5-7-2016

Interactive Social Selling and Relationship Management on WeChat

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INTERACTIVE SOCIAL SELLING AND RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT ON WECHAT

by

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Under the Direction of Natalie T. J. Tindall, PhD

ABSTRACT

The thesis examined the phenomenon of micro-entrepreneurship, social selling and

relationship management on WeChat. I used autoethnography as my research methodology, and

the findings contribute to academic area on social selling, micro-entrepreneurship, social

marketing, relationship management, and strategic communication. This paper also explored

how WeChat users conduct their management strategies and relationship marketing in the

common Chinese culture background. Findings revealed that WeChat is an ideal social selling

and marketing approach for Chinese individual sellers to accomplish their business goal.

INDEX WORDS: WeChat, Social Selling, Micro-Entrepreneurship, Social Media, Strategic,

Communication, Public Relations, Marketing, Relationship Management, China

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2016

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College of Arts and Sciences

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May 2016

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my husband Mingqi, my parents Mr. Haining Sun and Ms Jing He. Without their patience, understanding, support and most of all love, the completion of this work would not have been possible. I would also dedicate this paper to my dearest son, Alan. You bring me all the joy, and your love encouraged me through this thesis process. I love you with all my heart.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At first, I would like to acknowledge my thesis advisor and committee chair, Dr. Natalie Tindall. My previous thesis advisor left GSU right before I started this project. I was anxious at that time. I was afraid I could not find a thesis advisor to help me finish this project and even thought about quitting the program. Fortunately, Dr. Tindall agreed to be my thesis advisor without any hesitation. She kept on encouraging me to study on this project during the whole process. I am honored to have her as my thesis advisor because she is such an expert in public relations, a great mentor to guide me research on this project, and a close friend to teach me to be a great woman. Without her patience, her professional knowledge, and her great advice, my thesis completion will not happen. Thank you so much, Dr. Tindall. What I learned from you will benefit the rest of my life.

I would also acknowledge my thesis committee member, Dr. Ted Friedman and Dr. Ann Williams. Both Dr. Ted and Dr. Williams gave me great advice on my thesis. I am very thankful for their commitment and their willingness to share their knowledge and time.

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1   INTRODUCTION

WeChat, an emerging mobile application created by Tencent in 2011, is the most widely used social media platform in China[1]. When Tencent developed WeChat (微信), the application had a limited, plain messaging function. According to Tencent's official website (n.d.), the company integrated the best features of existing mobile apps and networks such as WhatsApp, Twitter, and QQ, and added new, appealing functions to make WeChat interesting and unique. Those additions made WeChat a global social network. Globally, more than 500 million individuals use the WeChat mobile application as their preferred method for connecting with others. According to an announcement at the 2015 Tencent Global Partner Conference, the amount of average users who use the application on a daily basis spiked to 570 million in September 2015.

This platform brings messaging, social communication, games, and online payment under one umbrella[2]. Different than Weibo, which is considered the Chinese Twitter and emphasizes the public sphere, WeChat emphasizes the user's personal sphere. Users can add (or delete) friends, post comments, and share pictures and videos in groups and with others. To some extent, these personal features are similar to the features of Facebook. Users can alter the settings in WeChat to add or delete friends, show personal posts, or block strangers from accessing their personal accounts.

The Tencent Global Partner Conference released the following informational statistics in 2015: More than 60 percent of WeChat users are young people between 15 to 29 years old. Users

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[1] Tencent is a well-known Chinese Internet service company. According to its official website (n.d.), it was founded in November, 1998, and has become one of the biggest and most used Internet service portal. Its products and services include instant messaging service, online media, interactive entertainment service, E-commence, and online advertising service.

[2] The basic functions of WeChat include free text and multimedia messages, video calls, sharing photos, and videos on user's personal social network named "Moments." Other features include mobile games, online payments, and personal E-wallet.

averaged 128 friends in his or her WeChat circle or community. If the user started working in a firm, the number of friends would increase by 20%. Fifty-eight percent of WeChat users used the free call feature to connect with friends. The peak points for shopping via WeChat are 10 a.m. and 10 p.m. every day.

1.1   Significance of this Project

To discover how WeChat works for online business and business communications, the thesis will examine the phenomenon of social selling and relationship management on WeChat. As a new social phenomenon, social media are changing and will continue to change our approaches for communicating with the businesses and global communities. As an emerging media, academic research on WeChat is also at the beginning stages. The relevant literature about WeChat and about the social selling via WeChat are lacking. This work has a number of important implications for both academics and practicing social sellers. First, this thesis will study the business function of WeChat, especially by small business users. The result can be contributed to academic area on social selling, social marketing, and strategic communication. Also, it will be pragmatic and helpful for WeChat users who are considering social selling and social marketing for their own businesses. This paper will provide guides for social sellers. Furthermore, this project will become a window for academic world to know WeChat, understand the WeChat model, and contribute to the social selling research. Finally, the paper is also unique because of the methodology conducted in this paper, autoethnography. I, as an autoethnographer, can contribute to the social construction of what is known as public relations practice on WeChat. To my knowledge, there is no research that has applied autoethnography to social selling and relationship management on WeChat. To some extent, this paper will fill in the void in the literature.

1.2   Definitions

This section will provide definitions for the terms used throughout this study: small business, social media, social selling, social marketing, interactive marketing, and personal branding.

1.2.1   Small business / Micro-entrepreneurship

According to the official government website of Chinese Industry and Commerce Bureau (n.d.), small businesses are defined as privately owned corporations, partnerships, or sole proprietorships. What businesses are defined as "small" in terms of government support and tax policy depends upon the country and industry. For instance, in China, small businesses are defined as having 10~50 employees with annual retail sales profits more than 1,000,000 RMB (around $ 180,000) and less than 5,000,000 RMB (around $850,000). Moreover, the Chinese government also has a definition posted on the government website for micro-entrepreneurship which is even smaller than small business. A microbusiness is a business with less than 10 employees and annual sales profit is less than 1,000,000 RMB ($180,000).

1.2.2   Social Media

Multiple definitions of "social media" exist. Buettner (2015) defined social media as a computer-mediated tool that allows people to create, share, or exchange information, including ideas, pictures, videos, and career interests, in virtual communities and networks. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (p. 61). Also, Andzulis, Panagopoulos, and Rapp (2012) defined social media as "the technological component of the communication, transaction and relationship building functions of a business which leverages the network of customers and prospects to

promote value co-creation" (p. 308). In this study, I chose to use Andzulis, Panagopoulos, and Rapp's definition because this definition is more relationship oriented than the other definitions are.

1.2.3   Social Marketing

According to Kotler and Lee (2010), social marketing is a process using marketing principles and methods in order to create, communicate, and deliver value for the purpose of affecting the behaviors of the target individuals in a way that will benefit both the target individuals and society in general. Social marketing was also defined as the approaches to influence behaviors that benefit individuals and communities to gain greater social effects by applying marketing concepts (Aiden, 2010). Moreover, Aiden argued that social marketing could be described as having "two parents"—a social parent, including social science and social policy approaches, and a marketing parent, including commercial and public marketing approaches (p. 20). In this study, I prefer the definition from Kotler and Lee because social media is an approach to practice this kind of marketing to affect the target individuals.

1.2.4   Social Selling

The University of British Columbia first established the term of social selling (Lan, Darren, Amitava, & JoAndrea, 2009). They found that where there are incidental similarities between a buyer and a seller, it is more likely a purchase would take place. According to Edelshain (2009), who created the term "sales 2.0," social selling is a business approach which operates through advanced technologies, including social media, to find the similarities between seller and customers. Also, social selling is defined as a process of developing relationships, which is one component of the sale process (Chan, 2011). Thus, relationship-oriented social media becomes great approaches to facilitate or enable the performance of selling tasks.

1.2.5   Interactive Marketing

Scholars analyze interactivity in a variety of ways. At the early beginning of interactive marketing research, U.S. scholars often studied interactive marketing as relationship marketing, Internet marketing, and database marketing (Virvilaite & Belousova, 2005). The definition of interactive marketing has evolved due to the influence of different interpretations and notions of the interactive marketing (Virvilaite & Belousova, 2005). Interactive marketing was defined as a continuing process during which consumer's needs and dreams are identified, described, and satisfied (Bezjian, Caldery, & Iacobucci, 1998). Also, interactive marketing was defined as an evolving trend in marketing where customer's response in a conversation becomes important for determining marketing behavior (Deighton, 1996). According to Deighton (1996), interactive marketing features "the ability to address the individual once more in a way that takes into account his or her unique response" (p. 151). Interactive marketing processes are facilitated by Internet technology (Deighton, 1996). Furthermore, Gronroos (1995) asserted that interactive marketing was the management of interaction between consumer and supplier. In this thesis, I will apply the definition from Deighton because this definition is more specific and reflects the online conversation approach of interactivity in marketing.

1.2.6   Personal Branding

First used and discussed by Tom Peters, personal branding is defined as the use of social media to establish an individual's reputation and credibility (Asacker, 2004). Personal branding also involves highlighting of personal information to find common ground with potential (Clay, 2014). Furthermore, personal branding was defined as the practice of people marketing themselves and their careers as brands (Lair, Sullivan, & Cheney, 2005). I prefer the definition

from Clay (2014) because it emphasized the approach, which is social media, to establish individual brands.

In this paper, I will analyze the social selling and relationship management, especially in the Chinese culture content. Thus, it is necessary to define several Chinese public relations terms.

1.2.7 *Chinese Social Power*

Michel Foucault, the French postmodernist, defined that "power" is everywhere and is exercised through knowledge (Foucault, 1991). Cook (Cook& Emerson, 1978) argued that power came from exchange networks: "power is an attribute of position in a network structure observable in the occupant's behavior, even though the occupant does not know what position or what amount of power he or she possesses" (p. 721). Specifically, in Chinese culture, power means "the sociomoral, or peer-group pressure, that one may use to change the attitude, motivation, or behavior of another to conform to one's will during the process of social interaction" (Hwang, 1987, p. 947). To gain social resources, the individual will try to employ this kind of power to influence others. Because this thesis will look at the Chinese culture phenomenon in social media, I will apply Hwang's definition in this study.

1.2.8 *Renqing*

Li-Chi (Book of Ritual) defined Renqing as "it consists of happiness, anger, sadness, fear, love, hate, and desire; all of them are acquired at birth". Hwang (1987) argued that there are at least three different meanings for Renqing in Chinese culture. First, it represents the emotional responses of an individual experiencing the different situations in his or her daily life. Second, renqing can represent a source that people can show it to others as a gift in the course of social exchange. Thus, "renqing could be a medium of social exchange in Chinese culture" (p. 954). This is the meaning I will discuss later in social selling and relationship management in WeChat.

It needs to be mentioned that "renqing can not only contain substantive stuff as money, goods, or services but may also include some abstract component of affection" (p. 954). Third, Chinese people need to manage renqing in their daily life. Here, renqing could represent two basic social behaviors. "(1) renqing contains in the daily social life that people keep in touch with each other in one's social network, and (2) when a social member of one's reticulum gets into trouble or faces a difficult situation, one could sympathize, offer renqing for that person" (p. 954).

1.2.9   Guanxi (Relationship)

The behavior of "establishing guanxi" or "maintain relations" in Chinese society involves social exchanges. Chinese use different rules of social change to deal with different relationships between each other (Hwang, 1987). Chinese people frequently use the concept of yuan (natural affinity) for interpreting the establishment and quality of interpersonal relationship(Yang, 1982). In this process, each side of the relationship will think their connection as a predestined occurrence that will lead to happy results and gain renqing between them (Hwang, 1987).

1.3   Conclusion

In Chapter Two, I examine the current literature regarding social selling, social marketing, and how to build the relationship with stakeholders by using social media. Theoretically, I examine how social cognitive theory is a lens to understanding the impact of emerging media on individuals' attitude and behavior. In Chapter Three, the research method and how the research method will work will be discussed.

2   REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This thesis examines how social selling works for online business, how social marketing works with emerging media approaches, and how relationships enhance online selling. Previous research shows that relationship management has a great impact on marketing and emerging

technologies provide new approaches for social selling. However, most of the literature examines the relationship management from the organization side. The literature overlooks the interplay of relationship management and social selling from individual sellers to personal customers.

