many users in the use of WeChat Moments. The launch of the WeChat Moments function is aimed at expressing the emotions of friends with strong ties, and is also a self-exhibition platform. However, with the socialization of WeChat users and the increase in the number of friends, the audience in WeChat Moments have shifted from single-dimensional to multi-dimensional, as a result, posting in WeChat Moments requires consideration of multiple factors. For example, the expressions in front of friends are not suitable for family members and leaders. In order to take care of most of audience in WeChat Moments, the users’ language expression is neutral, and WeChat Moments has become a tool for maintaining the realistic image.

"Audience Isolation" Function Narrows the Content of Communication and Leads to Short-term Effect

WeChat founder Zhang Xiaolong revealed that more than 100 million WeChat users set up WeChat Moments for visible in three days in 2019.[6] “Visible in three days” and "visible to some friends" and other features were introduced to improve the efficiency of communication between users and self-directed isolation at the beginning. For example, students blocked parents and teachers, office workers blocked leaders and colleagues. With the increase of new friends, the strong-tie network in WeChat is diluted, the effectiveness of the WeChat original isolation mechanism is reduced, so privacy cannot be protected in a timely manner. In a word, the imperfect screening mechanism of the WeChat Moments increases the cost of separating close audiences, causing some users to choose functions like "Visible in Three Days" to unify audience isolation. The emergence of "audience
isolation" has caused short-term effects of content in WeChat Moments and weakened media functions. The reason is that functions such as "visible in three days" shorten the transmission time, "visible to some people" narrows the transmission range, and "audience isolation" are prone to group imitation, making isolation behavior the norm, and also weakening the media effect of WeChat Moments.

**Real Social Pressure Shifts Online Social Pressure, Deviating from the Original Motivation of Online Social**

Internet socialization originates from anonymous social and weak socialization represented by online chat rooms. Users choose to use Internet social media in order to gain stranger interactions and escape the pressure brought by the real social circle. The proportion of the real social audience in WeChat Moments are much higher than other social media, especially for the social disadvantaged groups and working groups, 76% of social media users need to talk about work via WeChat, compared to using WeChat to talk about work, social media users are even more reluctant to send work-related content to friends. [7] WeChat broke the boundary between reality and virtual reality, shifting the offline social pattern to online, and the social pressure generated online was still borne by the weaker part in the social circle, which forces some social disadvantaged users to choose media again, and use the weak-tie media represented by Weibo instead. Compared with the strong-tie media represented by WeChat, the weak-tie media has stronger anonymity and wider spread. Its public platform attributes make it easier for users to speak and find similar groups. In addition, some users with special social needs will further choose social platforms such as SOUL app to get media satisfaction.

**Weak-tie Friends Dilute Strong Social Attributes, Blurring Privacy Boundaries**

The improvement of audio and video call, mobile payment and other functions has made WeChat a wider range of applications in work and life. "Add WeChat" has replaced "exchange phone numbers" as a new way of socializing, which has introduced a large number of friends with weak ties in WeChat Moments. At the same time, third-party personnel such as WeChat Business have settled in, and offline merchants' praising and forwarding behavior has transferred to online planform, resulting in endless content such as advertisements and rumors, which has resulted in redundant information in the circle of friends. "Dunbar Number" believes that the number of stable social networks owned by humans should be around 150. As early as 2017, 45% of WeChat users had more than 200 friends, and 13.5% of users had more than 500 friends, which is far greater than the recommended amount of "Dunba Number". [8] The increase of friends with weak ties dilutes the attributes of strong ties in WeChat, the audiences in the WeChat Moments are forced to expand, and the privacy is weakened, resulting in a reduction in the display desire of ordinary users. The content displayed by users in WeChat Moments often involves personal real identity information. The increase of strange friends leads to the frequent occurrence of privacy leaks in the circle of friends, and the privacy boundary of the circle of friends is further blurred.

**The Rise of Short Video Apps are Replacing Video Display Functions**

American scholar Jay believes that the emergence of the new media platform is not a replacement for the old platform, but a functional supplement. [9] The display function of WeChat Moments consists of text, pictures, and videos, but due to the limitation of the duration mechanism, the video display ability is weak. With the decline in network tariffs, the introduction of "wireless traffic" has enabled users to reduce the cost of watching videos online via mobile phones, thus providing
objective conditions for the development of short video apps. As of January 5, 2020, the number of active users on Douyin Day exceeded 400 million, and the number of new users increased by 150 million a year in 2019,[10] which became the fastest growing and largest number of short video APPs in China. Compared with the WeChat Moments, the short video APP with a wider spread is more professional in video display and editing functions, which also make full use of the user's fragmentation time, and personalized push is more in line with user preferences, and the "up and down" switching mechanism will switch the connection interval is further compressed, so it is more likely to produce an "addiction" effect. "Browse for a while, and an hour or two will pass" has become a unique phenomenon in short video apps. For users who love video shooting, the Douyin display function is more powerful, and it is easier to obtain media satisfaction. The video display function of the WeChat Moments is replaced.

