



# WeChat Moments use and self-esteem among Chinese adults: The mediating roles of personal power and social acceptance and the moderating roles of gender and age<sup>☆</sup>

Yi'nan Wang<sup>a,\*</sup>, Ruihong Nie<sup>b</sup>, Ziyi Li<sup>a</sup>, Nan Zhou<sup>b,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Beijing Key Laboratory of Applied Experimental Psychology, National Demonstration Center for Experimental Psychology Education, Faculty of Psychology, Beijing Normal University, Beijing 100875, China

<sup>b</sup> Institute of Developmental Psychology, Beijing Normal University, Beijing 100875, China

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## ABSTRACT

The present study examined whether and how specific use behaviors of WeChat Moments, the most popular social network site (SNS) in China, relate to users' self-esteem. Three hundred and twenty-five Chinese adults (53.85% female;  $M_{age} = 32.67$ ,  $SD = 7.70$ ) completed online measures of WeChat Moments use behaviors, personal power, social acceptance, and self-esteem. We found that WeChat Moments use intensity and received likes are positively associated with self-esteem, whereas status updates are negatively associated with self-esteem. We found further that personal power and social acceptance mediate the associations of WeChat Moments use intensity and received likes with individuals' self-esteem. Moreover, gender and age emerged as significant moderators. The current study provides evidence for the association between WeChat Moments use and self-esteem among Chinese adults and contributes to the literature by clarifying the equivocal findings, as well as uncovering the underlying mechanisms of the relationship between SNSs use and self-esteem.

## 1. Introduction

Online social networking sites (SNSs) have grown in popularity in recent years and have provided a promising area of study in the field of social sciences (Kosinski, Matz, Gosling, Popov, & Stillwell, 2015; Wilson & Graham, 2012). The extent to which individuals integrate SNSs into their lives (i.e., use intensity) and the number of likes received on SNSs may enhance their social capital and perceived prestige and thus may be vital predictors of self-esteem (Harter, 2001; Liu & Baumeister, 2016; Nesi & Prinstein, 2015).

Previous evidence concerning the impact of SNS use on individuals' self-esteem mainly focused on Facebook use and the findings are equivocal. Furthermore, given that most studies on Facebook use used Western samples as Facebook is blocked in China, little is known about whether and how SNS use relates to self-esteem among Chinese users. To address these gaps, the present study examined whether and how specific WeChat Moments use behaviors were related to self-esteem among Chinese users.

### 1.1. An overview of WeChat Moments as the most popular SNS in China

WeChat, also known as Weixin in China, was launched by China's largest listed Internet company, Tencent, in January 2011. Similar to Facebook, people can update their status with posting information (i.e., photos or verbal disclosures) and interact with others in WeChat Moments, such as clicking the "Likes" response to endorse content shared by friends or receiving "Likes" from friends (Kosinski et al., 2015). Due to its convenient access to both the Internet and cellphones, WeChat won its popularity among people across all ages, from young adolescents to elders. However, despite its growing popularity worldwide, there is a surprising lack of studies on how WeChat Moment use may be related to individuals' self-esteem.

### 1.2. SNS use and self-esteem

As noted above, there is a lack of consensus on the relationship between SNS use and individuals' self-esteem. On one hand, there is evidence that SNS use may be beneficial for individuals' self-esteem through providing positive feedback (Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten,

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\* Corresponding authors at: Beijing Normal University, No. 19, Xijiekouwai Street, Beijing, China.

E-mail addresses: [yynnawang@gmail.com](mailto:yynnawang@gmail.com) (Y. Wang), [nanzhouchina@gmail.com](mailto:nanzhouchina@gmail.com) (N. Zhou).

2006). Exposure to information presented on one's Facebook profile also can enhance self-esteem by allowing people to present preferred or positive information about themselves (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011), which might make positive public impressions. Therefore, SNS use might enhance self-esteem via providing positive feedback and increasing social capital.

On the other hand, some researchers argued that more Facebook activities and self-promotional contents on Facebook are related negatively to self-esteem (Kalpidou, Costin, & Morris, 2010; Mehdizadeh, 2010). For example, Mehdizadeh (2010) found that self-esteem related negatively to the number of times students checked Facebook per day and time spent on Facebook per session, as well as self-promotional content in the Main Photo section. Therefore, the negative correlation between Facebook use and self-esteem might be driven by self-promotional behaviors.

Going beyond the general amount of activity on SNS (i.e., total time spent on SNS), the use history (i.e., total length of SNS use), number of friends on SNS, use intensity (i.e., emotional connection to SNS and integration of SNS into daily lives), interactions on SNS (e.g., received likes), and status updates (i.e., verbal disclosures about oneself) are more relevant for self-worth (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Liu & Baumeister, 2016). Indeed, previous studies on Facebook use imply that it is the coexistence of positive feedback, social capital, and self-promotional behaviors that have led to the conflicting relationships between Facebook use and individuals' self-esteem. Hence, different WeChat Moments use behaviors may have differential associations with individuals' self-esteem. First, received likes on WeChat Moments may represent positive social feedback that would be associated positively with self-esteem (Valkenburg et al., 2006; Hypothesis 1). Second, greater WeChat Moments use intensity might help people to obtain more social capital through WeChat Moments use (Ellison et al., 2007), which may be beneficial for sustaining high self-esteem (Hypothesis 2). Third, given that self-promotional behaviors are found to be negatively related to self-esteem, we hypothesized that status updating would be associated negatively with self-esteem (Hypothesis 3).

