

Microblogging, friendship maintenance, and life satisfaction among university students: The mediatory role of online self-disclosure

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ABSTRACT

Despite a substantial literature suggests that computer-mediated communication impact individuals' various psychosocial factors, relatively few studies have elucidated the underlying mechanism behind these associations. Building upon self-disclosure theory and previous studies, the principal purpose of this present research is to systematically explore the relationships among microblog utilization, online self-disclosure, friendship maintenance, and perceived life satisfaction. A web-based survey was implemented using a total of 426 university students in Northwestern China. Structural equation modeling reveals that intensity of microblog use is positively associated with these students' friendship maintenance and life satisfaction. Additionally, online self-disclosure plays the crucial mediatory role in the relationships between microblog use, quality of relationships, and gratification with life. The results imply that as microbloggers disclosure their inner thoughts or emotional states with other users online, they could foster their friendship maintenance and obtain greater life satisfaction. However, contrary to the expectation, students' friendship maintenance is not discovered to be a significant predictor of the sense of life satisfaction in the online environment. Overall, these obtained outcomes of the empirical work could offer new insights into the deep comprehending of the social psychological process of microblogging among younger generation in the new media context.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the unprecedented pervasiveness of social media technologies that integrate a wide range of characteristics and affordances of digital platforms and other e-commerce tools, have fundamentally reshaped how individuals communicate and sustain interpersonal relationships in their routine daily life (Chan, 2018; Pang, 2018c; Yoo and Jeong, 2017). These newly emerging computer-mediated services offer people a unique venue to instantly create virtual profiles, interact with networked peers, self-disclose basic information about themselves, as well as acquire meaningful news in differentiated ways (Kim et al., 2015; Pang, 2016; Wei and Gao, 2017; Yang and DeHart, 2016). Additionally, social networking sites (SNSs) provide members with numerous online entertainment activities, including participating in online games, viewing amateur videos, downloading web-based music, and sharing photos (Dhir and Tsai, 2017; Skoric et al., 2016). Given that youth adults particularly university attending students are predominant SNSs users (Chen, 2017), it is therefore necessary to thoroughly investigate the actual implications of these innovative applications for their social and psychological development such as online self-disclosure, friendship maintenance, and gratification with current life (Chan, 2018; Chang and Hsu, 2016; Chen and Li, 2017; Park and Lee, 2012; Petersen and Johnston, 2015).

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Among a variety of SNSs available in contemporary China, Weibo (Chinese microblog) has recently emerged as one of the most widely visited social media platforms with approximately 316 million registered users by the end of December 2017 (CNNIC, 2018), and roughly 54 million individuals utilize it on a daily basis (Wang and Shi, 2017). Much like Twitter, the ever-increasing popularity of Weibo enables users to periodically generate and distribute short 140-character messages in text or multimedia format on various topics ranging from personal preferences and interests to present events and political issues (Chan et al., 2012). Besides Twitter-like functionality, Weibo also permits members to actively upload videos, exchange images, and comment on others' posts. As a consequence, any individuals could take a screenshot of a lengthy article and subsequently publish it as a picture on Weibo, thereby breaking the 140 Chinese character restrictions (Wang and Shi, 2017; Yu et al., 2016). Collectively, these interactive social and technological attributes of Weibo offer users an excellent environment where they can efficiently and effectively connect and communicate with a list of existing friends and acquaintances (Gan and Wang, 2015).

Documenting the beneficial influences of SNSs on individuals' everyday lives, a growing body of empirical research has consistently demonstrated a significant correlation between SNSs adoption and a range of positive outcomes (Lee et al., 2018; Sprecher et al., 2016; Verduyn et al., 2017). Nonetheless, most of previous investigations to date have largely concentrated on the utilization of Facebook and MySpace in the US and Europe societies. Unfortunately, empirical evidence on the possible influences of Weibo use on its users' social connectedness and well-being status in the context of China is surprisingly scarce (Pang, 2018a; Sullivan, 2014). Additionally, insufficient scholarly attention has been devoted to the Weibo usage practices of university students population (Wang and Shi, 2017), in particular, how Weibo communication would ultimately contribute to their psychosocial variables. Furthermore, it is still quite unclear whether individual's online self-disclosure plays a crucial moderating role in the associations between social media adoption, relationship quality, and gratification with life (Wang et al., 2018). Accordingly, more focus required to be placed on the sophisticated consequences of Weibo communication and the association between the processes of the new technology interaction and its diverse outcomes.