The conceptual framework of this study will build on social cognitive theory (SCT). This theory holds that individuals, in responding to information signals, proceeding through several stages which beginning with the awareness (cognition or learn) to conviction and action (Bandura, 1963). Similarly, I propose that uninformed potential customers, in responding to information signals (i.e., social media advertising and marketing information posted on WeChat), proceed through the stage of likelihood to purchase (i.e., awareness or learning about the personal brands and products) to the amount of purchase online and offline (i.e., take action to buy products on WeChat). In this section, I will discuss the relevant literature on SCT affected in social selling, relationship management, and relationship marketing. Also, the relationship between them will be discussed.

2.1   Social Cognitive Theory in Social Media

Social cognitive theory states that learning is a cognitive process that happens in a social context, including media, and can occur purely through observation or direct instruction, even in the absence of motor reproduction or direct reinforcement (Bandura, 1963). Thus, people learn through observation and modeling. Social cognitive theory explains that human behavior in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors (Bandura, 1963). Bandura (2001) also states that communication systems happen through two pathways: direct and socially mediated pathway. In the direct pathway, they promote shifts by informing, enabling, motivating, and guiding participants. Bandura argued that, "in the socially mediated pathway, media influences link participants to social networks and community

settings that provide natural incentives and continued personalized guidance, for desired change"
(Bandura, 2001, p. 265).

Hoffman, Lutz, & Meckel (2015) stated that "environmental factors, behavior, and personal
factors form a causal model of triadic reciprocity" (p.1362). Within this model, they explained
that "(a) an individual's environment influences personal factors (such as cognitions and affect),
which in turn shapes the choice of environment; (b) personal factors influence behavior, which in
turn influences these personal factors; and (c) behavior affects the environment, which in turn
impacts behavior " (p. 1362).

2.2   Social Media Brand Community and Consumer Behavior

Mckenna (2002) argued that online social interactions could allow online users to build
awareness of one another, the awareness may increase with the amount of interactions and this
relates to online relationship development (Parks and Floyd, 1996). Different stages of awareness
may cause different levels of communication impact (Brown and Reingen, 1987). For instance,
the online information posted from a friend, whom he or she has a higher awareness of, would be
more influential on the specific user than the same information from a stranger. Furthermore,
consumers will also have relationships with organizations and these relationships will affect
purchasing decisions (Crosby and Stephens, 1987). For example, if individual has already
followed the brand's official account on WeChat, it means that he/she would like to join the
brand community. This kind of participation may also cause the further purchase on the brand's
products both online and offline. Goh, Heng, & Lin (2012) found that engagement in social
media brand community resulted in a great increase in consumer purchases. In addition, they
found that the community contents (including both user-generated content and marketer-
generated content) could affect the consumer purchases. Interestingly, they argued that

"consumers influence the purchase expenditure of one another through both informative as well as persuasive interactions, whereas marketers influence it only through persuasive communication" (p. 26). Thus, the consumers' persuasive effect is much more than that of marketer's.

2.3   Relationship Management from Public Relations Perspectives

2.3.1   Relationship Marketing

With the consistent development of WeChat, the approaches for doing business in WeChat become varied. Companies can use the group function and official account to promote customer relationship management (CRM). CRM strategy refers to an all-encompassing business model supported by marketing principles in order to increase revenues and profits by focusing on customers (Choudhury & Harrigan, 2014). To launch CRM, relationship-oriented social media are great options for sellers and marketers. Relationship-oriented social media are those tools or specific applications capable of facilitating communication among buyers and sellers in a real-time, two-way, interactive, and conversation-like model (Ellonen & Kosonen, 2010). With multiple functions that support these characteristics, WeChat is a relationship-oriented mobile application.

How can CRM work via relationship-oriented apps? Sharma and Sheth (2010) argue that sales technology innovations refer to buyers' and sellers' resistance to adoption and use. This dual-acceptance innovation is technology with substantial utility such that both sellers and buyers interactively use the tool. It means that the interactive salesperson-customer shared information technologies become an integral part of the sales process. Participation from both sellers and buyers on social media is helpful for selling process. Moreover, both parties offer

further opportunities to explore, discuss, and visualize alternative product or service offerings on the relationship-oriented social media (Ahearne and Rapp, 2010).

2.3.2   *Social Selling and Relationship Marketing*

To explain this social selling process further, Ellonen and Kosonen (2010) described two different modes of interaction among buyers and sellers. These two modes were instrumental interaction and relationship-oriented interaction. In the instrumental mode, one-way communication was applied for sellers to promote the products or specific services. It was a seller centric mode. In the utility of WeChat, sellers could use official account as a platform to promote this kind of instrumental selling mode. This mode could be an effective way to reach target customers. However, it was hard to reach the potential customers because the posts from official platforms only could reach users who have already followed this specific seller. The other mode emphasized reciprocal and bilateral communication and collaboration. This was a salesperson-customer shared technology and was used primarily for relational selling (Ahearne and Rapp, 2010). This mode was popular in WeChat selling, especially used by micro sellers in promoting products or services in their "Moments" to their friends/customers.

2.3.3   *WeChat for Selling and Purchasing*

Thompson (2014) argued that messaging apps are an omnipresence approach of both a communications channel and a purchasing channel. Before the messaging era, companies and organizations could not reach consumers through one channel to accomplish the four steps of the purchasing funnel: awareness, interest, desire, and action. Now, messaging apps have the capability to reach audience positively and interactively across all four stages. For example,

Thompson used Line as an example to show the effectiveness on doing marketing via messaging app[3].

WeChat developed a mechanism for companies to create countless sub-platforms to do social marketing, advertising, public relations, and social selling with people who follow them. Moreover, thousands of individuals build their own small business via WeChat although most of them have jobs in the real world.

2.3.4   Building Relationship with Stakeholders

Relationship management refers to the process of managing the relationships between an organization and its internal and external publics. Ledingham (2003) defined an organization-public relationship as "the state which exists between an organization and its key publics in which the actions of either can impact the economic, social, cultural or political well-being of the other" (pp. 184). Ledingham also argued that relationship management is a core focus of public relations.

Linda Childers Hon and James E. Grunig found through their research that the relationships could be categorized in four components (Hon and Grunig, 1999). They found that the four components worked well in both interpersonal relationships and organization-public relationships. The four components (Hon and Grunig, 1999) are:

"Control Mutuality — The interaction of power on influence one another in a relationship". (p.19)

"Trust— one party's level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party". (p.19)

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[3] Line is a mobile application for instant communications. It created by Naver Corporation, Japan, in 2011. Line became the largest social network in Japan in 2013. In February 2015, it announced that over 600 million active users are using this app. It also predicted that this number would be expected to reach 700 million at the end of this year.

"Satisfaction— the degree to which one party feels favorably toward the other because positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced". (p. 20)

"Commitment—the extent to which one party believes and feels that the relationship is worth spending time and energy to maintain and promote". (p. 20)

Social media is an ideal way to build and maintain relationship with stakeholders for sellers. Actually, it is characterized by user-generated content, which has been found to be more effective than traditional public relations communication approaches in influencing the attitudes and behaviors of individuals (Thackeray, Neiger, Hanson & McKenzie, 2008). Researchers have identified three effective strategies for relationship management online (Men & Tsai, 2012). The first strategy is to engage organizations to disclose the organizational information and to involve in the open and direct conversations with publics (Waters et al., 2009). Information dissemination is the second strategy for organizations to meet the needs, concerns, and interests from the publics through disseminating organizational information (Kent & Taylor, 1998). The third strategy is using social media to interactive with the publics. Interactivity is one of the key advantages of social media over the static, traditional online tools (McMilan, Hoy, Kim, &McMahan, 2008).

As a theoretical framework and a management approach, social relationship management can be regarded as building a two-way collaborative relationship through communication and interaction between organizations and their stakeholders (Abeza, O'Reilly, & Reid, 2013). This relationship includes fulfilling promises, building trust and commitment through real-time talking, listening, learning between each party (Gronroos, 2004; Peppers & Rogers, 2010). The goal of the organizations is to reach an understanding of their stakeholders by relationship management and finally organizations produce and deliver a co-created, customer-valued

product (Gronroos, 2004; Peppers & Rogers, 2010). According to Williams and Chinn (2010), the success of a relationship management needs three key components: a communication process, an interaction process, and the creation of value. Gronroos (2004) further argued that the second key component, the interaction process, is central to the relationship management process and occurs through both indirect and direct channels. Gronroos asserted that a relationship dialogue needed to be used to show a genuine interest from organizations to stakeholders' needs. Through this dialogue, the combined effects of communication and interaction result in added value to customers and relevant stakeholders (Williams & Chinn, 2010).

Interestingly, in Chinese culture, building and maintaining relationship with people are regarded as an important social behavior. In Chinese culture, according to Hwang (1987), gao guanxi, was a typical relationship maintenance approach. In Hwang's face and favor theory, to seek for social resources (e.g., money, goods, information, and status) controlled by a particular allocator, an individual can adopt several strategies to create and enhance his or her influence over the allocator (Huang, 2001). To be more specific, when a person is unknown to a resource allocator, he or she can "pull" or "work" the connections (la guanxi or gao guanxi) by "asking an intermediary of high social status to introduce the petitioner to the allocator and to solicit a favor from the allocator on his or her behalf" (p. 225). Once the guanxi (relationship) was created, the trust could be established between the allocator and the other. Thus, the social network management could be established and enhanced by this kind of social behavior in Chinese society. In the emerging media age, social media becomes a new approach for Chinese people to pull or work with these social connections and relationships. According to Men and Tsai (2012), Chinese corporations use social media to cultivate relationships with the publics. "Companies in China commonly use the dialogic strategies of disclosure, information dissemination, and

interactivity" in order to manage their relationships with the publics, especially with their customers (p. 728). The Chinese organizations attempted to be open and transparent to the public by providing their company descriptions and URLs for their Websites on social media. However, Men and Tsai (2012) found that companies have not taken full advantages of social media. For instance, practical gaps exist between what is happening and what should be happening in terms of corporate use of social media (p. 728).

2.4   A "Free" Market in WeChat

Shirky (2008) stated that instead of living in the framework of traditional institutions and organizations, "we are now living in the middle of a remarkable increase in our ability to share, to cooperate with one another, and to take collective action" (p. 21). He argued that emerging capable groups through new media tools are working without the managerial imperative and outside the former strictures that bounded their effectiveness. Shirky asserted that: "These shifts will transform the world everywhere groups of people come together to accomplish something, which is to say everywhere" (p. 24). His argument supports the opinions of cyber-utopianism. Cyber-utopians believe that online communications, including the ideas, information, and applications, are transparent, usable, and accessible (Rushkoff, 2002). Rushkoff even argued that "the Internet's ability to network human beings is its very life's blood" (p. 26).

Can WeChat offer this kind of power to the users? Is it true that new tools not only have made cultural production more efficient but also have achieved democracy? The answer is no. Taylor (2014), a cyber skeptics, asserted that on Internet, a cable cartel would rather seek profits than provide universal service. She also argued that the Internet has still given access to some of the most mammoth corporations of all time instead of enabling small producers. "It was supposed to create a decentralized media system, but the shift to cloud computing has

recentralized communications in unprecedented ways. It was supposed to liberate users but instead facilitated all-invasive corporate and government surveillance" (p. 231).

A group of cyber skeptics have argued that the rise of Internet censorship and surveillance made the Internet limited for the public to gain information free. Morozov (2011), a former cyber-utopian, changed his opinion because of the global politics and criticized cyber-utopianism as a native and stubborn belief, which refused to consider the downside of Internet, including the government control and monitoring (Morozov, 2011). He stated that cyber-utopians did not consider how helpful and useful the Internet would support for propaganda purposes, and how sophisticated modern systems of Internet censorship could become. He argued that "cyber-utopians refused to see that the Internet penetrates and reshapes all walks of political life, not just the ones conductive to democratization" (p. xiv). He also mentioned that authoritarian governments were still using cyber-space "as both a carrot (keeping their populace entertained) and a stick (punishing those who dare to challenge the official line)" (p. xv).

