You are what you post in “circle of friends” of WeChat: Self-presentation and identity production from a personality perspective

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Abstract
Social media services have become increasingly important in Chinese people’s daily lives, and among them, WeChat is one of the most popular applications. There have been studies examining individuals’ practices of self-presentation and identity production in various online platforms, and they have found the impact of anonymity on users’ presentation and construction of self. However, little is known about whether users present their actual self or construct new identities different from those in their offline life. To fill this gap, this study explores the association between expression of personality traits on circle of friends and their actual personality traits in offline life. Participants were 93 college students from China. Their personality traits were measured through Neuroticism Extraversion Openness Five-Factor Inventory, and their posts on circle of friends platform were extracted and split into words by Chinese Lexical Analysis System. The results showed consistency in the dimension of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness, except for neuroticism, suggesting that the contents posted on circle of friends platform can reflect the user’s real personality traits. As an instrumental tool developed in this study, the semantic cues were further discussed regarding its usefulness in evaluating subjects’ personality traits.

Keywords
Circle of friends (COF), identity construction, personality expression, personality traits, self-presentation, semantic cue, WeChat

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Individuals’ practices of online self-presentation and identity production have been under investigation for two decades. Early studies conducted in various online platforms, such as Multi-User Dungeons (MUDs), bulletin boards (BBS), chat rooms, and websites, have shown evidence and characteristics of identity construction (Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkhan, 2008; McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002; Rheingold, 1993; Surratt, 1998; Turkle, 1995). Many recent studies started to examine how people present themselves on less anonymous platforms such as online dating sites and social networking sites (SNSs) (e.g. Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006; Gibbs, Ellison, & Heino, 2006; Manago et al., 2008; Yurchisin, Watchravesringkan, & McCabe, 2005; Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008). The results of these studies showed that people’s practices of identity production in these less anonymous platforms differ from those early anonymous ones.

In the context of China, the number of Internet users has been increasing and the SNSs which provide a less anonymous environment are becoming increasingly popular. Among all the online services facilitating self-presentation and communication, WeChat is one of the most popular ones. The number of current active users of this platform has arrived at 938 million according to the financial statement of Tencent Company in 2017, suggesting that WeChat has become one of the most significant applications in Chinese people’s daily life. WeChat is a free application for providing instant messaging services for intelligent terminals, launched by Tencent Corporate in January 2011. Users can send texts, images, voices, videos, and files to their friends through WeChat (Chen & He, 2014). Besides traditional instant messaging services, WeChat also offers services such as online payment, circle of friends (COF), and news subscriptions.

The COF of WeChat is designed as a private community for sharing images and texts, where users can post text status, upload pictures, and repost articles. The audiences of sharing information are restricted to the friends of users who post the information, which means individuals cannot see the information and comments posted by other users who are not their friends. The strong ties play a dominant role, whereas the weak ties come as a subordinate position in the COF, which combines the virtual social relationships with the reality ones to provide decentralized platform (Nie, Fu, & Cheng, 2013). According to the concept of social media defined by Boyd and Ellison (2007), COF shares features of social media. An increasing number of people start to construct their social network, keep in touch with their friends, and acquire and share information with others through COF. The behaviors of users mainly include post statuses (texts and/or images), like, comment, and repost articles on COF. The contents posted by users mainly include three types: pure-text, pure-image, and mixed-text-and-image statuses.

There have been studies concerning social media such as Weibo (MicroBlog) and Renren (a Chinese version of Facebook) in China (e.g. Fuchs, 2016; Lim, 2014; Liu, 2015). However, despite the significant role that COF plays in a huge number of Chinese people’s lives, there are only few research works examining its users’ practices of self-presentation and identity production, especially in terms of personality expression. More specifically, whether users’ expression of personality traits on COF is consistent with their actual personality still remains unknown. Previous studies mainly focused on the relationship between the profile and the personality traits of users, but they failed to explore the link between the statuses posted by users and their personality traits. To what extent will the users of WeChat show their real personality traits by posting statuses on COF? Can we infer individuals’ personality traits through their status on COF? What are the semantic cues related to users’ personality traits? These are the questions this study hopes to answer. In short, this study aims to identify the relationship between the personality traits and the contents posted on the social media. Notably, the main approach related to the study of personality traits is exploiting questionnaires relying on self-presentation and interviews in a well-controlled and context-free
environment (Rozin, 2001). However, as Barker and Wright (1951) suggested, it is preferred to understand the personality traits through studying the natural behavior in daily life. Hence, this study will inform the practitioners to better understand the relationships between personality traits of the users of WeChat and the contents generated by them. In addition, it is also expected to provide a new way to evaluate and predict individuals’ personality traits by analyzing user-generated content instead of self-reported questionnaires.