Taken together, rooted in self-disclosure theory and previous studies on SNSs interaction (Chan et al., 2012; Chen, 2017; Pang, 2018d; Trepte et al., 2018), this overarching goal of this current study is to extend the existing literature by systematically probing whether and how the intensity of Weibo use would eventually contribute to maintaining friendships and facilitating life satisfaction as the two predominant outcomes. Additionally, the moderating role of online self-disclosure between Weibo utilization, friendship maintenance, and gratification with life was also uncovered through analyzing structural equation model. Therefore, the exploratory work is among the first that seeks to more carefully examine the underlying mechanisms between Weibo use intensity and its distinct consequences among university students in Mainland China. Furthermore, the significant findings may not only provide fresh insight into the innovative affordances of Weibo, but also contributes to broader controversies regarding the indirect impact of computer-mediated communication on younger generation's quality of life in the social media age.

2. Literature reviews

2.1. Liking Weibo use to friendship maintenance and life satisfaction

Taking into account of the potential effects of online communication on people's level of well-being, two entirely contrary hypotheses have been presented by prior studies. The displacement hypothesis holds that web-based activities could reduce individual's psychological well-being due to it may displace the total time spent in more valuable interactions with real-life friends, hence eventually reduce the quality of these existing relationships (Valkenburg and Peter, 2007). Comparatively, the stimulation hypothesis emphasizes that Internet-based communication could enhance social connections and thus ultimately contribute positively to a series of consequences (Kalpidou et al., 2011). Indeed, earlier investigations typically inclined to endorse the displacement hypothesis, suggesting that Internet applications exert negative influence on the relationship quality and psychological health because these accessible online connections are shallow and temporary, and that they would inevitably replace authentic time of sustaining real-life relations (Kayany and Yelsma, 2000; Valkenburg and Peter, 2007). Notwithstanding, majority of recent empirical studies seemed to lend support to the augment hypothesis, confirming that SNSs behaviors promote people's perceived feeling of well-being and relationship quality (Chen and Li, 2017; Lee et al., 2018; Trepte et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2017).

With respect to SNS use, the positive association between computer-mediated communication and life satisfaction seems to be ascribed to the truth that the newly emerging media is a particularly effective tool for individuals to maintain a constant relationships with their old and new friends without considering of physical location and the time of day (Davis, 2012; Lee, 2017). Additionally, media multiplexity and the frequency of strong-tie interactions would foster the rating of gratification with current life (Chan, 2015; Pang, 2017). Furthermore, network functions and affordances of SNS render it conveniently for people to fulfill their distinct personal and social requirements in the computer-mediated situations, which are also leading to the improvements in happiness, mental health, as well as physical states (Chang and Hsu, 2016; Gan and Wang, 2015). Consequently, younger generations who utilize SNS more intensity have much higher degrees of life gratification than those who use it less intensity. Given that the primary characteristic of Weibo usage is to efficiently cultivate and reinforce individuals' high-quality social bonds (Christy et al., 2015; Yu et al., 2016), Weibo use intensity is anticipated to facilitate university students' sense of life satisfaction and friendship maintenance. Building upon the above-mentioned discussions, the two following assumptions were thereby formulated:

H1: Weibo use intensity is positively associated with university students' friendship maintenance.

H2: Weibo use intensity is positively associated with university students' life satisfaction.

2.2. Linking Weibo use to online self-disclosure

Typically, self-disclosure can be conceptualized as the act of disclosing individual's factual information voluntarily and intentionally, consisting of regional orientations, thoughts, as well as photographs via web-based social networks (Baiooco et al., 2012; Schouten et al., 2007). Christy and her colleagues claimed that the multi-dimensional construct as the essential and particular impulse that might boost online interpersonal interaction (Christy et al., 2015). Youth adults are indicated to reveal themselves indirectly through the web-based interaction situations and simultaneously strive to sustain favorable impressions (Chen, 2015; Huang, 2016). That it, in the computer-mediated space, individuals express deep feelings and opinions within online setting that could subsequently improve the number and depth of self-disclosure due to the accumulated experience may decrease physical and nonverbal cues, carefully design their utterances, manage their virtual followers, and optionally exchange meaningful resources (Wang et al., 2014). Consequently, SNS users incline to disclose more intimate information about themselves on such innovative technology, and are unwilling to give comments in offline communications (Liu and Brown, 2014).