Because of government control and monitoring, WeChat would be considered an online environment without absolute freedom. First of all, in mainland China, government censorship covers PC-based applications as well as mobile apps. Thus, WeChat cannot offer users all access to the information they want to reach. This is only limited to users on the mainland of China; users who live abroad are not included in the censoring. Second, though the download and the basic use of WeChat is free, many derivatives can earn money from users' pocket, including the charging stickers from the sticker shop, the purchase of virtual currency in the derived games, the service from the WeChat cloud, and so on. Furthermore, the access to the Internet is not free in most countries. This means that users need to pay for Internet access. For instance, individuals in China need to join data programs offered by telecommunication companies to gain Internet

access. Finally, the function of WeChat, to a large extent, is to earn money other than share information to the public. For instance, several sub-apps, including gaming apps, online payment apps, are related to WeChat in order to earn money from the users.

In cyber skepticism, commerce has commodified relationships on Internet. Taylor (2014) criticized the way the Internet has developed. She argued that Internet was supposed to eliminate middlemen and enable peer-to-peer relationships, but it has empowered an influential and practically omnipresent crop of mediators. She addressed that "Instead of making our relationships horizontal and bringing prosperity to all, the gap between the most popular and the practically invisible, the haves and have-nots, has grown. Instead of unshackling individuals from the grip of high-priced spectacles, it has helped entertainment firms dominate global audience. Instead of decommodifying art and culture, every communication has become an advertising opportunity (Taylor, 2014, p. 232)." However, after I look at WeChat, I will have a critique for her argument later in Chapter Four.

2.5   The Value of WeChat for Small and Micro-entrepreneurship

Chan (2011) asserted that social media, such as Facebook, are the best suitable platform for practicing soft marketing and selling. First, the word-of mouth enhances the truth of information and the trust from customers. Second, the network created by users via social media platforms strengthens the affinity of relationship. Third, "forward" and "share" functions on social media platforms make the information flow much quick. Finally, the direct communicating approach makes the image of brands and companies more favorable and attractive.

Two theories widely used at the organizational level of analysis on the usage of social media are the technology-organization-environment (TOE) framework (Kuang-Wei and Yan,

2010) and the resource-based view (RBV) theory. According to Kuang-Wei & Yan (2010), "the technology-organization-environment (TOE) framework is used to identify a number of potential antecedents of small business social media usage" (p. 188). The TOE framework includes three elements: technological, organizational, and environmental contexts. Social media adoption by small business is heavily dependent on the ability to which they can use social media sites and their offerings (Schaupp & Belanger, 2014). According to Kuang-Wei & Yan (2010), "the resource-based view (RBV) theory is used as a starting point to identify determinants of social media value for small businesses "(p. 188). The RBV theory suggests that the resources must be economically valuable, relatively scarce, difficult to imitate, and immobile across companies (Peteraf, 1993). According to Schaupp & Belanger (2014), the RBV theory provides support for the link between usage of social media and its value for small businesses on various dimensions of value creation. They found that "small business social media usage is positively associated with its perceived value on the internal operations dimension, the marketing dimension, the customer service dimension, and the sales dimension" (p. 201). What is the advantage of WeChat comparing with self-built apps? Interestingly, Lv & Zhou (2014) listed it in detail to show the effectiveness of WeChat on social marketing for small business.

Table 1 Comparative analysis of self-built APP and WeChat (Lv & Zhou, 2014)

	Self-built APP	WeChat
1	Development cost of more than RMB 100,000	Low development cost
2	Development cycle of 2-3 months	Short cycle of 1-2 months
3	Uninstallation residual	Simply "unfollow"
4	Occupying phone memory	No occupation
5	High maintenance cost	Lower maintenance cost
6	Prying user privacy	No user privacy involved, safe and convenient
7	Download required	Easy scanning of QR code for automatic adding
8	Powerful	Provided with all features of traditional APP
9	High promotion cost and complex process	400 million user base with low promotion cost
10	Passive marketing	Active marketing for point-to-point precise communication

According to this chart, the authors compare the self-built app with WeChat to do e-commerce in money cost, information transformation, time cost, technology requirement, and marketing. They find that information can be transferred with "instant transmission and circle spread" via WeChat. Second, WeChat has high user loyalty and popularity. Third, marketing through WeChat is very simple and straightforward because of the "permission-based marketing." In WeChat, users need to follow the public account of companies, and this marketing approach makes it easier for enterprises to identify potential consumer groups and target the "point-to-point" promotion model at a low cost through WeChat. Thus, for the owner of small businesses, he or she can create a public account to promote and advertise his or her products. The public account also can be an effective approach for branding management.

2.6   Research Questions

Based upon the literature review, the researcher proposes the following research questions:

1: How do users apply WeChat in promoting and selling their products?

2: What are the motivations for individuals to shop or sell via WeChat?

3: What relationship marketing and management strategies do online WeChat sellers use?

3   METHODOLOGY

In 1975, James Carey argued that qualitative research "is a process of making large claims from small matters: studying particular rituals, poems, plays, conversations, songs, dances, theories, and myths and gingerly reaching out to the full relations within a culture or a total way of life" (p. 190). His opinion contradicted the dominant positivist assumptions guiding the vast majority of communication research. After that, more and more social scholars called for qualitative communication research to be accepted in the post-positivist era.

Lindlof & Taylor (2011) argue that within qualitative research, "the processes of collecting and analyzing data are ultimately resolved by rigorously developing increasingly precise and useful language for describing, conceptualizing, interpreting, explaining, and critiquing recorded communication"(p. 13). Qualitative research methodology is a broad methodological approach of inquiry employed in many different academic disciplines, including communication (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Qualitative research methods help researchers gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons governing such behavior, and this methodology also examines the why and how of specific social phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). A qualitative approach is a general way of how to conduct qualitative research. It describes the purpose of the research, the role of the researcher, the stages of research, and the method of data analysis. The main approaches are ethnography, interview, focus group, field research, participant observation, and grounded theory. In this thesis, I will apply qualitative research methodology, specifically autoethnography, to answer the research questions.

Before I decided to conduct autoethnography as the research methodology, I considered using quantitative research methodology, specifically a survey for this thesis research. According

to Creswell (2014), "a survey design provides a quantitative or numeric description of attitudes, trends, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population" (p. 135). Survey could be used to gather perceptions and opinions of micro-entrepreneurs who are conducting social selling via WeChat, the attitudes from WeChat users on relationship management, and the trends of micro-entrepreneurship on WeChat. Thus, survey would be a suitable research method to answer the research questions posed by this thesis. Yet for reasons beyond my control, I did not use survey method. In the latter appendix, I provide the sample questionnaire instrument that was proposed for this process.

3.1   Authoethnography

Autoethnography combines the features of autobiography and ethnography (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010). Maréchal (2010) states that "autoethnography is a form or method of research that involves self-observation and reflexive investigation in the context of ethnographic field work and writing" (p. 43). Ellis (2004) defines autoethnography as "research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political" (p. xix). Autoethnography differs from autobiography because it combines writing about the researcher's own experiences with the author's analysis of the experience through building on the literature and theory (Bennett & Folley, 2014). Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2010) suggest that autoethnographers "must use personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and, in so doing, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders. To accomplish this might require comparing and contrasting personal experience against existing research" (Section 2, para 5).

In this study, I would like to apply my own insider perspective as a WeChat user, social seller, and a customer to answer the research questions. Using my own WeChat experiences and

narratives to focus on the motivations of a seller and a buyer doing business and shopping on WeChat, I will dissect the approaches of relationship management on WeChat as well as delve into why WeChat is the specific social media of choice for Chinese users to conduct small business transactions.

This qualitative research methodology has several advantages. First, scholars argue that insider autoethnographers provide insights into the phenomena and group dynamics that others outside that culture cannot observe (Vickers 2002). This paper can be a window for people who are not familiar to Chinese culture, especially not familiar to the relationship culture in China. Second, Learmonth and Humphreys (2012) assert that autoethnography provides scholars with new forms of empirical material. For this paper, the empirical material is a narrative of the business interactivity in social media. An autoethnographic approach is particularly appropriate to understanding social media tools because it enables an exploration of the complexity of practices from the perspective of an active participant (Veletsianos 2013). Third, as a storytelling research method, authethnography makes this research accessible to multiple audiences. Fourth, according to Veletsianos (2013), autoethnography is an appropriate approach to understand social media tools because it contains an exploration of the complexity of practices from the perspective of an active participant. The personal conclusions for social media study can make others to consider their own using experiences and to compare them to those of the authors in addition to learning about unfamiliar people or cultures (Ellis, 2004).

I, as an autoethnographer, can contribute to the social construction of what is known as strategic communication practice on emerging media, especially WeChat. I will apply an analytical autoethnographic approach and use my own experiences, reflections, and memories to

construct myself in my storytelling as an academic and practitioner in this study. I will apply the five requirements addressed by Anderson (2006) for an analytical autoethnography:

(1) the researcher is a complete member of the social world under study;

(2) the researcher engages in analytic reflexivity, demonstrating an awareness of the reciprocal influence between themselves, their setting and their informants;

(3) the researcher's self is visible within the narrative;

(4) the researcher engages in dialogue with informants beyond the self, and

(5) the researcher demonstrates a commitment to theoretical analysis, not just capturing what is going on in a individual life or socio-cultural environment. (p. 378).

In terms of the structure of this thesis, I have followed the structures of autoethnographers such as James (2012), who has incorporated the autoethnographic writing within a standard structure for an academic article rather than writing the whole paper as an autoethnography story.

Autoethnography connects the researcher's personal and often subjective experiences to wider socio-cultural context and meanings. The subjectivity of this research methodology makes it to gain issues and problems on ethics. Some of the scholars criticized this research method seriously. In a criticism, Delamont (2007) argued that "autoethnography is literally lazy and also intellectually lazy" (p. 2), that it violated the basic purpose of social research to study the social world because it could not rise above its own familiarity, was unethical, was purely experiential and unanalytical (James, 2012). Delamont (2007) even stated that autoethnography "abrogates our duty to go out and collect data: we are not paid generous salaries to sit in our offices obsessing about ourselves" (p. 2). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) challenged all self-narrative autoethnographers by saying that the story which autoethnographer made is not in a vacuum and others are always visible or invisible participants in the researcher's story (Chang, 2008).

However, every researcher should take ethics issues into consideration when she/he conducts a research methodology. According to Raab (2013), each research needs to be addressed on an individual basis to avoid being too general. The purpose for ethics consideration is to avoid harm and any risk for the researcher and participants if involved. Thus, how to avoid ethics problems in the autoethnographical study? Ellis (2009) suggested that researchers could utilize one or any of the following: use pseudonyms, delay publication until after the death of a person, fictionize the story, seek approval after the fact, omit or alter facts, and obtain paper consent. Each situation is different and needs to be evaluated separately. In this study, I will pseudonyms for the individuals and organizations I mention. Both the researcher and the people mentioned in the autoethnography will not have any more risks than she or he would in a normal day of life. The benefits of an autoethnographical study will be far outweigh the issues and problems. According to Raab (2013), there is increasing evidence that character-driven narratives are becoming more and more popular in recent years.

4   FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

My autoethnographic study encompasses my user experience (UX) and user interface (UI) from my daily life as a WeChat user, a seller, and purchaser. My basic using experience of WeChat, how WeChat is structured, how it differs from U.S./Western model of social media, how I can take advantages of the features of WeChat, how I use WeChat to gain/pull relationships with my WeChat friends will be discussed. I will classify my experience and interactivity with others into four themes: (1) an active user on WeChat; (2) commerce everywhere; (3) why WeChat, and (4) Gain/pull relationships (guanxi) on WeChat.

I started using WeChat September 2011, and I am an active user with 286 contacts. In the first theme, I will introduce the structure, basic functions, and the composition of my WeChat.

My WeChat daily using story will be applied as an approach to gain knowledge of this emerging media created and popularized in China.

In theme two, I will tell my own stories as a seller, a customer, and a spectator in using this social media.

In theme three, I will try to find the differs from WeChat to other social media conducted in U.S. and my own opinions on why WeChat becomes the main social platforms for Chinese people to launch social selling and doing public relations.

Fourth, I will share my own experiences on how to gain/pull (La) relationships (Guanxi) on WeChat.