**Literature review**

*Self-presentation and identity production on the Internet*

Early research on identity production online emphasizes the special qualities of online environment, especially its anonymity. Special features of online communication, including its anonymity, high degree of control and autonomy, and the ability to interact with similar others, create a unique protective environment that encourages individuals to express themselves more freely than they would do in traditional channels of communication (Amichai-Hamburger, 2005). Furthermore, it is speculated that the Internet environment is especially appropriate for those with introvert personality traits. Hence, the Internet is seen as being able to provide a unique venue for strategic self-presentation and identity construction, especially for those who are not able to express their “true” self.

The results of several early studies were consistent with these speculations (e.g. Maldonado, Mora, Garcia, & Edipo, 2001; McKenna et al., 2002). For instance, Maldonado et al. (2001) evaluated messages sent to an online discussion forum and found that the introverted participants sent as many messages to the forums as did extraverted participants. Moreover, their messages contained more information compared to the extroverts. It seems that the introverts do not behave similarly as they usually do in offline life, that is, inclining to withdraw from active self-expression. The authors explain that this may probably be due to the absence of non-verbal cues and the better control over the pace of interaction.

Recent studies on less anonymous online platforms such as Internet dating sites and SNSs showed that identity production on these platforms differs from those constructed on the anonymous ones mentioned earlier (Ellison et al., 2006; Gibbs et al., 2006; Manago et al., 2008; Yurchisin et al., 2005; Zhao et al., 2008). A study based on content analysis of Facebook users found that unlike users of anonymous platforms (e.g. BBSs, chat rooms, role play games) who presented “true selves,” Facebook users projected hoped-for possible selves on this less anonymous online platform (Zhao et al., 2008). And this seems to suggest the construction of “highly socially desirable identities individuals aspire to have offline but have not yet been able to embody for one reason or another” (p. 1830). Manago et al. (2008) used focus group methodology to explore how undergraduate students construct their identities on MySpace. They found that MySpace profiles were used by college students to construct and communicate idealized selves. The results suggest that personality traits presented on SNSs profiles are more likely to reflect “ideal self” rather than “actual self” of profile owners.

The studies discussed above seem to suggest the impact of the nature of online environment on people’s online self-presentation. In online platforms with higher level of anonymity, people are more likely to take opportunities to present their “true self” which refers to the aspects of self that are suppressed in offline life due to normative pressures. While situating in a less anonymous online environment, surrounded most by people they know in their offline life, practices of identity construction tend to be similar to those in offline environment. Yet, in order to examine whether the
Internet does have impact on people’s self-presentation and identity production, we need to make comparisons of both online and offline practices. Besides, in the studies regarding SNS noted earlier, most previous studies seemed to emphasize social and cultural aspects of identity and tended to neglect personal aspect of identity, especially personality. Considering the significant impact of personality on governing our choices and behavior both on and off the Internet (Amichai-Hamburger, 2005), in this study we will examine people’s practices of presenting and producing their selves by expressing their personality traits.

**Judgment of personality in online environment**

A number of research studies have demonstrated that individuals leave personality-related cues in both offline and online environments. In offline world, behaviors of personality expression can be found in offices (Gosling, Ko, Mannarelli, & Morris, 2002) and daily conversations (Mehl, Gosling, & Pennebaker, 2006). When online, despite special features of the Internet environment, there are also signs of personality expression on Facebook profiles (Back et al., 2010; Gosling, Augustine, Vazire, Holtzman, & Gaddis, 2011), Twitter (Qiu, Lin, Ramsay, & Yang, 2012), and other virtual world activities (Yee, Harris, Jab on, & Bailenson, 2011). Hence, it is possible to obtain meaningful and accurate information regarding personality on the Internet.