A substantial amount of empirical evidence has also documented the positive association between SNS adoption and online self-disclosure practices in general (Bazarova and Choi, 2014; Chen, 2017; Huang, 2016; Yoo and Jeong, 2017). For instance, a thematic analysis of 32 adolescents demonstrated that digital communication technologies could significantly stimulate adolescents' engagement in online self-disclosure with their intimate friends (Davis, 2012). Consistently, Bazarova and Choi posited that affordances of Facebook can expand perceived opportunities for self-broadcasting and enhancing social relationships with other contacts, people acquire these chances to gratify their diverse instrumental demands and adjust their interaction behaviors accordingly (Bazarova and Choi, 2014). Based on a long-term investigation, a recent study has contended that instant messenger conversations can boost German users' online self-disclosure, which subsequently may increase their social support from current friends (Trepte et al., 2018). Considered in the context of Weibo, it is natural to argue that Weibo interaction can promote Chinese university students' self-disclosures of thoughts and feelings through the service, as such social media gradually plays an important role in the offering opportunities for social connectedness, enlarging of social ties, as well as exposing to peers and information (Wang and Shi, 2017). Therefore, the article proposed the third assumption:

H3: Weibo use intensity is positively associated with university students' online self-disclosure.

2.3. The influence of online self-disclosure on friendship maintenance and life satisfaction

There is general agreement that the notion of online self-disclosure has been the most predominant factor in the cultivation and maintenance of real-world relationships due to it helps reinforce mutual trust among distinct partners (Bazarova and Choi, 2014; Choi and Lee, 2017; Dhir and Tsai, 2017). Friendship maintenance is generally defined as actions, activities, or practices individuals engage in with the objective of sustaining the dyadic friendship at a satisfying and committed degree (Davis, 2012). Actually, only when individuals express what they inner thoughts and feelings could they establish and maintain meaningful connections (Trepte et al., 2018). During the course of computer-mediated interactions, young people tend to adopt various SNSs to connect with offline friends and to broadcast different activities they had shared with their intimate peers. Moreover, disclosing one's personal distress to others through the web can also bolster solidity and intimacy while decreasing the feeling of stress and enhancing the perception of life satisfaction (Wang et al., 2018). Therefore, online self-disclosure can significantly lead to distinct positive outcomes, such as friendship maintenance and gratification with current life (Dhir and Tsai, 2017; Lee et al., 2018).

With the proliferation of Internet and communication technologies, scholars have flocked to investigate the vital mediating role of online self-disclosure in the social media sphere. For example, in a study specifically addressing Facebook utilization, Seidman discovered that true self expression online is more common among undergraduates attempting to deepen existing friendships than those acquiring other new affiliations (Seidman, 2014). Similarity, Smith and Sanderson confirmed that revealing personal information on SNSs such as Instagram is the fundamental component for enticing other people to require to become a friend or to reply positively to individual's request to become their friend (Smith and Sanderson, 2015). Besides the direct impact of social media communication on well-being consequences, Desjarlais and Joseph have further documented that characteristics of social-based social media technologies could stimulate the revealing of personal intimate information, which in turn foster the closeness to a friend and well-being (Desjarlais and Joseph, 2017). More recently, Wang, et al. verified that SNS could have a positive and significant association with SNS users' friendship quality and satisfaction with present social life through the mediation of online self-disclosure (Wang et al., 2018). However, the moderating mechanism between online self-disclosure, friendship maintenance, and life satisfaction in the Weibo context has been given insufficient attention. Thus, the current work proposed that:

H4: Online self-disclosure exerts positive influence on university students' friendship maintenance.

H5: Online self-disclosure exerts positive influence on university students' life satisfaction.