4.1   An Active User on WeChat

As an active and frequent WeChat user, I would like to apply my experience as both seller and buyer to examine the usage of WeChat and how WeChat sellers use relationship management to build and sustain their customer bases. The following section explores my own journey from user to seller as well as gives personal insight on how social selling works.

I downloaded the WeChat app in June 2011, based upon a friend's recommendation. At that time, only the Chinese version, 微信（Weixin, the Chinese pronunciation）, was available for users. (Almost one year later, the English version named WeChat became available.) Because I use this app quite often and my contact in WeChat is active all the time, screenshots come from my own WeChat account in WeChat 6.0.1 for iPhone version.

I have 286 friends in my contacts, including family members, friends, former teachers, and former colleagues. This is my own private communication circle because each of my friends asks for permission to be added to my private circle. I also need their permission to be on their contact list so that we can chat and share information with each other. My contacts range between the

ages of 19 to 61; almost 70 percent of my contacts are women. I also follow 49 public accounts

for fashion, restaurants, news media, health care, and museums. In my WeChat, I can explore

four main parts: WeChat, Contacts, Discover, and Me. I use the WeChat functions to conduct

private chats with my contacts, create group chats for selected friends together, send text and

voice messages to my contacts, and share pictures, videos, and links with specific friends.

Moreover, an online business link that will transfer user to other websites or apps can also be

sent via WeChat function. The receiver can use the shopping link to complete the purchase later,

and he or she can share the link with others and post it to the Moment function. In the Contacts

part, users can add/delete friends and manage the contacts into groups by tags. The users also can

manage the official accounts and group chats in Contacts part.

Within the Discover function, several business approaches are available to meet the user's

business needs. Within this function, people can share images, forward links, and post articles. I

have received 298 pieces of "moments" posted by my friends in 24 hours from Mar.8 to Mar.9,

2016. Among them, 48% were marketing-related and advertising-related information. In these

143 pieces of marketing and advertising-related moments, two-thirds of them were posted by

individuals who run small businesses via WeChat. The remaining one-third were from official

accounts or from individuals who are working as marketers and advertisers for their employers.

The users also can scan QR codes in Discover part. QR codes can be used to add friends and

follow official accounts. Moreover, the QR code becomes a promotion approach for companies.

For example, customers can scan a QR code to obtain discount for specific products purchasing.

Customers can find QR codes almost everywhere, such as advertisements posted on magazine,

print media, TV show, and subway advertisements. These codes are very popular among Wechat

users in China. Users also can find Shake, People Nearby, and Drift Bottle functions to reach

strangers to date in Discover part. Moreover, a Games part allows users to access to games apps that were developed by Tencent.

In my daily life, WeChat is my most frequently used social media playform. In my iPhone setting, over 80% of my battery is used on WeChat per day. This surprised me, and I informally asked my friends to check their WeChat use. Their situations are almost the same as me.

Whether we were chatting, viewing news, shopping, video calls, or even doing business, we used WeChat to do lots of things, especially during the holidays. For example, during the Chinese New Year, WeChat was an ideal approach for me to send my warmest greetings to my friends, former classmates, relatives, former colleagues, and former teachers during Chinese New Year's holidays. At first, we only sent best wishes and "Happy Chinese New Year" stickers with personal textual greetings. Then, my friends and I found the Red Packet, a function that could be used to send real money and greetings to WeChat friends. Actually, the Red Packet function linked with one's Wallet function so that the balance in Wallet could be used distribute real money to WeChat friends. After user received those packets, he or she could choose to keep the amount in his or her wallet or redeem it to his or her linked bank account.
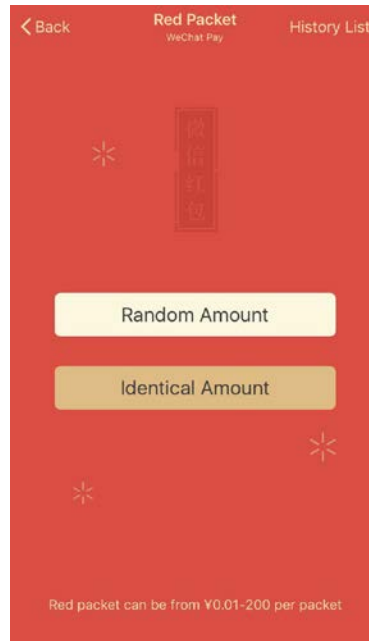
Figure 1 WeChat Red Packet Function

The Red Packet is the perfect reflection to Chinese New Year's culture. In Chinese New Year's tradition, people will put some money into a red paper packet (or envelope) and give it to children. It shows the best wishes from parents, grandparents, and relatives to little ones. At that time, the traditional red packets do not contain any purpose of relationship management. The WeChat Red Packet is regarded as the electronic version of this traditional red packet (Young, 2015), but the receiver is no longer the little ones. In Red Packet function, one can choose to send either identical or random amount red packet to either specific friends or to entre group chat. If the sender wants to send a random amount of red packets to a group chat, the sender only can decide the total amount and the quantity of red packets he or she would like to send. Then, interesting thing will happen. For example, I send four red packets with total amount of ¥100 ($18) in a five people group chat. They are all random red packets. Then, Member A might open one of the red packets and only received ¥0.01. Dramatically, member B might open another

packet and received ¥90. The results will be listed so that each member can see others amount. Usually member B will start another turn for Red Packet sending so that member B will keep his or her face and even gain trust from other members, according to the face and favor theory (Hwang, 1987). Moreover, the sender also can change the quantity of the packets sent each time.

Sometimes, the quantity of red packets sent in a group chat is less than the number of group members, and this created a new term, "grab red packet," in group chat. I was also one of those active users who were excited in grab red packets during this holiday. I received and grab red packets from my WeChat friends while sending them to my friends as well. On the Chinese New Year's eve, I received 179 red packets from my friends and sent 186 packets. The amount of each packets ranges from ¥0.12 ($0.2) to ¥200 ($31). Hence, this Chinese New Year holiday, sending WeChat Red Packet to friends and relatives even became an emerging culture phenomenon in China.

According to Tencent, over 32.1billion red packets were sent and received during Chinese New Year's holiday, and it was 10 times larger than last year. More than half a billion WeChat users participated in this event (Young, 2015). Thanks to the technology, WeChat brings such an impressive function for us to celebrate holiday.

Figure 2 Sender can prepare random amount Red Packets to group chat

Figure 3 Someone like to use identical amount red packet to show best wishes

Why did the Red Packet event gain such success? In fact, it is not the money exchange event. It is an emerging approach for WeChat users, especially social sellers, to gain/pull guanxi. In Chinese culture, we believed that money involved in chatting would damage renqing and guanxi (relationship) (Hwang, 1987). However, this time, this version of red packet gained

people's affection and even enhanced WeChat users' relationships. In my own experience, I did send red packets to my group chats and my former customers, and the small sellers in my WeChat circle sent me red packets as well. My friend, who runs a WeChat MicroStore, told me that she spent a whole day to prepare and send red packets to her clients and WeChat followers.

In this red packet event, I am not the first person to send and receive red packets among my WeChat circle. When I first received a red packet, it was packed from a set of red packets sent in a group chat. Because it looked very similar as the traditional red paper packet, I clicked and opened it immediately and received a small amount of money from a friend. This experience made me and my friends in this group happy and excited. Other members and I then packed several red packets and sent them to this group as a return. Then, I found my other group chats and personal chats repeated the same process for red packets sharing.

According to face and favor theory (Hwang, 1987), in this red packet campaign, once I received the red packet from my friend, I must send a red packet back and even add more amount. Otherwise, I would lose my face. This is precisely because I need to maintain the impression management so that I could gain renqing from my friend. According to Hwang (1987), the term "face work" actually related to self-image and impression management. If I did not send back the Red Packet, my face work would be fall and I would lose the opportunity to manage Renqing with this specific WeChat friend. If the amount was the same as the one I received, it would look like return money to the sender, then, both of us would be awkward and this would damage our relationship. If I sent the red packet back and add some amount to the specific friend in a personal chat, I would gain favor from him or her. If I grab one red packet from a group chat, I should packed red packets and sent them to this group chat in order to save my face and gain satisfaction from all the members in this group. My friends were all doing the

same as me because we had the same culture value. Thus, huge amount of users participated in this campaign interactively.

4.2   Commerce Everywhere

Like the Red Packet function, WeChat created several functions to make the possibility for users to do social selling and relationship management. One day when I wake up and opened my WeChat app, I realized that commence were everywhere in WeChat.

4.2.1   Experience WeChat Commercial Model as Customer

My Moments show me my friends posts daily. One day, I found that I became a target audience of my best friend, Miss T. T, who works for a Public Relations Firm in Shanghai, once told me that WeChat helped her dream came true. She is interested in jewelry design since high school. She even earned a minor degree in jewelry design and industry management. However, after graduation, she just could not find any opportunities to work for jewelry company. Instead, she designed jewelry by herself and do social selling on WeChat. She named her brand as NothingToWear and designed new jewelry accessories twice a month. As a WeChat friend of her, I received her promotions twice a week with different themes, including What's New, Fashion Trends, On Sale, Seasonal Products, Little Jewelry Class, and so on.

Because she is a communication professional, she could take advantage of her working experience for her own business. She told me that she actually did not have any inventory. Every time she had new idea for jewelry design, she just made one piece of it and started to take several pictures to post on WeChat. If there was any customer wanted to buy the specific jewelry, she could make one for her within one week. "I love WeChat selling is because I could keep my job and almost have no risk to run my small business. I do not want to gain huge profits from this store, but just feel happy to achieve my jewelry design dream," T said to me. Because T is my

best friend, I think I should support her. I tried my best to buy her products and forwarded her posts to my other friends so that her audience could be expanded.

Actually, T is only one of the WeChat small sellers who are doing home-made products to sell on WeChat. My brother's ex-girlfriend, Miss Z, is also a great handcraftsman. She is good at making cakes, lollipops, and cupcakes. Interestingly, her business is also a part-time business and her products are all customized by her WeChat clients. I had an experience with her to order my wedding cake, cupcakes, and lollipops on my wedding ceremony. I could find all the category of cakes on her Moments and chat with her about the price of different category. I found ordering wedding dessert on WeChat is extremely convenient for me because the location of my stay and my wedding ceremony were not the same country. WeChat store gave me the chance to order desserts remotely. At first, I told Z the main color and theme of my wedding ceremony. Two days later, she drew a draft of all her design on the wedding dessert table including main cake, lollipops, and each cupcake. Then we used WeChat to discuss further about the design to meet my needs. Finally, I purchased all her design and wedding dessert table by using WeChat Pay. After my wedding ceremony, I was satisfied and post all the dessert pictures and @ her store in my Moment. As she promised, my recommendation for her store on WeChat helped me to get ¥ 100 ($20) credit back to my WeChat balance. She told me that this was her promotion strategy, "let my clients to find my customer and my clients could get cash back from the advertising. I like this win-win marketing strategy."

4.2.2   Different Types of Small Business on WeChat

Within these two years, this commercial wind also blows to Chinese who live outside China. My friend, V, a Chinese teacher living in Melbourne, Australia, told me in a WeChat informal chat that she ordered her Chinese food as lunch and dinner on WeChat every week. The

restaurant actually did not have a real location but the owner just post menu with pictures on WeChat for customers to order online. "The owner named Mother's kitchen is a middle aged Chinese women and she loves to cook Chinese food at home", V told me that Mother's kitchen used People Nearby function on WeChat to reach her and her friends. I think this is a very smart choice because this is a home-made small business and target audience/customers are mostly Chinese students and residents who live in the same neighborhood. Since WeChat is a great free social media for Chinese students to keep connected with his/her parents, friends, and relatives in China, WeChat becomes an ideal social media to reach them. Moreover, People Nearby function can help Mother's Kitchen to find active users within two miles and add them as friends. It even has filter function to allow one to only search either women or men nearby and add the specific user that individual is interested in. It shows that WeChat offers different approaches to meet small seller's needs on social selling and marketing.