The Rise of the "Show" Culture Brings Media Anxiety and Forms an "Online Silence Spiral"

The emergence of the culture of "show" has made the "photographing behavior in WeChat Moments" a media phenomenon, forming a media agenda of "touring at any time" and "everyone is playing" in WeChat Moments. The crowd shows a tendency to be fixed, and the users' experience of the WeChat Moments is reduced. In order to show that they “have a good time”, some users continue to maintain the image of the media, occupying more and more time and energy in editing and displaying the content. WeChat Moments become the source of vanity. On the one hand, because the content of the WeChat Moments is often to show the "good side", it is easy to create a mimic environment for ordinary people in WeChat Moments to enjoy a good life except for themselves. On the other hand, users who love WeChat Moments will continue to post and post more, and users who do not love or less will post less, and ultimately choose not to post or even watch, forming an "online silence spiral.", The WeChat Moments has become a "show-off Moments" to express.

Future Development Direction and Inspiration

Verticalization and Specialization are the Development Trends of Social Media

In the development process of any social media, as the user base increases, the media function will expand horizontally to meet the needs of various users, resulting in a reduction in the uniqueness of the media, and there is no obvious shortcoming and the media advantage is lost. At present, social media functions are developing towards enrichment, and the functional homogeneity among different media is relatively strong, but professional media still occupy the mainstream in the subdivided fields, such as Weibo's "square" social networking, Soul's stranger social networking, and Douyin video socializing. Verticalization and specialization are still the development trend of social media. On the basis of considering the bearing capacity of the device, the focus of media functions should be tilted to the professional and vertical fields, especially the social media represented by Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, which are reference for China’s media development. The development of WeChat originates from strong socialization, and the function positioning is to maintain and expand the close relationship. With the further popularization of the media, the number of users is increased, and its strong social attributes are weakened. The advantages of professional attributes and vertical attributes have been reduced. As a display zone in the private social field, the privacy of WeChat Moments has been continuously diluted, publicity and publicity have been continuously enhanced, and eventually lost the original advantages of the media. In the future development, the focus of the media should still be on the construction of a
strong social network, and the scope of the core audience should be closer to the close relationship groups and become a real zone which can be shared by friends.

**Complementary Use of Multi-platform is a Manifestation of User Initiative and the Normal Use of Media in the Future**

Up to the fourth quarter of 2019, China’s per capita mobile APP installation reached 60, and the daily use time per capita reached 5.1 hours. The increase in the number of media platforms and the expansion of the range of function choices have become the prerequisites for multi-media use. Technology empowerment has made audience development trends diversified. Increased user initiative and reduced media switching costs have made multi-platform use the norm. In the traditional media era, due to geographical and technological limitations, media contact and switching costs are relatively high. In the era of social media, the decline in network tariffs and the popularity of smart phones have reduced the cost of media contact, enhanced computing capabilities of media terminals, time-consuming compression of media switching, and increased storage space, making multi-application selection possible. Media differentiation makes various vertical applications dominate the professional field. At the same time, the coexistence of newspapers, television and radio media in the traditional media era will continue to online platforms. In this context, the use of WeChat Moments media for the purpose of self-presentation and emotional confession, the audience can use different media for different expressions according to the different positioning of the media, such as WeChat Moments focus on "The me" image construction and maintenance, Weibo and other social media for strangers are focused on the image expression of "The I". Different social media work together to meet different levels of the same demand and achieve multi-media complementarity.

**Alleviating Media Anxiety is a Common Problem in the Development of All Social Media**

With the in-depth development of social media, the threshold of media contact has been moved down, blurring the online and offline boundaries, making the virtual social circle and the real social circle integrated, and making media users from early elite and niche to popular and civilian development of. Media use is no longer used as an indicator of class division. “Everyone can get it” is the contact characteristics of social media today. Increasing cognition, relieving stress, getting entertainment, expanding social, and escaping the pressure of reality are the purpose of social media contact. So the media becomes a tool for satisfaction. The original intention of the WeChat Moments function setting is to provide a talk window. The premise of effective display is that the audience is in place, the stage scene is matched, and the actors and troupes perform reasonably. In fact, in the process of using WeChat Moments, on the one hand this function satisfies social relations and media needs. On the other hand, it breaks the space and time constraints, and continues the work into life, becoming a continuation of anxiety such as performance and communication pressure. The existence of media anxiety reduces the satisfaction of users in WeChat Moments. Eliminating media anxiety is a problem that WeChat Moments and even all social media must face when seeking further development. The solutions are as follows: 1. Reduce social media dependence and reduce media usage time; 2. Find alternative media to achieve complementary media functions; 3. Media further improve audience segmentation functions to achieve accurate audience positioning.
Conclusion

As social media continues to develop, the phenomenon of media transfer will become the norm for users to use social media. From the user's perspective, media transfer prefers the user to the user side, which is more beneficial to the user. From the perspective of the social media provider, in order to obtain user resources, it will try to prevent the user's media transfer behavior, and the solution is to carry out media transformation. In fact, after the steady development of any media, the media has taken into account all kinds of users, leading to difficult examples of its transformation. How to aim at market dynamics and timely transformation and win a place in the media market is still worth considering. Specific directions include: 1. Focus on core users to achieve maximum function shift; 2. Appropriately weaken marginal users and introduce complementary media for user diversion; 3. The horizontal functions of media are reduced and its overall functions are inclined to vertical. In addition, how to prevent the phenomenon of media addiction requires a balance between the media provider and the user.

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