2.4. The influence of friendship maintenance on life satisfaction

Many previous investigations linking friendship maintenance to life satisfaction have argued that web-based communication can impact well-being consequences by helping individuals to sustain their stock of friendships (Burke and Kraut, 2016; Yoo and Jeong, 2017). In other words, people with higher degree of happiness appear to own better friendship quality than those with low degree (Valkenburg and Peter, 2007). This positive association between friendship maintenance and the possession of gratification with life

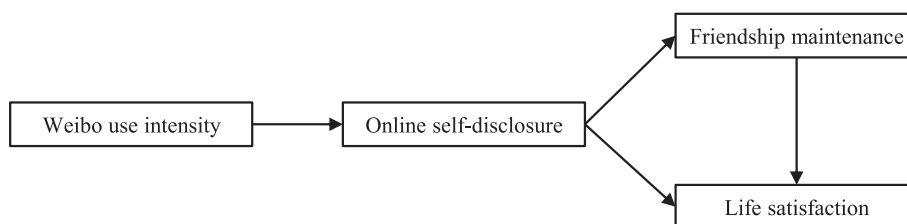


Fig. 1. The conceptual model among Weibo usage, friendship maintenance, and life satisfaction.

could be interpreted by the fact that SNSs increase individual's sense of connectedness and belongingness, hence, the existing social relations increase overall life satisfaction by providing appropriate intimacy, caring, suggestion and tangible assistance from other users (Sprecher et al., 2016; Trepte et al., 2018). Regarding younger generations, Liu and Yu proposed that social supports can help them decrease psychological distress and various mental-related symptoms such as anxiety and depression (Liu and Yu, 2013). Recently, by analyzing of local residents samples in Hong Kong, Chan discovered that face-to-face communications and friendship satisfaction were both significantly associated with psychological well-being and positive emotions among younger and older cohorts (Chan, 2018). Considering the widely popularization of Weibo in contemporary Chinese society and their ever-increasing spaces and platforms to keep in touch with other people (Wang and Shi, 2017), a thorough investigation of the connections between Weibo interaction, relationship maintenance and life satisfaction is extremely needed so that to offer a more comprehensive picture of individual's social relations, and its association with gratification with current life. On the basis of previous literatures, the following hypothesis concerning the potential effect of friend maintenance in the context of Weibo was formulated:

H6: Friendship maintenance has the positive influence on university students' life satisfaction.

3. Research model and methodology

3.1. Theoretical study model

Fig. 1 presents the hypothesized research model for investigating the association between university students' Weibo use, online self-disclosure, friendship maintenance, and life satisfaction. In the hypothesized research model, Weibo use intensity is anticipated to positively correlate with individual's on online self-disclosure behaviors. Additionally, this research study also strives to uncover whether intensity use of Weibo would indirectly influence university students' friendship maintenance and satisfaction with life through the mediation of online self-disclosure.

3.2. Sample and procedures

A web-based survey was implemented to gather statistical data from university students in Northwestern China. As university students are currently the most regular and enthusiastic social media users in Mainland China (Wang and Shi, 2017), thus the research sample is deemed to be suitable to illustrate the possible effects of Weibo use on their relational maintenance and life satisfaction. Specifically, students were invited to participate in an online survey via a professional electronic questionnaire website, namely, www.sojump.com. Additionally, all participants were informed that their replies were anonymous and their online participation was completely voluntary. This online survey was distributed from June 26, 2018 to July 27, 2018. The study selected the voluntary online sampling method, because it was generally recognized to be one of the most convenient and efficient manners to capture a large population of social media users (Langston, 2003). In total, 487 subjects responded to the online survey. Sixty one invalid respondents were removed because of missing values for the questionnaire questions. Ultimately, the remaining 426 valid responses were utilized for further analysis.

3.3. Measurements

3.3.1. Weibo use intensity

The Weibo use intensity scale was proposed by Chan and his colleagues (Chan et al., 2012) with slight revisions from Ellison's group (Ellison et al., 2007), which was applied to gauge subjects' Weibo usage behaviors. Weibo use intensity is a significant measure that has been frequently applied in the online interaction and SNS literature (Ellison et al., 2007; Liu and Yu, 2013). The construct primary consists of three fundamental parts: the total number of Weibo friends, the amount of time spent on Weibo per day, as well as a number of Likert-scale attitudinal statements to unearth students' emotional attachments to this innovative communication platform (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.85$). Respondents were then required to rate on a five-point Likert scale to what extent they agreed or disagreed with these statements (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Sample questions include "Weibo has become part of my daily routine." and "I feel I am part of the WeChat community at the campus." Table 1 displays the summary of study descriptive outcomes.

Table 1
Descriptive information for Weibo use intensity.