There are different types of WeChat small sellers, including home-made food selling, handcrafts selling, fruit and vegetables selling, flower selling, and so on. Among them, a type of small seller is very popular due to the price and location superiority. This type is oversea products selling. These WeChat sellers are usually living in developed countries, including Japan, Korea, United State, Australia, France, and so on. They just worked as international buyer and import what they bought from foreign countries to WeChat users who live in China and are interested in buying imported products precisely because of the quality and price superiority. Most of those overseas sellers are international students while others are housewives doing some part time business in order to gain their family income. Doing social marketing on Wechat can keep the consistency of the promotion for these small sellers because the whole purchase path can be realized via Wechat. M runs her own clothing shop by Taobao and Wechat. She imports

Japanese fashion clothing to China and then uses Wechat to do marketing and post-sale advertising. She gives some discount to the customers who wear the clothing bought in her shop and share the picture on Moments. Posting marketing information on Wechat can achieve the whole purchase path, including gaining awareness, stimulating interest, arousing desire, and executing action.

4.2.3   I Joined the WeChat Small Seller Team

As a user and a seller, I have witnessed at least two attempts for social selling within the Me function. First is the Sticker Gallery. Individuals can find latest, funny, and cute stickers in the gallery and manage the downloaded stickers. Some of them are require extra payment to download. The other approach is Wallet. In this E-wallet, lots of financial related derivative apps can be used after it is linked to the user's personal or business debit/credit card. People can use the WeChat wallet to transfer or receive money from friends and use a temporary QR code to quick pay purchase instead of typing the information on the credit card. So far, the Wallet function only works in mainland China.
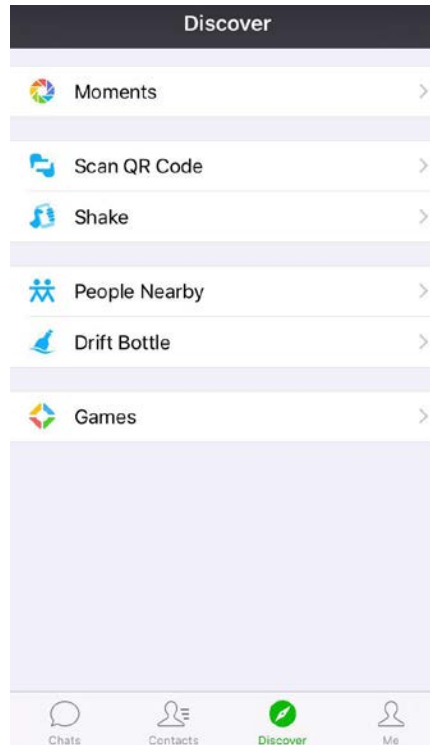
Figure 4 Purchasing is happened through these WeChat functions

From last January to June, I sold items using my own WeChat account. A friend of mine

who recently had her first baby suggested that I sell popular U.S. baby products, including baby

clothing, toys, nursing products. That is when I started to notice the selling function of WeChat. I

found that I could use WeChat Moments to post products pictures and text descriptions so that I

could gain the purchase awareness of potential customers. At that time, over 80% of my WeChat

friends were from 25 to 35 year old first-time mothers or expecting mothers. Thus, WeChat

could be a great promotional sales tool for me to advertise U.S. baby products to Chinese

customers. Those baby products, including clothing, toys, and nursery products, were all cheaper

in U.S. than in China. Furthermore, the potential customers were all the people who had already

knew me in real world. They would trust the product, trust me, and would be eager to purchase

these products through my WeChat.
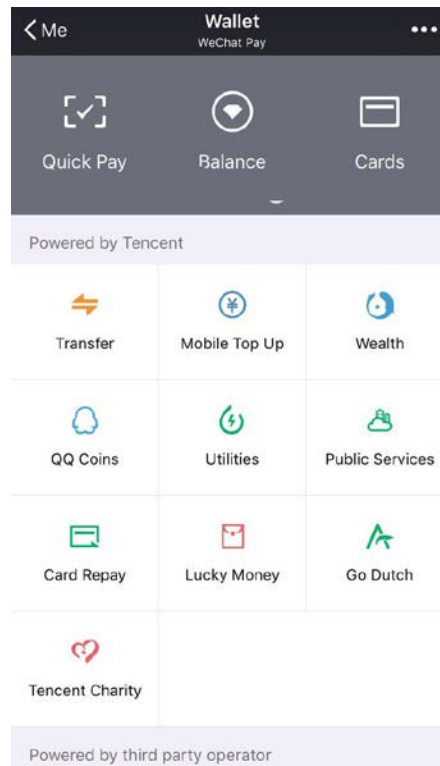
Figure 5 Individuals use WeChat Pay to complete their payment for WeChat shopping
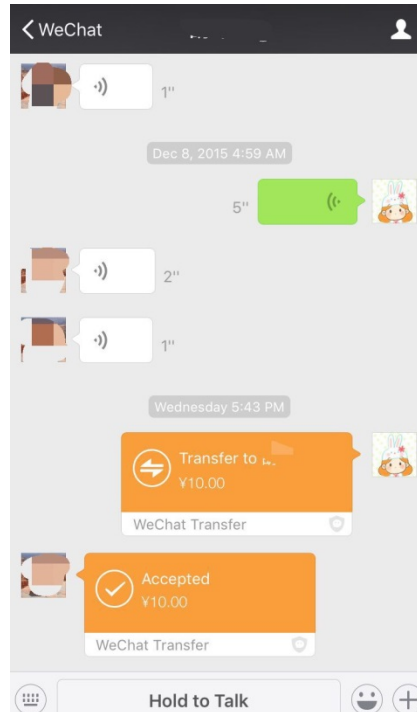
Figure 6 Transfer currency with friends also can be used as a payment approach

A friend recommended my WeChat virtual store to her friends on WeChat after her first purchase from me via WeChat. Thus, because those women were her friends and had already gained trust and respect for her, they would happily add me as their friends and purchase from me without any hesitation. Then, I created a group chat named Baby Clothing in U.S. and added all of them in to the group. Thus, those women became my target audience to view my promotions on baby clothing. The most excited thing is that the group chat could help me to accomplish almost the whole selling process, including advertising, customer service, and even after service evaluation.

The payment on WeChat was also very convenient. There are two approaches to do payments on WeChat. First, I just downloaded a sub-app of WeChat named MicroStore, on which I could set up the whole payment method and created a specific link for the product. Then, the link could be sent to the WeChat friend who was going to buy this product. The whole purchase then could be accomplished through that link by several easy clicks. The other payment approach was just using WeChat wallet within the WeChat app. The specific amount of purchase could be transferred to my account immediately from the buyer's account. After purchase, the customers also could share their reviews and "real show", a picture posted with the products bought from me therefore generating a snowball effect.

Figure 7 One of my WeChat store's advertising posts for U.S. baby clothing

4.3   Why WeChat

Given the rapid development of social media, why has WeChat become the main approach for Chinese users to do social selling and relationship management? Why do Chinese users allow WeChat to occupy their spare time? It is precisely because (1) WeChat lack of competitors, (2) the UI of WeChat keeps on improving to enhance the UX, (3) the WeChat functions support different social selling types.

First, as a WeChat user, I find that I use it because it is the only mobile social media which includes all the functions I need. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, even Google, these social media and web search engine that are popular in the west, especially in U.S., are blocked by Chinese government due to the censorship regulations. Hence, Chinese web and smart phone users can only use software and apps produced by Chinese corporates that agree to cooperate

with the government to filter information which prohibited to show for Chinese people because of political issues. This unique phenomenon helps WeChat to eliminate competitors.

The only competitor of WeChat, is Weibo, a web-based social media created by Sina which works similar as Twitter. However, because of the development of smart phone, mobile-based WeChat is apparently more popular than Weibo. Moreover, compared to other social media popular outside China, like Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, and LinkedIn, WeChat does not have an official information training source to help users doing social selling and marketing on WeChat. However, for instance, Facebook has Blueprint to help marketers, small business owners, and users to know how to achieve their business goals via Facebook. Because of this difference, social sellers on WeChat do not have guidance for how to do business on WeChat but they need to learn from others and learn from what they are doing.

Second, WeChat contains almost all functions to meet users from all walks of life. This character is quite different than social media popularized in U.S. In U.S., social media has specific character to reach target users, in other words, to meet user's one special needs. They are kind of personalized apps. For instance, LinkedIn focuses on user's career needs, including job searching and recruiting, establishing and maintaining professional network, searching professional knowledge, and so on. Instagram and Pinterest are all visual focused social media. It is hard to find a social media popularized in the West which contains all functions for social selling, marketing, payment, and relationship management functions. Moreover, WeChat does not stay the same. Actually, it keeps on changing and adding functions to gain its user interface in order to enhance user experience, especially on social selling and purchasing experience. When I find update reminder from WeChat, I would update and eager to find new functions immediately. At first, WeChat only has a basic chat functions. Then, Moments was added to

WeChat made social marketing possible through WeChat. People could read, comment, post, like, and forward marketing posts on Moments. After that, public and service platforms were created for users to subscribe. Thus, it gave more room for individuals and corporates to drive social selling systematically and interactively. Finally, small functions, like Red Packet, Wallet, are added to accomplish the whole purchase process on one app.

Third, WeChat functions support different social selling types. For instance, People Nearby function is suitable for the fast food delivery business. Moments is a good platform for small sellers to market their brand and products, and group chats are specific approaches for sellers to reach target customers and royal customers directly. For traditional news media, the service platform allows those companies to post news subscriptions. Sellers and corporations can use Public platforms for the regular and strategic posting of marketing information, corporate news, and advertising.

Table 2 WeChat Functions meet the needs from different types of business

Types of Business	Social Selling Functions	Relationship Management Functions
Business which have physical locations	Moments, Subscriptions, Public Platform, WeChat sponsored Moments	Moments
Food and Groceries Delivery	Moments, People Nearby, WeChat Pay, Wallet, QR Code	Moments, Private Chats
Overseas business	MicroStore, WeChat Pay, Wallet	Moments, Group Chats, Private Chats, Video and voice call, Moments

Home-made Food & Beverage	Moments, WeChat Pay, Wallet, Subscriptions	Moments, Group Chats, Private Chats
Designed Brands	Moments, WeChat Pay	Moments, Private Chats

I find that within WeChat, social sellers can find all public relations outreach to create their unique marketing strategy. WeChat is very powerful for social selling and relationship management because it contains all the media which PESO model identified helpful and useful for social selling and public relations.
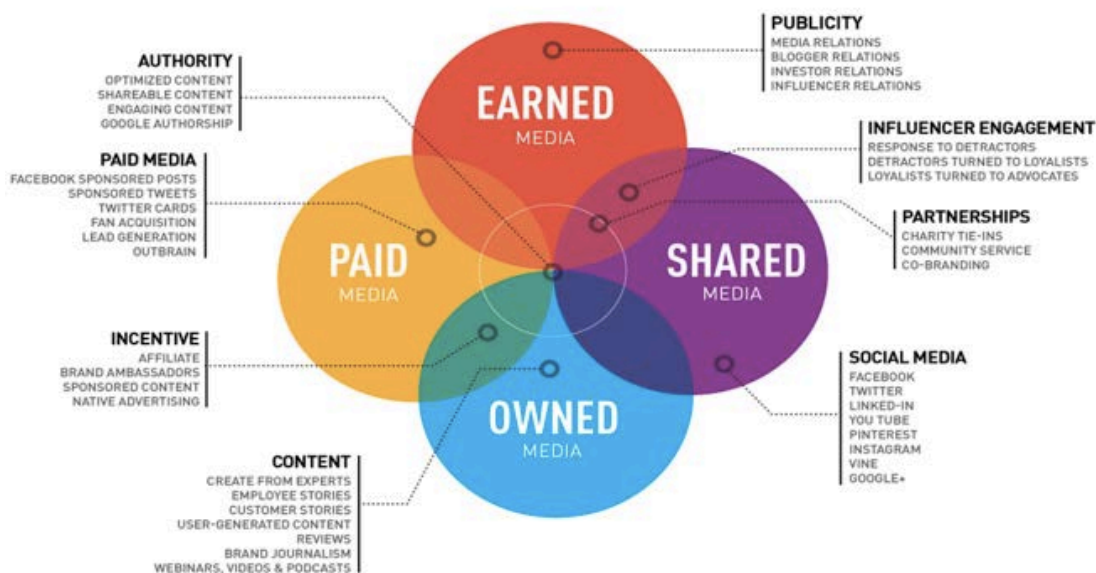
Figure 8 PESO model (Dietrich, 2014, p.37)

PESO model (Dietrich, 2014), a communication strategy, is widely used for public relations professionals. PESO media represents paid media, earned media, shared media, and owned media. Communication professionals believe that in the emerging media age, organizations need to design their own communication strategy including PESO media approaches.