Another issue is the procedure of judging people’s personality. Questionnaires and inventory are used in many studies for judging personality traits (Schuerger, Zarrella, & Hotz, 1989; Torgersen et al., 2012; Van der Linden, Oostrom, Born, Van der Molen, & Serlie, 2014). However, Rees and Metcalfe (2003) have pointed three problems caused by questionnaire: (1) candidates may fake-good personality questionnaire, (2) faking-good affects the criterion validity, and (3) it is unable to identify faking-good answer. Under this circumstance, a method named zero-acquaintance is introduced. Zero-acquaintance provides judgments of subjects’ personality traits by persons who are strangers to the subjects. The judgment-making by zero-acquaintance can be based on lots of cues, such as stereotypes (Kenny, 2004), facial expressions (Kenny, Horner, Kashy, & Chu, 1992), and appearance (Back, Schmukle, & Egloff, 2011). The results of these studies have indicated the validity of judging personality traits based on zero-acquaintance.

Moreover, linguistic cues left on the Internet have been shown to connect with personality cues. More studies using zero-acquaintance exploited text materials to measure the personality traits of subjects. A study explored the relationship between the content tweeted by users of Twitter and their personality traits. The result shows that individuals can predict the types of Big Five personality traits by reading the content (Qiu et al., 2012). Another study about the users of Facebook found similar results. Specifically, individuals can predict strangers’ personality traits by reading the content generated by the subjects on Facebook (Holleran & Mehl, 2008; Ivcevic & Ambady, 2012). Overall, those studies proved that people can predict strangers’ personality traits relatively accurately by reading text materials.

**Big Five framework**

There have been a growing number of research works examining personality expression on the Internet by using the five-factor model (e.g. Back et al., 2010). The Big Five framework refers to a model of personality that consists of five factors representing personality traits: extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experiences, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Ehrenberg, Juckes, White, & Walsh, 2008; John & Srivastava, 1999). This framework is used to classify individual
differences in personalities (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003), and its applicability has been verified in different cultures (John & Srivastava, 1999; McCrae & Costa, 1997). Hence, it is widely recognized regarding its validity in explaining personality (Funder, 2000; McCrae & Costa, 1997).

**Extraversion.** Extraversion describes the extent of comfort feeling when individuals participate in the situation where there exist direct social interactions (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Hogan (1986) thought that extraversion contains two components: ambition and sociability. Those who have high level of extraversion tend to take a risk, go to socialize, and be talkative, and they prefer to live in reality or make friends online, whereas those who have low level of extraversion tend to be shy and reserved, and they prefer to stay alone rather than taking part in kinds of social activities.

**Neuroticism.** Neuroticism describes the stable extent of individual’s mood (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Those who have high level of neuroticism tend to be unstable in terms of mood and be prone to experience worry, depression, and anger, whereas those who have low level of neuroticism prefer to be calmer and have a sense of security, but they sometimes tend to show indifferent attitude to others.

**Openness to experience.** Openness to experience, also called intellect or imagination, describes the extent of curiosity and the ability of imaging and acceptance to new things (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Those who have high level of openness to experience tend to be curious to the world and have a high level of imagination and understanding, whereas those who have low level of openness to experience tend to lack curiosity and imagination, and they have difficulty in accepting new things.

**Agreeableness.** Agreeableness describes the extent of friendliness (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Those who have high level of agreeableness tend to have good ability of empathy and try their best to help others, whereas those who have low level of agreeableness tend to be more aggressive and neither help nor trust others.

**Conscientiousness.** Conscientiousness describes the attitude toward work and tasks (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Those who have high level of conscientiousness tend to work hard and carefully and to be responsible to tasks and be strict to themselves, whereas those who have low level of conscientiousness tend to lack responsibility to their jobs and tasks and have difficulty to constrain themselves.