Individual items	Mean	SD
Weibo use intensity (Cronbach's alpha = 0.85)	3.39	0.52
How many friends do you have on Weibo? 1 = 50 or less; 2 = 50–100; 3 = 101–150; 4 = 151–200; 5 = above 200	2.64	1.52
Approximately how much time do you use Weibo per day? 1 = less than 30 min; 2 = 30–60 min; 3 = 1–2 h; 4 = 2–3 h; 5 = above 3 h	3.00	1.42
Weibo is part of my everyday activity	3.74	0.77
I am proud to tell people I am on Weibo	3.30	0.57
Weibo has become part of my daily routine	3.81	0.68
I feel out of touch when I haven't logged onto Weibo for a day	3.53	0.80
I feel I am part of the Weibo community at the campus	3.52	0.74
I would be sorry if Weibo shut down	3.63	0.76

Notes: Subjects' response ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

3.3.2. Online self-disclosure

The scale of online self-disclosure originally designed by Gibbs, Ellison, and Heino was utilized in this present work (Gibbs et al., 2006). The sample item is “I frequently talk about my feelings about myself with those I meet in online space.” Participants were invited to assess their degree of agreement with every question on a five-point Likert rating scale according to “1 = strongly disagree” and “5 = strongly agree”. These responses to negatively phrased statements were reverse worded. This reliability coefficient for this five-statement questionnaire was 0.72.

3.3.3. Friendship maintenance

Friendship maintenance was assessed using Friendship Maintenance Scale from Oswald and Clark's work (Oswald and Clark, 2006). This scale predominantly concludes four subscales such as positivity, supportiveness, openness, as well as mutual interaction. University students were asked to indicate how frequently they participate in a certain behavior in their friendship on using an 11-point response scale ranging from 1 “never” to 11 “frequently”. Subsequently, the mean of all statements was calculated to create the overall friendship maintenance construct. The Cronbach's alpha for such response scale in the research study was 0.93.

3.3.4. Life satisfaction

Life satisfaction generally refers to one's personal appraisal of the overall quality of life on the basis of self-selected criteria (Gilman and Huebner, 2006). It was evaluated by the 4-item gratification with present life scale established by Diener and his colleagues (Diener et al., 2003). Examples of the questionnaire statements were mainly comprised “In most ways my life is close to my ideal.” and “Until now I have gotten the significant things I need in life.” Every question was evaluated on a 5-point Likert rating scale varying from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. These four statements were eventually averaged to generate a scale of overall satisfaction with life. The Cronbach's alpha of this four-item scale is discovered to be high at 0.88.

3.3.5. Demographics

The study participants were asked to report their gender on a nominal scale (1 = female, 2 = male). Additionally, they were also required to indicate their age by asking a single question of what is their age on the last birthday.

4. Data analytical strategy

The current work employed the SPSS software version 22.0 and AMOS software version 22.0 for the quantitative data analysis. Preliminary descriptive analyses were initially carried out to summarize the respondents and provide fresh insight into the potential impacts of Weibo use on university students' online self-disclosure, friendship maintenance, and perceived life satisfaction. Then Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to determine the associations between the main variables of the study after taking control of demographic variables such as gender and age. Ultimately, based on the hypothesized conceptual model, a path analysis was performed to further evaluate the intricate relationships among these main variables.

5. Results

5.1. Descriptive statistics outcomes

Before investigating the study questions, preliminary analyses generate descriptive data on the Weibo usage behaviors among university students in Mainland China. In the present sample, all the university students the study surveyed are Weibo users. Obviously, during the past two decades, Weibo has drawn a substantial population of young generations especially students on university campuses from all over China (Feng et al., 2016). Descriptive analyses indicate that among the 426 subjects included in the final research sample, 236 are males (55.4 percent) and 190 are females (44.6 percent). Additionally, these students' age ranged from 18 to 32 years old ($M = 23.5$, $SD = 3.23$). Regarding certain Weibo use behaviors, Weibo users report that they spend between one

Table 2
Correlation analyses among the main research variables.

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Weibo use intensity	3.39	0.52	–			
2. Online self-disclosure	3.52	0.33	0.193**	–		
3. Friendship maintenance	3.70	0.39	0.250**	0.261**	–	
4. Life satisfaction	3.56	0.42	0.197**	0.139**	0.262*	–

Note: N = 426. M = mean. SD = standard deviations. *p < 0.05. **p < 0.01.

hour and two hours on average on the site daily and possess between 101 and 150 friends listed on the personal profile (see Table 1).