In WeChat, I find that paid media includes WeChat sponsored posts, WeChat sponsored subscriptions, and WeChat advertisements. Earned media includes service platforms, traditional media news posts, and blogger recommendations. Shared media includes co-branding accounts,

other users Moments, subscriptions. Owned media includes user's own public platform, own

subscription posts, official accounts, and own Moments.
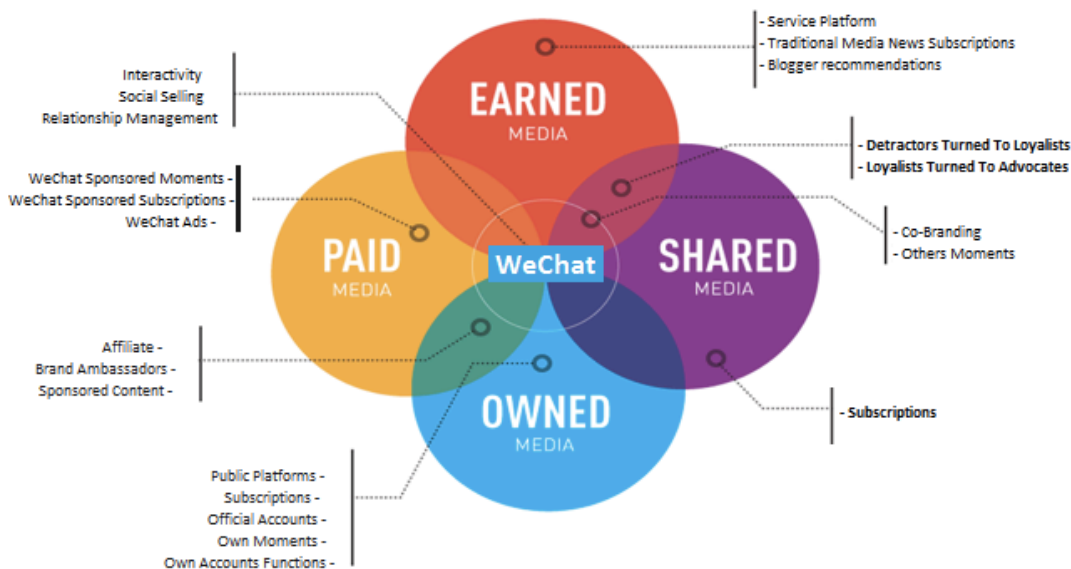
Figure 9 WeChat-PESO Model

Moreover, Tencent has a compensable cloud computing service platform. This cloud

computing also offers a Wechat service market. In the Wechat cloud, clients can purchase cloud

computing to do marketing, managing the company's public platform on Wechat, and

personalized the Wechat cloud service. There is a catalogue on the frontpage of Wechat cloud

service market listing the specific service sets, including creating and managing public platform

for clients. The field of the public platform marketing is broad, including e-commence,

restaurants, government organizations, entertainments, hotels, real estate agencies, travel

agencies, and personalized designing. Customers also can find the price of each service per day

and pay for the service online. This service makes Wechat becoming a complicated, diversified

app, other than What's App, an instant messaging app. How does Wechat promote its own cloud

service? Mosco (2014) discusses the selling of the cloud sublime. Cloud sublime means the

collective storage system service for online use. The promotion of cloud service via social media

is more different and complicated than the pure promotion of a commercial advertisement. Maintaining that the cloud gives clients more power, cloud marketers are advised to stay ahead of the process by assuming that any prospective customer has done the necessary research prior to the personal sales pitch (Mosco, 2014). It means that the cloud company needs to develop the online presence so that the potential customers can determine the products before the talk between company and the clients. However, the Wechat cloud service platform looks easier to promote because the power of Wechat already shows the important and useful of Wechat cloud for target clients. It means that the success of Wechat brings great promotion and marketing effects for other derivatives developed by Tencent. As for March, 2016, Wechat cloud offers 184 service company to meet the clients' different commercial promotion needs on WeChat public platform.

4.4   Gain/Pull Relationships (Guanxi) on WeChat

Since WeChat have those amazing features for small sellers and corporates to accomplish non-stop purchases, is there any difference on social marketing strategies between small sellers and corporates? As a small seller, I think my secret weapon is relationship management because I have more time to reach each customer and potential customers than big companies. When I did my business, I have my own strategies.

First, I tried to cooperate with other small sellers to share contacts in order to reach potential customers/target audience. When I started my business, I was trying to add more active users at a very low cost to promote my products. Firstly, I would rather sell stuff to strangers other than my relatives, former teachers, former colleagues, and friends. It is awkward for me to earn money from people who I already know in the real world. Secondly, my business was just started as a part-time job and I could not afford any WeChat compensable advertising services. Hence, I

decide to exchange my resource, my current WeChat contacts, to small sellers I already know. This works well because other small sellers holding the similar idea and situation as mine.

I first sent my intention to Mixiu, who runs her business to sell Japanese fashion clothing on WeChat, in a private chat. Because I am a loyal customer in her MicroStore and my business will not cause any competitiveness to her, she was happy to support my new business and agreed to share my marketing and products information in her moments. It could be very helpful. She had over 500 WeChat friends, and more than 70% of them were her customers. She forwarded my post with her comment, "Great American baby products, imported directly from U.S., From a close friend I trust." After her post, I received 18 new friend adding requests related to her recommendation. This made me really excited because this strategy did help me to gain potential customers. Mixiu also asked me to share her store QR code on my Moments so that her advertising could reach another 280 users as well. Face and favor theory can apply to this strategy.

Second, I encouraged current customers to share my store and products information to his/her contacts/friends. When my business started to work and more and more WeChat friends bought products from my MicroStore, I added them as my "sales" to share their "real show" in their Moments. As a reciprocity method, the one who shared his or her "real show" and mentioned my store on Moments would have either discount point or credit points for next time purchase use. Once some of his/her friends saw this post and showed interested in my store or specific product, he/she could either refer my WeChat name card or add us to a group chat to introduce us as friends. This is also an ideal way for me to expand my contacts and reach my target audience because trust and personal reputation will positively add value to the recommendation and let the users who read this post to trust me as well. This method is a

reflection of social selling mode discussed in the literature review. This relational selling is a

sales-person-customer shared technology to emphasize the reciprocal and bilateral

communication and collaboration (Ahearne & Rapp, 2010). This mode was popular in WeChat

selling, especially used by micro sellers in promoting products or services in their "Moments" to

their friends and customers.

Figure 10 MicroStore App

Third, I mentioned my WeChat store to my friends and relatives both online and offline to

call their cognition of my business and ask them to tell my store to anyone they know will

potentially interested in U.S. baby products. I posted my store QR code in my Moment and said:

"Please share this QR code to someone you know would be interested in baby products from

America.

Figure 11 A store QR code from one of my friends

This is my part-time business and I guarantee every transaction will be satisfactory." When saw this post, some of my friends with children under two years old left direct comments, asking the specific purchasing and products information. Some of my friends told me that they would refer this information to whom they know to help me look for customers. I really appreciated for those who helped me to find customers and I even wrote down their names in case they need my help some time. And, this did happen. For instance, one of my friend, named Hua, who referred her former classmates to me as new customers twice, asked me to post her store QR code to expand her contacts for business use. Because she helped me before and her business is fruit delivery that will not cause any competition with me, I helped her immediately. This makes her very happy and enhanced our relationship as well.

Fourth, I talked to each new contacts who was just be added to be my friend or any potential customers through different approaches on WeChat including chatting directly, @him or @her in a group chat, putting comments on his/her moments, liking his/her posts, and even join his/her games derivated from WeChat, in order to seek common interests. I am interested in review all

my potential customer's posts on their Moments, especially those posts about their little ones. One of my loyal customers, Xiu, actually became friend with me before buy anything in my MicroStore. I did not know her before my close friend, Jing, sent her WeChat name card to me. Jing told me that Xiu, a mother to a one-year-old baby girl, wanted to find good quality baby clothing for her only child. I thought she could be my customer and added her as my WeChat friend at once. Then, I looked at Xiu's Moments and found that her baby has allergy on milk-based formula, and she was asking her friends if there was any substitution. I suggested that she try a soy-based formula and that I could help her to buy this specific type of formula in U.S. She was very excited and decided to order two cans of soy-based formula with a baby jumpsuit. She became my loyal customer and was happy to introduce her friends to my microstore.

Fifth, I talked with my customers to build long-term relationships that would be sustained whether they were customers or not. The relationship between seller and buyer will not be ended after one purchase. I will not delete my customer after one purchase. Instead, I look forward to future purchases, future discussions around topics of interest, and personal branding. Thus, I will keep maintaining the relationships with my customers (friends) by chatting with them in our group chat, sharing both my interests in my daily life and product promotions and advertisements. On the other hand, I can know my customers' potential needs through their posts on Moments as well. As I expected, some of my previous customers did become friends with me. To some extent, relationship could be created by one time purchase. The consistent cultivation of relationships also could create and promote further business and relationships.

This phenomenon may not be the same as what Taylor (2014) described. Taylor argued that the development of social media impelled people to the "attention economy (p. 209)." The exceeding advertisements and marketing information "transformed our relationship to

commodities" (p. 209). Thus, this has commodified our relationships and ourselves. However, in my case, I find that the relationship created by commodification purpose also can apply to enhance culture and friendship. To some extent, the commercial atmosphere in WeChat may not negative to relationships and culture cultivation but may enhance relationship development.

In fact, what I did and experienced on WeChat about relationship management are a good reflection of social cognitive theory. First, I tried to call the target audience's awareness of my personal brand. Then, those potential customers became familiar with my brand and with me. In other words, they have learned about my unique selling proposition, my life and connection to the products, my brand, and the products I sold. This could gain the likelihood for them to purchase. Social cognitive theory also stated that communication systems happen through direct and socially mediated pathways (Bandura, 2001). In my story, I tried to make the communication interactively happen between my audience and me through both pathways. I talked to my customers and newly added friends one by one about me and my business could be regarded as building direct pathway for marketing and social selling. Moreover, in WeChat, people who reviewed all the information related to me and my brand could provide natural incentives and continued personalized guidance, for reaching my MicroStore and purchasing.

5   CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to determine how WeChat users apply WeChat to do social selling and relationship management in light of the social cognitive theory. This paper also explored how WeChat users conduct their management strategies and relationship marketing in the common Chinese culture background. Findings revealed that WeChat is an ideal social selling and marketing approach for Chinese small/individual sellers to accomplish their business goal. It has several features to meet all the needs of small sellers.

First, WeChat is a low-cost approach for small seller to achieve their marketing, selling, customer service, and public relations outreach. Small sellers even do not need to pay any advertisement fee to achieve their business goals. Second, WeChat contains almost all types of media for small sellers to do marketing and public relations management. Third, WeChat has great user interface to help small sellers to accomplish the whole process of social selling. Small sellers who do different types of business can find specific functions to reach target audience. Also, WeChat helps users to accomplish online payment without jump out to other apps or other payment methods. This app keeps on updating its functions for commercial use. Fourth, it is a typical relationship management app which meets the Chinese culture and value. In WeChat, users utilize their guanxi (relationship) network to promote their business. Because of the Chinese culture and value, this strategy will not damage the relationship. On the contrary, gao guanxi (gain/pull relationship) even could enhance and expand relationships while promoting business interactively and organically.

This study will contribute to academic area on social selling, social marketing, and strategic communication, especially on WeChat study. Moreover, it will be pragmatic and helpful for WeChat users who are considering social selling and social marketing for their own business. Because there is no official training information for social sellers to know how to do business on WeChat, this paper can also provide guides for social sellers. Furthermore, this paper is a pioneer study by using autoethnography to look at social selling on social media in general and WeChat in particular.

