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On the Information Crisis in the Micro-era—A Case Study of WeChat Moments (Postprint)

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] WeChat information is derived from the Moments function, representing a fusion of social elements and instant communication tools. In mobile social networks, the dissemination of WeChat information exhibits novel patterns and characteristics, posing substantial challenges to network information management. **[Method/Process]** Referencing relevant domestic and international literature, this study systematically analyzes information characteristics from four perspectives: content, cognition, dissemination, and social interaction of WeChat information, and proposes crises in WeChat information dissemination along with corresponding countermeasures based on these features. **[Results/Conclusion]** While the micro-era has transformed our lives, it has simultaneously introduced new crises—excessive user dependence, inflation of Moments content, influx of weak ties, and continuously increasing information noise within Moments, among others. Through in-depth exploration of WeChat information characteristics and associated crises, this paper proposes targeted countermeasures, providing references for monitoring and preventing information crises in new media environments.

Full Text

Preamble

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] WeChat information, derived from the Moments feature, represents the fusion of social elements and instant messaging tools. In mobile social networks, the dissemination of WeChat information exhibits new patterns and characteristics, posing enormous challenges for network information management. **[Method/Process]** Drawing on relevant domestic and international literature, this paper systematically analyzes the characteristics of WeChat information from four perspectives: content, cognition, dissemination, and social interaction. Based on these characteristics, it proposes the crises emerging in WeChat information dissemination and corresponding countermeasures. **[Result/Conclusion]** While the micro-era has transformed our lives, it has also introduced new crises: user over-dependence, information inflation in Moments, the influx of weak ties, and continuously increasing information noise. Through in-depth discussion of WeChat information characteristics and crises, this paper provides a reference for monitoring and preventing information crises in new media environments.

Keywords: micro-era; WeChat; information; crisis

Classification Number: G206

Introduction

With the development of mobile internet and the construction of smart cities and wireless urban networks, public Wi-Fi has rapidly proliferated, gradually unlocking demand for various mobile internet applications. The internet has transformed people's lifestyles and brought individuals closer together. WeChat—a social tool built upon real social relationships—has gained particular popularity. Although information dissemination subjects in social networks may be small individually, their aggregation forms an unstoppable force of public opinion. Simon's attention economy theory reminds us that human attention is a scarce resource, and time spent on WeChat is fragmented; yet if these fragments could be assembled, they would form a holistic understanding. WeChat's powerful appeal stems not merely from entertainment and leisure, but from valuable content that people crave, particularly the information it delivers. Given the importance of WeChat information, it inevitably exerts tremendous influence on people's thoughts, behaviors, and daily lives, making its study theoretically and practically significant.

2. Characteristics of WeChat Information in Mobile Social Networks

With the development of mobile internet technology, micro-applications such as microblogging, WeChat, micro-cloud, micro-business, micro-fiction, and micro-films have emerged in endless streams. The rise of the micro-era has made life more convenient and diversified. As of June 2017, mobile social network users had reached 724 million. WeChat operates as a small-circle dissemination

based on acquaintance networks, where users constantly share information with efficiency unattainable by traditional media, representing a tight integration of virtual and real-world social interaction. WeChat's value extends beyond communication—it consolidates all of a person's relationships into a single account, satisfying users' life demands for communication, information, payment, and shopping. Due to the one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many communication modes in WeChat Moments, information exhibits new characteristics in dissemination, content, cognition, and interaction.

2.1 Information Dissemination: From Convenient to Viral

WeChat users constitute the majority of mobile internet users, and the information they disseminate demonstrates strong usability and usefulness, rapidly sweeping across entire social circles and ultimately influencing public opinion trends. For instance, the phrase “xianggu” (“mushroom”) and “lanshou” (“blue-thin”) once flooded WeChat Moments. Users posted photos of any type accompanied by these words, creating an overwhelming trend. Even those who didn't understand the meaning blindly followed suit. Analyzed through the lens of uses and gratifications theory, it becomes evident that audiences receive psychological satisfaction and emotional sustenance when forwarding trending information, making mass dissemination possible when both social and psychological conditions are met. For self-gratification and spiritual resonance, users repeatedly copy, forward, and comment, causing information to mutate continuously during viral propagation. The fragmented nature of WeChat content allows the same material to accumulate influence through frequent updates and repetitive narratives, with this cumulative effect continuously amplifying information impact.

2.2 Information Content: From Diversified and Functional to Fragmented and Shallow

A key WeChat function is instant communication—write and send instantly, photograph and post immediately—unconstrained by time or space, with strong interactivity. WeChat users constantly engage in multi-form interactions through text, voice, images, and video. Content originates not only from user-generated content (UGC) and public account forwards but also from various websites. In the fast-paced information era, WeChat occupies substantial user time, and its real-time nature makes information acquisition perpetually fragmented and jumpy, diluting the value of WeChat's content repository. Pseudoscience, rumors, and plagiarism have significantly reduced original content. Various “link shares” and superficial, fragmented personal information proliferate daily, with fragmentation making people too lazy for deep reflection and fostering increasingly shallow thinking.