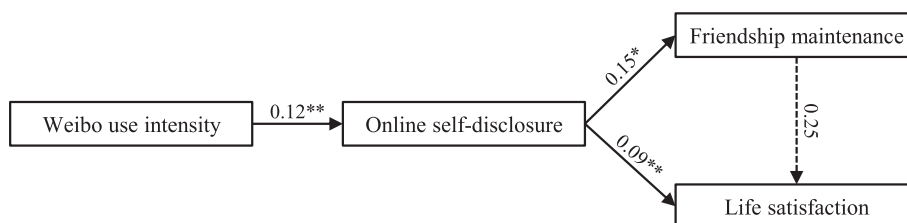
5.2. Pearson's correlations among all scaled variables

Pearson's correlations were subsequently performed to examine the potential connections among university students' Weibo use, online self-disclosure, friendship maintenance, and life satisfaction. The outcomes are displayed in Table 2. As expected, Weibo use intensity is positively associated with users' online self-disclosure ($r = 0.193$, $p < 0.01$). The finding implies that university students who utilize Weibo more intensity tend to reveal their inner thoughts and feelings in the computer-mediated setting than those who utilize less intensity. In addition, the use of Weibo intensity has the positive influence on friendship maintenance ($r = 0.250$, $p < 0.01$) and gratification with life ($r = 0.197$, $p < 0.01$). Meanwhile, participants' online self-disclosure behavior is also positively related to their friendship maintenance ($r = 0.261$, $p < 0.01$) and life satisfaction ($r = 0.139$, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, friendship maintenance is discovered to be significantly related to the sense of satisfaction with current life ($r = 0.262$, $p < 0.05$).

5.3. Path analysis results

In order to assess the extent in which Weibo use and could indirectly predicate relationship quality and satisfaction with life through online self-disclosure, structural equation modeling (SEM) was implemented. All the calculations were carried out in Amos 22.0. Participants' gender and age were controlled in the research model. As it is suggested practice to utilize various fit indices, this path model's goodness of fit was evaluated on the basis of the following combination of criteria: 3 or smaller for the relative chi-square (χ^2/df), 0.08 or less for the root-mean-squared error of approximation (RMSEA), 0.8 or above for the goodness-of-fit index (GFI) and the comparative fit index (CFI), as well as 0.9 or greater for Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) (Nabi et al., 2013). Accordingly, path analyses findings confirm an excellent fit between the survey data and this hypothesized model. As the model depicted in Fig. 2, with $\chi^2/df = 2.534$, RMSEA = 0.02, GFI = 0.99, CFI = 0.93, AGFI = 0.95, NFI = 0.92, RFI = 0.87, IFI = 0.93, TLI = 1.06.

As shown in Fig. 2, Weibo use intensity is a significant predictor of online self-disclosure ($b = 0.12$, $p < 0.01$). Hence, H3 is strongly supported, suggesting that Weibo use can help students to share their personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences with intimate friends. Additionally, online self-disclosure is discovered to be positively and significantly related with friendship maintenance ($b = 0.15$, $p < 0.05$) and satisfaction with life ($b = 0.09$, $p < 0.01$). Therefore, H4 and H5 are statistically supported. Unexpected, friendship maintenance is not positively linked with life gratification ($b = 0.25$, $p > 0.05$). Accordingly, H6 is refused. This indicates that when people form and maintain more successful relationships are may not gain the higher levels of life gratification in the context of microblog. Furthermore, the study also unearths how online self-disclosure could mediate the connections between Weibo use, friendship maintenance and life satisfaction. Specifically, when the links between online self-disclosure and life satisfaction were considered, the association between Weibo use and life satisfaction became insignificant. The outcome underlines the significant role of online self-disclosure in mediating connections between Weibo use intensity and satisfaction with life. Similarly, online self-disclosure also could mediate the relationship between Weibo use and friendship maintenance. Thus H1 and H2 are supported.



Notes: Numbers indicate path coefficient. *p<0.05; **p<0.01

Fig. 2. Path analysis of the hypothesized research model.