5.1   Limitations and Future Research

This research applied autoethnography as the research methodology for the examination of the interactive social selling and relationship management on WeChat. I looked at my own

experience as an active WeChat user, a small seller, and also a buyer to answer the research questions. This study fills the void about the marketing and public relations uses of WeChat. on It is also unique to apply autoethnography as research method on any social media platform, especially ones that have emerged outside of the Western culture. However, this study still has limitations.

First, autoethnography is a qualitative research method to subjectively study on social phenomenon. The researcher cannot avoid subjectivity because he or she examines his or her own experience. Second, WeChat is not a static media. Both its user interface and user experience are improving actively. Also, the different version of WeChat may vary its user interface and user experience. This study can only look at this social media's current UI and UX. Thus, the research results may be limited.

For future research, researchers can look at how WeChat contributes to bridge social ties and may assist with the building of social capital. Putnam (2000) described two basic forms of social capital: bridging and bonding. Putnam argued that bridging social capital, or the benefits created from informal connections, can lead to tangible outcomes. Actually, WeChat creates several approaches for users to build their social ties, such as Red Packet event. Thus, future research can look at how WeChat helps users to bridge their social ties according to social capital theory.

I would suggest future research to apply quantitative research methods to examine social selling and relationship management on WeChat objectively. According to Creswell (2014), "a survey design provides a quantitative or numeric description of attitudes, trends, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population" (p. 135). Survey will help the researcher to find the opinions from micro-entrepreneurs on social selling via WeChat, the attitudes from WeChat users on relationship management, and the trends of micro-entrepreneurship on

WeChat. Furthermore, quantitative data will help to unpack more on social cognitive theory on studying social media. Thus, survey will be one of the most suitable research methods to study on WeChat. The quantitative survey methodology will have several advantages. First, the survey will be conducted in my own WeChat friends circle so that the cost of finding participants and doing the survey will be very low. Second, survey is a good approach to identify attributes of a large population from a small group of individuals (Fowler, 2009). Based on the first conceptualization of this project, which had a quantitative methodology, I already have a sufficient survey design for future use. The survey questions and design is in the appendices.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Questionnaire

1. What is your gender?

A. Male   B. Female

2. What is your age?

A. 21-25 years old   B. 26-35 years old   C. 36-45 years old   D. 46 and over

3. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

A. some high school

B. high school graduate

C. some college

D. trade/technical/vocational training

E. college graduate

F. some postgraduate work

G. post graduate degree

4. Is your total annual income ¥100,000 or more, or it is less than ¥100,000?

A. under ¥100,000   B. over ¥100,000

5. When did you start to use WeChat?

A. 2011   B. 2012   C. 2013   D. 2014. E. 2015 F. 2016

6. Do you doing business on WeChat?

A. Yes, I do. B. I am interested in it, but have not started yet. C. No, and I will not.

Please answer the following questions by choosing the answer that best fits you.

Q1: What is the daily frequency of your WeChat use?

A. Never   B. Rarely C. Sometimes D. Often E. Always

Q2: Do you search for commercial information on WeChat?

A. Never   B. Rarely C. Sometimes D. Often E. Always

Q3: Do you purchase products or services on WeChat?

 A. Never   B. Rarely C. Sometimes D. Often E. Always

Q4. Do you review the marketing information and advertising appearing on your Moments

timeline on WeChat posted by your friends?

A. Never   B. Rarely C. Sometimes D. Often E. Always

Q5. Do you review the business functional information posted by your WeChat friends?

A. Never   B. Rarely C. Sometimes D. Often E. Always

Q6. Do you share or forward this information to expand the audience/customers of the specific

advertising or marketing information?

A. Never   B. Rarely C. Sometimes D. Often E. Always

Q7. Do you like to look at the commercial information on public platforms and service platforms

on WeChat?

A. strongly uninterested B. not interested C. Neither interested or uninterested D. interested E.

strongly interested

Q8. Are you interested in this business flow in WeChat?

A. no, and not considered B. no, but considered C. yes

Q9. Do you trust the products posted by your WeChat friends?

A. Never B. Rarely C. Occasionally D. A moderate amount E. a great deal

Q10. How often do you buy products from your WeChat friends?

A. Never B. Rarely C. sometimes D. often E. always

Q11. Do you agree that the relationship between you and your friends could orient your online shopping behavior?

A. strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Neither agree or disagree D. Agree E. strongly agree

Q12. How often do you use WeChat to manage the relationships with your friends?

A. Never B. sometimes C. often D. always

Q13. Do you pay for the products you ordered from WeChat by WeChat Pay?

A. Never B. sometimes C. often D. always

Q14. Do you pay for the products you ordered from WeChat by Alipay?

A. Never B. sometimes C. often D. always

Q15. Do you pay for the products you ordered from WeChat by Credit card?

A. Never B. sometimes C. often D. always

Q16. How often do you use WeChat as your daily social media?

A. Never B. sometimes C. often D. always

Q17. How often do you buy products from personal business/small business?

A. Never B. sometimes C. often D. always

Q18. Do you agree that the emerging media, like WeChat, would substitute traditional media as approaches for business communication?

A. strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Neither agree or disagree D. Agree E. strongly agree

Q19. Do you buy products on WeChat under your friends' recommendation?

A. Never B. Sometimes C. Often D. Always

Q20. Do you buy products on WeChat from a person you do not know?

A. Never B. Sometimes C. Often D. Always

Q21. Do you post commercial information on WeChat?

A. Never B. Sometimes C. Often D. Always

Q 22. Do you think WeChat is welcomed by small business because of the low cost?

A. strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Neither agree or disagree D. Agree E. strongly agree

Q23. Do you think WeChat business is based on the online personal relationships between

WeChat users?

A. strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Neither agree or disagree D. Agree E. strongly agree

Q24. Do you think WeChat business is based on the offline personal relationships between

WeChat users?

A. strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Neither agree or disagree D. Agree E. strongly agree

Q25. Do you think that WeChat is a good approach for small businesses to create relationship

with customers?

A. strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Neither agree or disagree D. Agree E. strongly agree

Q26. Do you think that WeChat is a good approach for small businesses to gain reputation?

A. strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Neither agree or disagree D. Agree E. strongly agree

Q27. Do you use WeChat to gain/pull relationship with people who you do not know in the real

world?

A. Never B. Rarely C. Sometimes D. Often E. Always

Q28. Do you use WeChat to promote your own business?

A. Never B. sometimes C. often D. always

Q29. Do you feel jealous from your friends who have already gained success on WeChat

marketing?

A. Never B. sometimes C. often D. always

Q30. Do you think that a terrible WeChat shopping experience would make you loose trust with your friends?

A. strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Neither agree or disagree D. Agree E. strongly agree

You are asked to rate how you think about each statement based on your experience with small WeChat sellers. Please check in the blank based on what you feel or perceive in each statement. 8-point scale means as follows:

1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4=Undecided (neutral) 5=Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree 8=Not Applicable

Q31. In dealing with people like me, the small seller has a tendency to throw its weight around.

Q32.The small seller really listens to what people like me have to say.

Q33.The small seller treats people like me fairly and justly.

Q34.Whenever the small seller makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about people like me.

Q35.The small seller can be relied on to keep its promises.

Q36.I believe that the small seller takes the opinions of people like me into account when making decisions.

Q37.I feel very confident about the small seller's skills.

Q38.The small seller has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do.

Q39.I feel that the small seller is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to people like me.

Q40.I can see that the small seller wants to maintain a relationship with people like me.

Q41.There is a long-lasting bond between the small seller and people like me.

Q42.Compared to other sellers, I value my relationship with the small seller more.

Q43.I am happy with the small seller.

Q44.Both the small seller and people like me benefit from the relationship.

Q45.Most people like me are happy in their interactions with the small seller.

Q46.Generally speaking, I am pleased with the relationship the small seller has established with people like me.

Q47.Most people enjoy dealing with the small seller.

Q48.Whenever the small seller gives or offers something to people like me, it generally expects something in return.

Q49.Even though people like me have had a relationship with the small seller for a long time, it still expects something in return whenever it offers us a favor.

Q50.The small seller will compromise with people like me when it knows that it will gain something.

Q51.The small seller takes care of people who are likely to reward the seller.

Q52.The small seller is very concerned about the welfare of people like me.

Q53.I feel that the small seller takes advantage of people who are vulnerable.

Q54.I think that the small seller succeeds by stepping on other people.

Q55.The small seller helps people like me without expecting anything in return.

Finally, please answer the following questions according to your own using experiences on WeChat.

Q56.If you are a seller, could you briefly tell me your motivation to apply WeChat as your business approach?

Q57.If you are a buyer, could you briefly tell me your motivation to purchase products on WeChat?

Q58.Do you feel satisfied with the commercial social media environment? Why or why not?

Thank you for your time and have a good day.

Appendix B: Consent form

Georgia State University

Department of Communication

Informed Consent

Title: Interactive social selling and relationship management on WeChat

Principal Investigator: Natalie Tindall

Student Principal Investigator: Ying Sun

I.   Purpose:

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to examine the

phenomenon of micro-entrepreneurship, social selling and relationship management on WeChat.

You are invited to participate because you are a WeChat user. A total of 200 participants will be

recruited for this study. Participation will require 30 minutes of your time over the course of one

day.

II.   Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will complete a questionnaire about WeChat. The research will

be completed online, and the procedures will only be performed once. Taking the survey should

take no more than 30 minutes of your time.

III.   Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

IV.   Benefits:

Participation in this study may not benefit you personally. Overall, we hope to gain information

about social selling, micro-entrepreneurship, social marketing, relationship management, and

strategic communication. Also, the findings will be pragmatic and helpful for WeChat users who are considering social selling and social marketing for their own business

V.   Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled

VI.   Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Dr. Natalie Tindall and Ying Sun will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)).   We will use a numerical code rather than your name on study records. The information you provide will be stored in a locked cabinet and on a password- and firewall-protected computer. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form. You will not be identified personally.

VII.   Contact Persons:

Contact Dr. Natalie T. J. Tindall at 404-413-5685 and ntindall1@gsu.edu if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this study. You can also call if you think you have been harmed by the study. Call Susan Vogtner in the Georgia State University Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu if you want to talk to someone who is not part of the study team. You can talk about questions, concerns, offer input, obtain information, or suggestions

about the study. You can also call Susan Vogtner if you have questions or concerns about your rights in this study.

VIII.   Copy of Consent Form to Participant:

You can print a copy of this consent form to keep. If you are willing to volunteer for this research, please click the appropriate button below.

Appendix C: Recruitment Letter

Recruitment letter

Study title: Interactive social selling and relationship management on WeChat

Researcher: Ying Sun (Thesis student)

Address: 25 Park Place 8th Floor, Atlanta, GA, 30303

Phone: 404-889-5108

Email address: ysun16@student.gsu.edu

Research Supervisor: Natalie T. J. Tindall, Ph.D.

Dear WeChat User:

It's my pleasure to invite you to participant in an online survey to assess the social selling and relationship management of WeChat. As a WeChat user, your experiences on selling/buying products and promote relationships via WeChat as micro-entrepreneur/consumer may very important and helpful in this research study.

In this study, I want to examine the phenomenon of micro-entrepreneurship, social selling and relationship management on WeChat. I would like to find the opinions from micro-entrepreneurs on social selling via WeChat, the attitudes from WeChat users on relationship management, and the trends of micro-entrepreneurship on WeChat. The findings will be pragmatic and helpful for WeChat users who are considering social selling and social marketing for their own business.

Your participation in this survey will be voluntary and your feedback will be anonymous. Please fill in the survey regarding your own WeChat using experience and opinion on this emerging

media. This online survey will be send directly from the researcher to you via WeChat. There are

55 likert-type questions. You may spend no more than 30 minutes to answer all the questions.

If you are interested in this survey, please RSVP no later than Feb. 29th, 2016, by email to

ysun16@student.gsu.edu, or by calling Ying Sun at 404-889-5108. I look forward to having you

join this research and contribute your opinions in WeChat study.