2.3 Information Cognition: From Surprise and Delight to Fatigue and Helplessness

As a virtual social platform built upon real-world interactions, WeChat initially provided users with novel delight and surprise. Moments enables users to find long-lost friends for instant interaction while strengthening communication with regular contacts. Users not only post frequently but also constantly refresh screens anticipating likes, comments, and forwards—feeling disappointed without interaction yet experiencing strong satisfaction and achievement when receiving it. The boundary of the WeChat “circle” is extremely ambiguous, not purely private; as long as someone is willing to “leak,” Moments holds no secrets. The presence of numerous “strangers” fills circle conversations with unpredictable risks, affecting genuine emotional expression between friends. Opening Moments reveals various advertisements and unfamiliar voices that compromise communication, altering users’ original intentions and degrading their experience. Emotional cognition has shifted from initial surprise and delight to fatigue and helplessness.

The internet delivers massive information, yet we remain information-hungry, compulsively refreshing Moments for trivial “junk information” about dining and entertainment, regardless of its utility or authenticity. Like eating and sleeping, people often open the app beyond conscious control, mechanically scrolling—a dependency that affects daily life experience. Research shows that excluding eight hours of sleep, people check their phones every 6.5 minutes on average during the remaining 16 hours. One study found that when asked to choose between their wallet, food, and phone, over 70% selected their phone. Increasingly, users have degenerated from genuine appreciation to merely “liking” to indicate acknowledgment, or even “lurking” in 观望 attitudes.

2.4 Information Exchange: From Active and Interactive to Indifferent and Diluted

In WeChat Moments, user roles shift with context between two social roles: information sender and receiver. Senders initiate interaction; receivers respond. Through this acquaintance-network-based platform, users can interact with friends anytime, anywhere, establishing good social relationships. However, social network virtuality has digitized, simplified, and symbolized life, reducing genuine emotional exchange. Interaction is gradually replaced by virtual social media, with interpersonal emotions growing cold and exchanges becoming mechanical processing between symbols, losing vitality. WeChat occupies substantial user time, and its real-time nature makes information acquisition perpetually fragmented, jumpy, and even erroneous. Over-reliance on WeChat information is absolutely insufficient, as the content repository’s value is diluted and pseudoscience, rumors, and plagiarism reduce original content.

3. Crises Facing WeChat Information in Mobile Social Networks

In the fast-paced information era, WeChat Moments satisfies people's social activity needs and demonstrates user value within circles. However, the value of WeChat "information" is continuously dissolving, with new problems emerging endlessly.

3.1 Information Inflation, Declining Personal Processing Capacity, and Increasingly Shallow Thinking

In the era of rapid mobile social network development, opening WeChat daily means confronting real-time information from hundreds of contacts and public accounts, with Moments perpetually updated with novel content. In the information age's fast rhythm, various "link shares" and superficial, fragmented personal information proliferate daily. Fragmentation makes people too lazy for deep reflection, fostering increasingly shallow thinking. WeChat's primary functions are entertainment and browsing; for academic and classic works, print media should remain preferred. Although readers gain new information through sharing, the proliferation of fragmented content discourages deep thinking. WeChat occupies substantial user time, and its real-time nature makes information acquisition perpetually fragmented and jumpy, diluting the content repository's value.

3.2 Information Noise Interference and Weak-Tie Network Influx Compromising Interaction

WeChat's initial success stemmed from the privacy of strong-tie acquaintance networks. However, "scan-to-follow" activities in offline social settings have continuously disrupted these strong ties, with unfamiliar friends constantly emerging and users no longer enthusiastic about sharing genuine emotions, instead remaining silent or 观望. People often post information aimlessly in Moments, anticipating immediate feedback. Whether information receives feedback, the content of feedback, its purpose, and whether it meets expectations create uncertain waiting periods. In this information space, some content is non-real, and this false satisfaction causes people to neglect real-world self-improvement, hindering reflection and self-actualization.

WeChat Moments represents a "total" interaction object, including close friends, ordinary friends, and even strangers, turning the circle into a hodgepodge. For users, Moments resembles a busy market with product promotions, happiness displays, advertisements, and inspirational quotes. The blurred boundaries of friendship make privacy difficult to guarantee, and emotional interaction becomes formalized. Many users hesitate to express themselves freely or confide emotions. "Liking" has become a fingertip exercise, increasingly manifesting as a conditioned programmatic presence that dissolves exchange value and aesthetic significance. Moments is no longer a spiritual home filled with affection, trust,

and warmth; the circle has lost its tight group relationships and become a mere “transfer station” for network information. “Forwarding” has become routine, with users re-forwarding information, spreading countless duplicates through viral propagation, causing significant self-identity loss. Users are baptized in repetitive, boring information, experiencing aesthetic fatigue that greatly dissolves enthusiasm for emotional interaction.