6. Discussion and implications

6.1. Main findings

The predominant goal of the current research is to thoroughly explore the underlying mechanism of the possible implications of Weibo utilization for Chinese university students' relational maintenance and overall life satisfaction in contemporary social media age. Specifically, it examines a hypothesized conceptual model that strives to further understand and interpret how individuals' Weibo use intensity is related to their friendship maintenance and satisfaction with life through the mediation of online self-disclosure. As such, this study may therefore contribute to the burgeoning scholarly literature on the emerging SNS interaction and its beneficial influences on individual's social relationships and well-being factors (Tian, 2013).

Firstly, the result demonstrates that Weibo use could positively predicate online-self disclosure. University students who utilize Weibo more intensity appear to be more likely to express their personal ideas and styles within a network of friends or acquaintances. Generally, these obtained outcomes suggest that Weibo could potentially serve as a significant avenue for university students to post and exchange what they are presently reading, thinking, as well as experiencing in their routine every lives (Liu and Brown, 2014). For instance, the novel tool permits users to instantly convey news and updates to close friends through a simple click. This finding supports those of prior previous studies on the positive correlation between computer-mediated interaction and online self-disclosure practices (Bazarova and Choi, 2014; Christy et al., 2015; Huang, 2016; Park and Lee, 2012). This may be due to the fact that with decreased visual, auditory as well as contextual cues, technological interaction could offer buffers for individuals who have difficulties in revealing their inner moods or feelings in the face-to-face situation due to afraid of scorn, embarrassment, and refusal (Bryant et al., 2006). Accordingly, this result is congruent with Walther's hyperpersonal model, which stated that SNS online profiles facilitate users to engage in self-disclosure online to voluntarily disclose themselves and idealize their visual image (Walther, 1996).

Secondly, as anticipated, online self-disclosure is discovered to have the significant relationship with both friendship maintenance and satisfaction with current online social life. The result indicates that microbloggers who revealed their genuine self features in the online environment, such as their inner thoughts and emotions, or who openly and honestly shared them with other users, would lead to cultivation a close relationship and maintenance such connection. In addition, expressing one's self through the web-based communication is also crucial in boosting the perceived satisfaction with life. This result is in line with pervious research on the consequences of self-disclosure in online environment, which claimed that self-disclosure exerts positive effects on friendship formation, interpersonal attraction, as well as liking (Gibbs et al., 2006). As Tosun and Lajunen argued that, individual may express their identity more authentically on social media platforms; therefore, offer more useful relationships with other contacts (Tosun and Lajunen, 2009). Besides the social influences of self-disclosure, psychological health and well-being statues have been also deemed as beneficial consequences of self-disclosure behaviors (Kim et al., 2015). Consequently, the current study lends empirical supports to the social penetration theory, which claiming that people disclose personal information to other person so as to acquire a relational reward such as interpersonal intimacy and social connectedness (Bylund et al., 2012).

Thirdly, the results document that Weibo use intensity not only significantly impacts online self-disclosure, but also contributes to the sense of life satisfaction. Clearly, path analysis highlights the pivotal mediating role of online self-disclosure on the associations between Weibo interaction, friendship maintenance, and satisfaction with life. That is, Weibo could lead university students to have closer and higher quality connections as well as greater life gratification through expressing their real aspects of themselves during the computer-mediated communication. As confirmed by recent studies (Trepte et al., 2018; Wei and Gao, 2017), this relationships may be attributable to the truth that in the web-based media setting, users who present their greatest worries, hopes, and emotions would receive importantly more attention and assistance and feel more connected to other people than members who do not reveal much personal information, communication with individuals would subsequently increase a sense of comfort such as mutual trust and closeness, and therefore boost the feeling of life satisfaction.

Finally, contrary to anticipation showed in Hypothesis 6, the result demonstrates that friendship maintenance is not positivity associated with self-reports of life satisfaction. In other words, people who sustain intimate interpersonal relations could not boost the gratification with their online social life. Therefore, this is not consistent with recent evidence that relationship quality is positively related to self-ratings of both cognitive and affective dimensions of happiness and life satisfaction well-being (Chan, 2018). It is possible that although social connectedness would could bring about support, assistance, and mutual understanding to people (Desjarlais and Joseph, 2017), it may not be recognized as a vital resource of feeling of happiness (Liu and Yu, 2013). Actually, other psychological factors including extraversion, self-esteem, social capital, as well as low degrees of psychological distress are also crucial elements of online positive affect especially life satisfaction (Dean and Lin, 1977; Diener and Seligman, 2002; Lopes et al., 2011).