Sincerely,

Appendix D: Questionnaire (Chinese)

调查问卷：

1. 请问您的性别

A. 男　B. 女

2. 您的年龄

　A. 18-25 岁　B. 26-35 岁　C. 36-45 岁　D. 46 岁及以上

3. 您的学历是？

A. 高中以下

B. 高中毕业

C. 大专

E. 大学本科

G. 硕士／博士

4. 您的年收入为？

A. 10 万人民币以下　B. 达到或高于十万人民币

5. 您何时开始使用微信？

A. 2011　B. 2012　C. 2013　D. 2014. E. 2015

6. 您把微信当作经营生意的工具吗？

A．是的。 B. 我有兴趣如此，但尚未使用。C. 没有，并且以后也应该不会使用。

请选择最符合您的情况的答案回答以下问题。

Q1: 您每天使用微信的频率是？

A. 从不　B. 很少 C. 有时　D. 经常　E. 总是

Q2: 您会在微信上浏览商业信息吗?

A. 从不　B. 很少 C. 有时 D. 经常 E. 总是

Q3: 您在微信上曾购买过任何商品或服务吗?

A. 从不　B. 很少 C. 有时 D. 经常 E. 总是

Q4. 您在使用微信中有浏览您微信好友上传的关于市场营销和广告类的信息吗?

A. 从不　B. 很少 C. 有时 D. 经常 E. 总是

Q5. 您有浏览微信上同商业相关的信息吗?

 A. 从不　B. 很少 C. 有时 D. 经常 E. 总是

Q6. 您有分享或转发此类营销或广告信息以起到推广效果吗?

A. 从不　B. 很少 C. 有时 D. 经常 E. 总是

Q7. 您乐于浏览微信公众号或服务号所推送的商业信息吗?

A. 非常不感兴趣 B. 没兴趣 C. 无所谓 D. 感兴趣 E. 非常感兴趣

Q8. 您对这样的微信商业现象感兴趣吗?

A. 不感兴趣，并没想过这点 B. 不感兴趣，但有考虑过 C. 有兴趣

Q9. 您信任微信好友发送的产品吗?

A. 从不 B. 很少 C. 偶尔 D. 一般 E. 十分信任

Q10. 您曾在您的微信好友处买过商品吗?

A. 从不　B. 很少 C. 有时 D. 经常 E. 总是

Q11. 您赞同"您和您的朋友的关系有可能对您的线上购物行为产生引导作用"吗?

A. 非常不赞同 B. 不赞同 C. 不置可否 D. 赞同 E. 非常赞同

Q12. 您有使用微信来经营您和朋友之间的关系吗?

A. 从不 B.有时 C. 经常 D. 总是

Q13. 您通过微信支付购买你在微信上预购的商品吗?

A. 从不 B.有时 C. 经常 D. 总是

Q14. 您通过支付宝支付你在微信上预购的商品吗?

A. 从不 B.有时 C. 经常 D. 总是

Q15. 您用信用卡支付您在微信上预购的商品吗?

A. 从不 B.有时 C. 经常 D. 总是

Q16. 您把微信当日常社交媒体使用吗?

A. 从不 B.有时 C. 经常 D. 总是

Q17. 您在微信上从小微商人 / 企业处购买产品吗?

A. 从不 B.有时 C. 经常 D. 总是

Q18. 您赞同"像微信这样的新媒体将取代传统媒体作为商业营销途径"吗?

A. 非常不赞同 B. 不赞同 C. 不置可否 D. 赞同 E. 非常赞同

Q19. 您因为朋友的推荐而在微信上购物吗?

A. 从不 B.有时 C. 经常 D. 总是

Q20. 您在微信上从不认识的人那里购买商品或服务吗?

A. 从不 B.有时 C. 经常 D. 总是

Q21. 您在微信上发送商业相关信息吗?

A. 从不 B.有时 C. 经常 D. 总是

Q22. 您认为微信之所以能吸引小微商业模式是因为它低廉的营销成本吗?

A. 非常不赞同 B. 不赞同 C. 不置可否 D. 赞同 E. 非常赞同

Q23. 您认为"微信商业模式是建立在线上用户的个人关系网络之上"的吗？

A. 非常不赞同 B. 不赞同 C. 不置可否 D. 赞同 E. 非常赞同

Q24. 您认为"微信商业模式是建立在用户的线下人际关系网络之上"的吗？

A. 非常不赞同 B. 不赞同 C. 不置可否 D. 赞同 E. 非常赞同

Q25. 您认为微信对于小微商人而言是一个能建立和经营消费者关系的有效渠道吗？

A. 非常不赞同 B. 不赞同 C. 不置可否 D. 赞同 E. 非常赞同

Q26. 您认为微信是一个让小微商人获取美誉度的良好渠道吗？

A. 非常不赞同 B. 不赞同 C. 不置可否 D. 赞同 E. 非常赞同

Q27. 您会利用微信来拉拢／建立在现实生活中并不认识的微信好友的关系吗？

A. 非常不赞同 B. 不赞同 C. 不置可否 D. 赞同 E. 非常赞同

Q28. 您利用微信来推广您的生意吗？

A. 从不 B. 有时 C.经常 D. 总是

Q29. 您对在微信营销方面取得成功的好友产生嫉妒／眼红的情绪吗？

A. 从不 B. 有时 C.经常 D. 总是

Q30. 您认为一次糟糕的微信售货体验会让你在微信好友间丢失信任吗？

A. 非常不赞同 B. 不赞同 C. 不置可否 D. 赞同 E. 非常赞同

以下陈述请您结合您在微信中同小微商户打交道的经历作答。请点选最符合你的感受或评价的选项。1－8 分别代表 8 个不同评价选项如下：

1=非常不赞同 2=不赞同 3=略微不赞同 4=不置可否 5=略微赞同 6=赞同 7=非常赞同 8=并不适用

Q31.在和我这样的人群打交道时，小微商有占据主导地位的态势。

Q32.小微商真心愿意了解像我这样的人群的想法和意见。

Q33.小微商公平，公正地对待像我这样的人群。

Q34.无论何时小微商作出了重要决定，我知道这将会是同像我这样的人群有关的决定。

Q35.小微商作出的承诺值得我信任。

Q36.我相信小微商在作出决定时，会将像我这样的人群的意见纳入考虑范围。

Q37.我对小微商的专业技能／素养表示相信。

Q38.小微商有能力完成它所声明的事项。

Q39.我认为小微商试图同像我这样的人群保持一种长期约定。

Q40.我能看出小微商想要同像我这样的人群建立并维护一种关系。

Q41.小微商和像我这样的人群之间有一种可长期持续的纽带存在。

Q42.相比其他微信商家，我更在意同小微商们的关系。

Q43.我同小微商的相处令我感到很愉快。

Q44.小微商和像我这样的人群都能感受到彼此之间的关系所带来的益处。

Q45.大部分像我这样的人都能在和小微商的相处中感到愉快。

Q46.通常来说,我对小微商和我建立的关系表示高兴。

Q47.大部分人喜欢同小微商打交道。

Q48.无论何时小微商惠及像我这样的人群时，这通常表明他们也希望有所回报。

Q49.尽管像我这样的人群已经同小微商保持了很长一段时间关系，小微商依然希望在他／

她给予我们好处的时候我们也要有所回报。

Q50.当小微商知道将会以此获益时，他／她会同像我这样的人群妥协。

Q51.小微商会对有可能日后让他们获益的人群格外在意。

Q52.小微商非常关心像我这样的人群的福祉。

Q53.我感觉小微商会利用弱势人群。

Q54.我认为小微商的成功是建立在前人经验上的。

Q55.小微商帮助像我这样的人群而不计回报。

最后，请您根据您的微信使用经历用两三句话简短回答以下问题：

Q56.如果你是微信卖家（小微商），请简述您为什么运用微信作为营销工具。

Q57.如果你是微信消费者，请简述您为何使用微信购物。

Q58.你认为当前微信的商业氛围让你感到满意吗？为什么满意／为什么不满意？

非常感谢您的配合并祝您生活愉快！

Appendix E: Consent form (Chinese)

<div align="center">

乔治亚州立大学

传播系

通知意向书

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标题: 微信的交互式社会化营销和关系管理研究

导师: Natalie Tindall

研究生: 孙樱

I. 研究目的:

您被邀请参与此次学术研究。这项研究的目的在于分析微信对于小微商业形态，社会化营销和关系管理的特殊作用和意义。 由于您是微信用户之一，因此受邀参与此次研究。一共有 200 位研究对象将参与到此次调查研究中。您将花费 30 分钟用于完成一份调查问卷。

II. 步骤:

如果您决定参与此次研究，您将完成一份有关微信的调查问卷。 孙樱和 Natalie Tindall 博士将同你联系。整个调查研究将会以在线问卷的方式进行，并且所有步骤都只会运作一次。完成这项调查研究需要花费您不少于 30 分钟的时间。

III. 可能存在的风险:

在这项研究中，你不会需要承担任何高于平日生活的风险。换言之，此项研究几乎不存在风险。

IV. 可能存在的益处:

参与这项研究可能不会让你的个人生活获益。总体上，我们希望获取到关于社会化营销，小微商业形态，社会化销售，关系管理和战略传播的数据和信息。同样的，这项研究的成果将会对考虑通过微信来开展社会化营销和销售的微信用户具有实际的参考价值。

V. 参与与放弃:

此项研究的参与形式为自愿参与。你不被要求一定要参与。如果你决定参加但又临时改变主意了，您将有权利在任何时候放弃参与此项研究。你在研究进行的过程中，可以任意跳过问题或中止参与此项研究。无论你如何决定，你都不会有任何损失。

VI. 保密条款:

我们将依据法律对于你所提供的私人信息对外严格保密。Natalie Tindall 博士和孙樱将对你所提供的信息拥有查看和使用的权利。信息和数据也有可能同决定此次研究规范无误的机构和有关人员共享（包括乔治亚州立大学机构审核委员会，人类研究保护办公室 OHRP））。在数据录入和研究分析时，我们将用数字编号来代替您的名字。您提供的信息将被保存在一台有密码和防火墙保护的电脑中并锁于指定保险箱内。你的名字和任何有关于你身份识别的信息都将不会出现在此次研究以及日后公开发表的研究结论中。研究成果将被归纳总结并一并上报。你的身份信息将被保密。

VII. 联系我们:

如果您对此项研究有任何问题，顾虑，或者投诉，您可以拨打 404-413-5685 或者发送电子邮件至 ntindall@gsu.edu 联系 Natalie Tindall 博士。如果你认为在此项研究中你的利益被损害了，你也可以联系 Tindall 博士。如果你想联系研究团队以外的人士，请联系乔治亚州立大学研究纪律办公室 Susan Vogtner。 电话：404-413-3513。电子邮件：

svogtner1@gsu.edu。如果您对此项研究中有任何疑问或者顾虑，你也可以通过以上方式联系 Susan Vogtner。

VIII. 研究参与同意书副本:

您被允许复制一份同意书副本予以保留。如果你愿意无偿参与此次研究，请按以下确认按钮。

Appendix F: Recruitment Letter (Chinese)

招募信

研究题目：微信的交互式社会化营销和关系管理研究

研究者：孙樱 （硕士论文学生）

地址: 25 Park Place 8th Floor, Atlanta, GA, 30303

电话: 404-889-5108

电子邮件: ysun16@student.gsu.edu

导师: Natalie T. J. Tindall, Ph.D.

尊敬的微信用户：

我非常荣幸地邀请你参与到关于微信的社会化营销和关系管理的线上调查问卷中来。作为一位微信用户，您作为微商／消费者对于使用微信售卖／购买产品，开展关系的建立和维护的相关经验将对此次学术研究大有裨益。

在这项研究中，我想要解析微信的微商，社会化营销和关系管理现象和模式。我想要收集并分析微商对于在微信上进行社会化营销的观点，微信用户对于关系管理的态度以及微商在微信上的发展态势。研究成果将会对考虑通过微信来开展社会化营销和销售的微信用户具有实际的参考价值。

您将自愿参与此项调查研究。你的所有信息将被匿名。请基于您在微信上的实际使用体验和对于这个新社交媒体的观点完成此项问卷调查。这项调查研究的相关链接将会由研究者发送至您的微信。你可能会花费不超过 30 分钟的时间完成此项问卷。

如果你对于这项研究感兴趣，请在 2016 年 2 月 29 日前回复。您可以通过致电孙樱或发送电子邮件的方式确认参与。电话： 404-889-5108。电子邮件：ysun16@student.gsu.edu。我希望您加入此项研究并分享您对于微信的观点。

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