### 1.3. The mediating roles of personal power and social acceptance

Previous research on SNSs implies that how people use SNSs may influence the liking and respect they have in SNSs (Bareket-Bojmel, Moran, & Shahar, 2016). Theoretically, individuals' relationships with others can be organized along two primary dimensions: a) how close, accepted, and connected they are with each other, which is the "social acceptance" dimension, and b) how much control, power, and agency they have vis-à-vis others, which is the "power" dimension (Anderson, John, & Keltner, 2012; Bakan, 1966; Hogan, 1982; Wiggins, 1979). According to a double perspective model (DPM; Wojciszke, Baryla, Parzuchowski, Szymkow, & Abele, 2011), agency (power) and communion (social acceptance) constitute two basic content dimensions of social cognition. Meanwhile, some evidence shows that both of them are equivalently related to self-esteem (Zeigler-Hill, 2010).

Sociometer theory posits that self-esteem is related to how people think they are being perceived and evaluated by others beyond an evaluation of one's personal attributes (Leary & Downs, 1995). For example, perceived social inclusion may lead to heightened self-esteem (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). More likes received on WeChat Moments may indicate higher levels of inclusion by others. Thus, WeChat Moments use might be related to self-esteem through social acceptance (Hypothesis 4).

In contrast to the sociometer theory that conceptualizes self-esteem as a yardstick for social acceptance, dominance theory suggests that self-esteem system evolves to monitor dominance (Barkow, 1975). A great deal of evidence has shown that personal sense of power, a perception of one's capacity to influence others, is a strong positive predictor of self-esteem between both Westerners (Adler, Epel, Casterlazzo, & Ickovics, 2000; Wojciszke & Struzynska-Kujalowicz,

2007) and Chinese (Wang, 2015a, 2015b). Given that updating status with exhibitions of success, achievements, or status might enhance individuals' personal power, WeChat Moments use might be linked to individual's self-esteem via personal power (Hypothesis 5).

In sum, we hypothesized that WeChat Moments use might be associated with self-esteem through social acceptance and personal power. Moreover, we speculated that demographic variables, such as gender and age, would condition the relationships among WeChat Moments use, sense of power, and social acceptance. For instance, men are thought to invest their self-worth more in social standing, while women invest their self-worth more in social acceptance (Kwang, Crockett, Sanchez, & Jr, 2013). Therefore, we hypothesized that personal power/social acceptance might show differential correlational patterns with self-esteem or WeChat Moments use behaviors across males and females. Furthermore, because younger people may use WeChat Moments for different purposes than older people (Wu, 2014), their self-esteem might have differential associations with various WeChat Moments use behaviors such as received likes or use intensity. As a result, we hypothesized that gender and age would moderate the associations among WeChat Moments use, personal power, social acceptance, and self-esteem (Hypothesis 6).

### 1.4. The present study

The present study examined WeChat Moments use, personal power, and social acceptance in the prediction of self-esteem among Chinese individuals. Specifically, this study aimed to address four questions: (a) Is WeChat Moments use related to self-esteem? (b) Which aspect of WeChat Moments use is associated more closely with self-esteem? (c) Will personal power or/and social acceptance mediate associations between WeChat Moments use behaviors and self-esteem? (d) Will gender and age moderate associations among WeChat Moments use, personal power, social acceptance, and self-esteem?

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Participants and procedures

Participants were 325 Chinese adults (150 males, 46.15%) that were recruited via a Chinese survey website (<http://www.sojump.com/>). Participants were paid 6 RMB (about \$1 U.S.) upon completion of the online questionnaires. Online consent forms were obtained prior to participating in this study. Participants' age ranged from 18 to 69 years old ( $M_{age} = 32.67$ ,  $SD = 7.70$ ).

All the questionnaires were presented in their Chinese versions. Following standard guidelines for the process of cross-cultural adaption of self-report measures (Beaton, Bombardier, Guillemin, & Ferraz, 2000), the English scales were translated into Chinese. All the scales were rated on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Self-esteem

We assessed self-esteem using the established and validated Chinese version of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965; Wang, Kong, Huang, & Liu, 2016). The 10-item self-esteem scale assesses individual's global self-worth, including both positive and negative feelings about the self. A sample item was "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself." Cronbach's alpha was 0.88.

#### 2.2.2. WeChat Moments use behavior

We used six indices to assess participants' WeChat Moments use. First, we used the revised 6-item Facebook intensity scale to measure individual's subjective involvement in WeChat Moments (Ellison et al., 2007), which assessed the extent to which the individual was

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