**Research questions and hypotheses**

With the increasing number of WeChat users presenting themselves on COF, there is a lack of research examining the relationship between their actual personality traits in offline life and those expressed on COF. Therefore, the first research question of this study is as follows:

*RQ1.* Are users’ actual personality traits consistent with those expressed on COF?

Specifically, this study will judge the personality traits of WeChat users through the contents posted on COF by the approach of zero-acquaintance. Then, the consistence between the personality traits reflected by contents posted on COF and the actual personality traits will be examined.
This study uses the correlations to operationalize consistence. In other words, the correlation between the personality traits reflected by contents on COF and actual personality traits will be calculated to examine the consistence. If the correlation is significant, then it will be deemed as the presence of consistence between personality traits reflected on COF and the actual personality traits. As the personality traits contain five dimensions according to the Big Five model, the consistence in all the five dimensions needs to be tested. The hypotheses of this study are as follows:

**H1.** The personality traits reflected on the contents of COF are consistent with the WeChat users’ actual personality traits.

**H1a.** The level of neuroticism reflected on the contents of COF is consistent with the WeChat users’ level of neuroticism.

**H1b.** The level of extraversion reflected on the contents of COF is consistent with the WeChat users’ level of extraversion.

**H1c.** The level of openness to experience reflected on the contents of COF is consistent with the WeChat users’ level of openness to experience.

**H1d.** The level of agreeableness reflected on the contents of COF is consistent with the WeChat users’ level of agreeableness.

**H1e.** The level of conscientiousness reflected on the contents of COF is consistent with the WeChat users’ level of conscientiousness.

If H1 is proved, this study will go further to explore those semantic cues which are effective to make judgments about the personality traits. Semantic cues mean a semantic unit based on words. The judger tends to employ words and their frequency to judge the personality traits in the approach of zero-acquaintance, and those words which facilitate the judgments are defined as semantic cues. The second research question, then, is as follows:

**RQ2.** Can the semantic cues in the statuses posted on COF be used to judge one’s personality?

The semantic cues can be identified and extracted by calculating and ranking the correlations of words’ frequency and personality traits.

**Research methods**

**Participants**

Participants were recruited from undergraduate and graduate students of two prestigious universities located in Beijing, China. The purpose of the study, link to the questionnaire for measuring personality, and compensation for participating in the study were advertised on WeChat. In all, 150 students engaged in answering the questionnaire, and among them, 129 completed and submitted the questionnaire. The number of valid questionnaires was 93. Among all the 93 valid participants, there were 24 male students (25.8%) and 69 female students (74.2%). The number of second-year, third-year, fourth-year undergraduates, and graduates were, respectively, 3, 37, 12, and 41.
Measurement

To measure the real personality traits, this study employs Neuroticism Extraversion Openness Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), which was developed by Costa and McCrae (1989) and was simplified from Revised Neuroticism Extraversion Openness Personality Inventory (RNE-OPI) which contains 240 questions. The NEO-FFI contains 60 questions and outperforms over other measurement tools for personality traits in terms of convergent validity (Kurtz & Sherker, 2003; Parker & Stumpf, 1998). Therefore, this study takes NEO-FFI as the measurement tool for personality traits.

Procedure

In the first stage, participants were required to answer the NEO-FFI to identify their actual personality traits. Note that the permission to extract the information on COF of the subjects needs to be acquired before they answer the NEO-FFI. Then, the WeChat accounts of subjects were examined to confirm the number of posts on COF from 1 January 2014 to 1 November 2014 is more than 100. For each participant, 50 posts on their COF will be extracted randomly to form data samples. Although different people may see different posts on COF because of the grouping function, the majority posts are available to all the friends. Moreover, the personality traits reflected by the posts available to the public match better to the personality traits reflected by NEO-FFI than those available to certain individuals by the grouping function. Therefore, in this study, only those posts available to the public constituted the sample frame.