3.3 Information Fragmentation, Circle Generalization, and User Entrapment in Emotional Alienation and Interaction Fatigue

WeChat Moments has transformed users’ social spatiotemporal concepts, with time conquering space and expanding social breadth, enhancing mobile social value and functionality. The longer users employ WeChat, the faster their social circles grow, with various “friends” dramatically altering the original emotional exchange value. Information fragmentation and circle generalization trap users in a vicious cycle of emotional alienation and interaction fatigue. For users with lower self-cognition, seeing others’ exciting lives increases anxiety—the more they scroll, the lonelier they feel. In reality, Moments only highlights fragments of mundane life, and this near-total lifestyle immersion creates a vicious cycle of greater loneliness and anxiety.

WeChat’s virtual space interaction blurs the line between reality and virtuality, leaving people wandering at the boundaries and 陷入 self-contradiction. Is this what we seek—accomplishing everything with a finger tap? In the virtual world, unregulated behavior and devoting primary time, interest, and energy to WeChat fosters loss of self-discipline and addiction.

4. Countermeasures for WeChat Information Crisis in the Micro-Era

As an emerging social tool, WeChat’s primary characteristics are social and media attributes. It integrates all interpersonal relationships, social relations, and life surroundings, satisfying diverse social content needs. However, as Le Bon noted in *The Crowd*: under group influence, audience emotions and thoughts exhibit herd effects, forming a collective psychology that converges in information identification while losing independent thinking capacity. WeChat, with its massive user base, is experiencing this convergence. Its acquaintance-network-based design makes it popular, but as a platform where information content remains unregulated and users can share and forward anytime, anywhere, this dissemination mechanism causes information inflation and circle generalization. Although developers positioned it as an instant messaging tool, WeChat’s evolution has mixed communication, social, financial, marketing, advertising, and media functions, allowing weak ties to 涌入 and creating continuous crises. WeChat itself is neither good nor evil; its nature depends primarily on users. We should approach crises like circle generalization, information inflation, and expanding noise scientifically, recognizing that only through multi-party cooperation can

this medium maximize its value.

4.1 Enhancing User Understanding of Mobile Social Networks

As information crises spread with mobile social networks' rapid development, users—active media subjects who both lead public opinion and transmit information—should correctly understand mobile social network characteristics and fully utilize new media platforms in the micro-era. Simultaneously, they should improve comprehensive qualities, enhancing cognitive and identification capabilities amid information bombardment, strengthening self-discipline and independent thinking under network 舆论, and reducing irrational behaviors and statements to guard against new media information crises.

4.2 Effective Government-Platform Cooperation and Proper Management

Mobile social network information dissemination occurs in virtual environments where users enjoy freedom of speech and information spreads virally. However, each user has a registered username or IP address, enabling authorities to manage IPs appropriately to control crisis propagation when discovered. In December 2015, Tencent released the *Internet Plus WeChat Government and Livelihood White Paper*, revealing that national government WeChat accounts cover most government functions including party affairs, transportation, education, healthcare, tourism, food safety, human resources, courts, justice, and science/technology. These government livelihood public accounts average over 36,000 followers each, possessing greater credibility in information reliability and persuasiveness. In managing mobile social networks, governments should widely solicit user opinions and suggestions, establish sound information disclosure cooperation mechanisms, adopt guidance approaches for correct 舆论 guidance, introduce relevant mobile instant messaging tool supervision measures and governance recommendations, and improve social network management.

4.3 Improving Platform Technical Management Systems for Effective Guidance

Network instantaneity enables various information to spread instantly, with rumors or hearsay often originating from or amplified by networks to become 舆论 focal points. WeChat has established “report” complaint portals in Moments, public accounts, and articles, with operations teams processing reports within seven days. Mobile social platforms can also establish 完善的舆论 management mechanisms by searching sensitive keywords and monitoring highly-forwarded information in real-time. WeChat could implement reward systems for false information reports, encouraging user discovery and reporting, and punishing rumor-spreading public accounts with bans to tackle problems at their source. During registration, real-name authentication should be implemented, with qualitative and quantitative analysis of platform information, technical traceback of dissemination chains, detection of high-frequency words and false information

sharing within specific periods, early capture of 不良 information tendencies, 完善 platform technical management systems, and scientific, rational judgment and guidance for effective 舆论 guidance.

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Author Contributions

Wang Feifei: Manuscript writing;
Zhang Shengtai: Framework design and manuscript review;
Zhang Juliang: Literature collection.

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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