6.2. Theoretical and practical implications

Based on the findings of this study, the empirical work provides a couple of theoretical implications. First, although Weibo has become one of the most popular social media platforms among university students in Mainland China, relatively few studies have systematically uncovered the unique characteristics of the new communication technology and its psychosocial implications in the digital age. Thus, the current study represents one of the few attempts to more carefully unearth how utilizing Weibo could ultimately contribute to the student population's relational maintenance and life satisfaction. Consisting with pervious studies (Chen and Li, 2017; Skoric et al., 2016; Trepte et al., 2018), the outcomes demonstrate that Weibo could improve university students' real-world relationship maintenance and satisfaction with life. Second, the research extends past work on social media communication and well-

being by identifying the mediating impacts of an individual's self-disclosure in the microblog context. The results indicate that if students who require to foster their quality of existing friendships and psychological health, they could first disclose more personal information about themselves on the SNS. Hence, self-disclosure behaviors within social media platforms could bring specific values that are fundamental for peoples' overall evaluation of the benefits that the online revealing practice gives them (Huang, 2016). Therefore, this result may offer a better comprehending on the association between individuals' self-disclosure behaviors, relationship maintenance, and online social well-being on the SNS.

The work also has several practical implications for microblog designers, providers and managers. First, a finding of possible interest to designers is that young people utilize Weibo more intensity may be more likely to disclose their personal information in the online setting. Moreover, interaction on Weibo could boost both relationship quality and life satisfaction. Therefore, microblog designers could develop support online functions or affordances for Weibo users that permit them to actively communicate and participate, further strengthening the positive impact of the innovative media on the satisfactory online social life (Dang, 2018; Desjarlais and Joseph, 2017; Huang, 2016). Second, the study demonstrates the significant role of online self-disclosure in helping individuals to foster their friendship maintenance and the sense of life satisfaction. Microblog managers could continue to develop novel and useful services that fulfill members' needs to express themselves, form and maintain social connections, and have a happy online social life. Thus, managers could devote more attention to encourage users to reveal themselves on the social media, so that they could establish the meaningful connections necessary for a satisfying experience with the communication tool. As scholars have suggested, computer-mediate interaction may exert a positive effect on individual's relationship maintenance and gratification with life only if it is utilized for interaction with real-world friends (Gibbs et al., 2006; Valkenburg and Peter, 2007).

6.3. Limitations and suggestions for future research

The work has a series of limitations that need to be cautioned in the follow-up studies. Firstly, the target participants are homogeneous population from university students in Mainland China. Obviously, the results cannot be generalized to other demographic groups especially young adults who are not in the university and other age cohorts. Accordingly, it is the task of future studies to explore whether the research model established in the study could be well supported by distinct samples. Second, the present study applied the cross-section design, which would prevent the identification of causal associations (Huang, 2016; Pang, 2018b; Tian, 2013). Although the path model confirmed that Weibo use would positively influence individuals' online self-disclosure, relationship maintenance, and sense of life satisfaction. However, it is also possible that a higher level of friendship quality and gratification with life may lead individuals to actively participate in supportive communication with others through such new media tool. Therefore, further investigations could perform a longitudinal study to examine the causal connections mentioned here. Lastly, the research merely concentrates on various positive consequences of SNSs adoption. Actually, like other patterns of social media, the excessive use of Weibo may lead to addiction and eventually has a negative influence on users' well-being health (Wang et al., 2013). Hence, to overcome this limitation, further exploration need to uncover the harmful effect of Weibo usage on social and psychological well-being and expand the horizon of the research on SNS communication.

7. Conclusion

In sum, the article is an initial effort to unearth the underlying mechanisms through which Weibo may potentially impact university students' meaningful social relationships as well as well-being consequences in contemporary China. This present work's greatest contribution is the result that Weibo use intensity would ultimately lead to the improvement of users' relationship maintenance and life satisfaction in the computer-mediated space. Additionally, the study demonstrates that online self-disclosure plays the crucial mediatory role in the relationships between Weibo use, quality of relationships, and gratification with life. Concentrating on individual's online self-disclosure behaviors may aid in comprehending the intricate associations between SNS utilization and distinct social and psychological factors. Thus, the current study of Weibo may provide valuable insights into the deeper understanding the characteristics of microblog and its potential impact on relationship maintenance and life quality in the new media context.

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