The preprocessing stage comes after acquiring data samples. The images, special symbols (such as “#” and “&”), hyperlinks, specific names, and places in the statuses are removed during this stage. The reasons to remove these elements are twofold. First, elements such as “#” and “&” and hyperlinks have no or little help to reflect personality traits. In other words, they are another kind of stopwords. Second, one of the research purposes is to find the semantic cues which are crucial for judging the personality traits. Specifically, these semantic cues are Chinese characters and words instead of images and photographs. Furthermore, “[PE]” is used to replace the emotions involving positive means, whereas “[NE]” is used to replace the emotions involving negative means. Although some emotions are ambiguous as its meaning depends on the context and mood of the users, for the purpose of splitting texts, it is essential to translate the emotions into special marks such as “[PE]” and “[NE].” The Chinese Lexical Analysis System (ICTCLAS) (Zhang & Liu, 2002), which has the function of splitting texts into a set of words and was developed by Institute of Computing Technology, is used to process all the posts. After removing stopwords, the frequency of each word was calculated to form the final data files. Each final data file contains all words and their frequency in all statuses of one subject.

Finally, six undergraduates majoring in personality psychology in East China Normal University (four females and two males) were selected to serve as research assistants/raters. They were asked to make judgment of each subject’s personality traits through the final data file in a free environment.

Results

Rater reliability

Rater reliability is one of the most frequently used approaches for evaluating the consistency among the judgments made by several raters (Van Daalen et al., 2009). There are a set of ways to calculate rater reliability, such as Kappa coefficient, intraclass correlation coefficient, and generalizability
theory (Pitts, Coles, Thomas, & Smith, 2002; Supovitz, MacGowan, & Slattery, 1997; Vargo, Nesbit, Belfer, & Archambault, 2003). Because the judgments given by raters, that is, the research assistants in this study, are certain grades for the personality traits of the participants, which are ordinal data, the Kendall consistency coefficients are calculated (shown in Table 1) to evaluate the inter-rater reliability. The result shows the presence of significant consistencies of judgments made by raters in every dimension of the Big Five model. As for the reason why all raters can draw consistent conclusions about the personality traits of subjects, it may due to their professional knowledge about personality, as well as potential stereotypes they hold (Graham & Gosling, 2012).

**Correlation analysis of personality traits**

Since the judgments made by research assistants about the personality traits of subjects are consistent, it is reasonable to take the means of their judgments as the personality traits reflected on contents of COF. Are the personality traits reflected by posts on COF consistent, at least similar, with their real personality traits, as the research hypothesizes? To answer this question, the correlations between the two types of personality traits are calculated, and the results are presented in Table 2. As shown, the judgments of research assistants and the results of measurement by NEO-FFI are correlated in almost every dimension of the Big Five model except neuroticism. And this indicates the presence of consistencies in almost every dimension of the Big Five model, except the dimension of neuroticism. Hence, H1b, H1c, H1d, and H1e are all proved while H1a is rejected. In other words, the personality traits reflected by statuses posted by users on COF are consistent, at least similar, with their overall real personality traits.

**Semantic cues**

Since the personality traits of WeChat users reflected by statuses on COF are consistent, at least similar, with their real personality traits, can individuals make judgments about others’ personality traits by reading their statuses posted on COF, just as what the research assistants do? To explore the semantic cues, that is, the semantic units, employed by research assistants to make judgments, the correlation between the personality traits and the frequency of words which appear in one’s each posts was selected. Parts of the semantic cues which are significantly related to each dimension of the personality traits at the 95% confidence level are shown in Table 3.

**Discussion**

The first research question of this study is whether users’ actual personality traits measured by NEO-FFI are consistent with their WeChat personality traits shown on COF judged through the
content and frequency of words of the status on COF based on the method of zero-acquaintance. Since the Big Five framework is exploited to represent the users’ personality traits, this study calculates the correlations between each factor of the Big Five framework. The results show that the correlations are significant in terms of four factors, which are extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness.

The only exception lies in the factor of neuroticism. Although neurotic individuals are expected to express their real self in anonymous online environments due to their difficulties in offline interactions (e.g. Tosun & Lajunen, 2010), there has been other evidence telling mixed results. There has been research finding the inconsistency in accuracy ratings for neurotic individuals’ SNS profiles (Back et al., 2010), suggesting that the neurotic can be strategic in presenting themselves online. Another study has revealed a positive association between neuroticism and online presentation of the ideal and the false self to deceive others, and use social comparison to impress others to a greater extent (Michikyan, Subrahmanyam, & Dennis, 2014).

In other words, it is reasonable to say that the users’ actual personality traits are similar to, if not the same with, their WeChat personality traits. This result is quite surprising because it is not consistent with the consequence of previous studies which revealed the construction of “true self” in anonymous online environment suppressed in the offline life (Manago et al., 2008; McKenna et al., 2002; Rheingold, 1993; Surratt, 1998; Turkle, 1995). Most previous studies argued that the nature of online environment has a great influence on people’s online self-presentation. More specifically, individuals in an online environment with a higher degree of anonymity and autonomy tend to release their instinct features, whereas users who are on an online platform with a lower degree of anonymity and autonomy prefer to represent their ideal images. For example, two studies on SNSs based on content analysis have provided evidences of constructing “possible selves” and “ideal self” instead of presenting actual self (Manago et al., 2008; Zhao et al., 2008). However, neither the instinct features nor the ideal images are similar to their true personality traits. Two explanations can be made regarding this inconsistency. First, they used a broader concept of identity, including its personal, social, and cultural aspects, whereas we focused on personality aspect of identity in our study; second, the results of these two studies were based on content analysis of Facebook and MySpace users’ profiles, which seemed more “subjective” compared to personality measurements and judgments used in our study.

The possible explanations for the result of this study are twofold. First is the theory of personality structure of Sigmund Freud and Strachey (1962). Freud divided the personality traits into three different parts, which are id, ego, and superego. An online environment with a higher degree of anonymity and autonomy means there are relatively low limitation for the behaviors of users. The lack of limitation leads id to outstanding, which means users tend to represent their ids. With the degree of anonymity and autonomy reducing, the limitation for the behaviors of individuals increases, which contributes the superego to handling the situation and then individuals represent

| Personality traits | Extraversion | Neuroticism | Openness to experience | Agreeableness | Conscientiousness |
|--------------------|--------------|-------------|------------------------|---------------|------------------|
| Correlation coefficients | 0.158 | 0.305*** | 0.276*** | 0.275*** | 0.378*** |

*: p<.05; **: p<.01; ***: p< .001
Table 3. Semantic clues and their respective values on dimensions of personality.

| Semantic cue     | Neuroticism | Extraversion | Openness to experience | Agreeableness | Conscientiousness |
|------------------|-------------|--------------|------------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Stars            | 0.314       | 0.428        | 0.309                  | 0.413         | Blessing          |
| Deepen           | 0.267       | 0.324        | 0.304                  | 0.323         | Happiness         |
| Life             | 0.266       | 0.318        | 0.293                  | 0.311         | Thorough          |
| Play             | 0.264       | 0.318        | 0.289                  | 0.309         | Pleasure          |
| Low-key          | 0.262       | 0.315        | 0.285                  | 0.293         | Compaction        |
| Plastic surgery  | 0.262       | 0.312        | 0.285                  | 0.292         | Step              |
| Interests        | 0.262       | 0.310        | 0.282                  | 0.292         | Engagement        |
| Conversation     | 0.255       | 0.296        | 0.281                  | 0.290         | Show              |
| Headline         | 0.253       | 0.288        | 0.270                  | 0.289         | Dinner together   |
| Strong           | 0.252       | 0.288        | 0.268                  | 0.276         | Thanksgiving      |
their ideal images. When it comes to COF, it seems to locate the middle of the spectrum from low degree of anonymity and autonomy to high degree. On one hand, the development and prevalence of WeChat in China have made it integrated into people’s lives. The COF is a mirror of offline social network. The similarities between COF and offline situation provide the limitation for users’ behavior, which constraints their egos. On the other hand, the COF is not a thorough replica of daily life because people are also able to make friends with remote strangers and vent bad emotions without considering others’ comments. The freedom of behavior on COF reduces the pressure of superego. Consequently, COF forms a unique situation where the first choice of behavior is neither the ego nor the superego, which means individuals prefer to show their true personality traits when they behave under the control of id.

Second explanation comes from Goffman’s theory on presentation of self. Goffman argues that the presentation of self is constructed based on certain situation, which can be divided into two parts: onstage and backstage. Onstage is the area where individuals appear before others and where positive self-concepts and desired impressions are offered, whereas backstage is a hidden, private area where individuals can be themselves and drop out from societal roles and identities (Goffman, 1959). With the development and prevalence of WeChat, there is an overlap between the audiences who read the contents posted by users on COF and the friends of the users in offline life. The situational factors, underlined by Goffman, have many similarities between COF and their offline life. As pointed by Buchanan (1999), there will be no significant differences between users’ online personality traits and their real personality traits when there is a large overlap between their online social relationships and offline ones. The overlaps promote that individual behave as what they do in the offline life, which naturally shows no difference between their true personality traits and WeChat one.

As for the semantic cues, there are so many semantic cues in each dimension of the Big Five model, which is consistent with existing studies. For example, previous study proved the positive relationship between extraversion and words with positive meanings (Qiu et al., 2012). In this study, words such as Handsome and Quality are positively related to extraversion. Nowson (2006) found the negative relationships between agreeableness and the words with negative meanings. The words such as Cry and Far-fetched are negatively related to agreeableness. However, there are also some different findings. Previous studies found the agreeableness positively related to the use of I and We (Mehl et al., 2006; Pennebaker & King, 1999), but the negative relationships between agreeableness and the use of I are found in this study. Whether the differences are due to data samples or due to different language and culture is a question that needs to be further examined.

Furthermore, there are so many semantic cues that are related to personality traits, but the meanings of many semantic cues in Chinese language context are ambiguous, such as lie (烈), fan (泛), suo (索), zhao (找), and kuan (款). Although these semantic cues have significant relationships with personality traits, they are of no use for making judgment of users’ personality traits. Hence, how to improve the accuracy of splitting words, especially the accuracy of splitting Chinese text, and how to select semantic cues which really promote to make judgments of personality traits need to be further explored.

**Conclusion**

This research aims to explore people’s practices of online self-presentation and identity construction in a less anonymous online platform (COF of WeChat). More specifically, we examined personality aspects of identity. Our results showed correlations between users’ personality expressed
on COF and their actual personalities. In other words, personality traits judged by research assistants based on contents that users posted on COF were consistent with personality traits reported by the users. Moreover, our study also found semantic cues in expression personality on contents of COF. All these findings appear to indicate that on COF of WeChat, people tended to present their real identities rather than construct identities different from their actual self.

Moreover, WeChat, despite its shared disparities with Western social media such as Twitter and Facebook, has been designed and utilized to reflect social and cultural norms of Chinese society. First, in the context of Chinese *guanxi* defined literally as networks of personal connections (Yan, 1996), the features of low anonymity, high privacy and closed community have made WeChat appropriated for Chinese *guanxi*-based social interactions (Wang, 2016). Furthermore, the distinction of different circles of relationships provided by COF has also reflected the chaxugeju (differential mode of association) which emphasizes the distinction of networks in terms of strength, norms of interaction, and functions (Fei, 1992). In other words, COF facilitates users’ differentiation of different types of relationships and networks and their construction of identity.

The findings of this study have plenty of potential application in the field of measurement of the Big Five personality traits. First, this study provided a new method for measuring the personality traits, which is relying on the content generated by users in social media instead of the method of questionnaire based on self-presentation report. Since the users tend to present their real personality traits on COF, it should be preferred to measure the personality traits through analyzing the statuses on COF, rather than traditional questionnaire. Furthermore, the semantic cues extracted in this study, which contribute to making judgments of personality traits, can shed light on similar studies.

Although this study provided some preliminary indications for the similarities between the personality traits reflected by the contents generated by users on social media and their real personality traits, further studies are required. Whether the similarities between two types of personality traits only appear on COF of WeChat or the similarities could be generalized among social media based on mobile Internet needs to be further examined. As this study was conducted among college students, it is necessary to examine whether similar patterns exist among other age groups. And the accuracy of word splitting technology based on Chinese text is supposed to be improved to extract more useful semantic cues that promote the judgment of personality traits.

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