

Self-Technologies in WeChat Status Use among Chinese Youth: An Empirical Survey Study

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Abstract. With the deep popularization of social media, the social modes and self-expression paths of young people are constantly changing, and WeChat Status has gradually become a new daily expression space for young groups. Taking Foucault's "technologies of self" theory as the analytical framework, this study adopts the questionnaire survey method to conduct an empirical study on the WeChat Status usage behavior of young people aged 15-29, with a total of 173 valid questionnaires collected. It aims to explore the practices of self-expression, self-regulation and identity construction of young people in the semi-private digital social field. The study found that WeChat Status enables young people to express their emotions in a more relaxed and immediate way. Compared with maintaining a social image of "being seen", more and more young people are beginning to care more about "expressing themselves truthfully".

Keywords: WeChat Status, technologies of self, Foucault, self-presentation, digital sociality

1. Introduction

The deep popularization of mobile Internet and social media has reshaped the social modes and self-expression paths of young people. Platforms such as WeChat Moments, Xiaohongshu and Douyin have constructed "front-stage" [1] social scenarios, where users need to carefully edit content, maintain their personal images and deal with social interactions. British sociologist Zygmunt Bauman pointed out in his theory of Liquid Modernity that interpersonal relationships in modern society gradually show the characteristics of fluidity, fragility and instability, and individuals also face stronger insecurity and emotional pressure in continuous connection [2]. Long-term high-intensity social interaction has, to a certain extent, further aggravated the social fatigue and expression anxiety of young people, and more and more people have begun to rethink "how to express themselves".

In this semi-private digital social field, young people continuously regulate their emotions, social boundaries and self-images through behaviors such as posting, editing, deleting and setting visibility ranges. This practice method has a certain degree of consistency with the "technologies of self" [3] proposed by Foucault. "Technologies of self" emphasize that individuals achieve self-management, self-regulation and subject construction through active actions on their own behaviors and states. From this perspective, WeChat Status may also become an important medium for young people to carry out daily self-practices in the digital age.

Based on this, taking Foucault's "technologies of self" theory as the analytical framework, this paper adopts the questionnaire survey method to conduct an empirical study on the WeChat Status usage behavior of young people aged 15-29. It focuses on the basic characteristics, usage motivations and the underlying self-practice logic of young people's WeChat Status usage behavior, and further uses SPSS descriptive statistics and chi-square test to analyze the relationship between factors such as age and posting frequency and WeChat Status usage behavior. Through the discussion of "WeChat Status", this paper hopes to further clarify the needs and pain points of young people's social expression, help understand the psychological state and social demands of contemporary young people, and provide a new perspective for digital social research.

2. Literature review

2.1. Review of research progress on Foucault's "technologies of self" theory

The practice of "technologies of self" proposed by Michel Foucault in his later years refers to the operations that individuals "perform on their own bodies, souls, thoughts, and behaviors by their own strength or with the help of others, so as to transform themselves and achieve a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, or eternity" [3]. That is, individuals can actively manage and understand themselves, and form a certain subjectivity in specific practices.

In the ancient Greek context, "technologies of self" were often embodied in practices such as writing, keeping diaries, reflection, and self-cultivation. Through these methods, individuals practiced "to take care of oneself" (*epimeleia heautou*), "the concern with the self", and "to be attentive to oneself; to care for oneself". If this theory is placed in the digital media environment, can behaviors such as posting, editing, deleting, and setting permissions on social platforms also be understood as daily technologies for individuals to regulate their own states and manage their self-images? Does WeChat Status constitute a new type of "technologies of self"? What is the difference between this practice and self-presentation in traditional WeChat Moments? Can it help users get rid of social media burnout to a certain extent and regain control over self-expression? These questions are worthy of further consideration.

2.2. Review of research progress on WeChat Status usage

Existing studies have achieved certain results regarding WeChat Status. In the research on digital communication and visibility of WeChat Status, some scholars have pointed out that individuals use the "low visibility" of status to vent emotions and shape personal images. In the social field where relationships have been established, they conduct iconic performances through the "medium" of status to realize the connection and generation of relationships, achieving the effect of strengthening strong ties and maintaining weak ties [4]. Furthermore, WeChat Status is also regarded as a "light expression" tool to cope with social media burnout. Some studies believe that in the high-intensity online social environment, users often face continuous pressure of interpersonal connection and self-presentation. By posting "electronic diaries", opening online "tree holes" and constructing ritual "wish pools" through WeChat Status, they achieve subtle and comfortable social interaction [5]. Therefore, WeChat Status has to some extent become an alternative to WeChat Moments and a "stress-relief" space. The "light expression" it carries is not only the conciseness of the posted content, but also the relaxed mindset of posting [6].

At the same time, some studies have begun to focus on the issue of privacy boundaries in WeChat Status. Users will deliberately continue the relevant characteristics of content with high interaction

volume. While understanding themselves from others' evaluations and feedback, they change their truest selves, making the state they show develop towards the perfect self in others' eyes. This leads to a certain impact on the posted content, and then gradually deviates from the true self [7]. This indicates that there is still a certain degree of "self-discipline" behind WeChat Status [8]. In addition, some scholars have begun to understand subject construction in digital media from the perspective of "technologies of self", arguing that the "art of communication" in the social media era is transforming "self-discipline" into quantifiable and comparable "digital morality" [9].

In summary, although existing studies have paid attention to the social functions, self-presentation characteristics of WeChat Status and the practice of technologies of self in digital media, the discussion on WeChat Status as "technologies of self" is still insufficient. In particular, there is a lack of specific analysis on how young people conduct self-regulation and identity construction through behaviors such as posting, deleting, and setting permissions.

2.3. Research questions

Based on this, this paper proposes the following research questions around the WeChat Status usage behavior of young people:

RQ1: What characteristics does the WeChat Status usage behavior of young people present?

RQ2: What are the main motivations for young people to use WeChat Status?

RQ3: Are there significant relationships between factors such as age and posting frequency and WeChat Status usage behavior?

RQ4: How does WeChat Status reflect the "technologies of self" practice of young people?

3. Research design

3.1. Questionnaire design

The questionnaire targets young people aged 15-29 and consists of 6 dimensions with 27 questions, covering six modules: basic information, basic WeChat usage, status usage behavior, usage psychology and motivation, usage impact and cognition, and development suggestions. The question types are mainly single-choice and multiple-choice questions, supplemented by fill-in-the-blank questions and skip logic. It focuses on investigating posting frequency, usage scenarios, visibility range, deletion behavior, core motivations, persona construction, social impact and functional pain points.

3.2. Sample source

The questionnaire was distributed online through platforms such as WeChat and Wenjuanxing using the convenience sampling method. The sample covers four age groups: 15-17 years old, 18-22 years old, 23-25 years old, and 26-29 years old, including junior and senior high school students, junior college and undergraduate students, master and doctoral students, corporate employees and self-employed individuals. A total of 173 valid questionnaires were collected.

3.3. Data processing method

The study used Excel for data entry and cleaning. After excluding invalid questionnaires, statistical analysis was performed with SPSS. Specifically, descriptive statistics were used to present the characteristics of WeChat Status usage, cross-tabulation analysis and chi-square test were used to

compare differences between different groups, and frequency, proportion and correlation analysis were combined to explore the relationships among WeChat Status usage behavior, psychological cognition and social impact of young people.

4. Analysis and results

4.1. Sample description

This study targets young people aged 15-29 and distributed questionnaires through the Wenjuanxing platform, collecting a total of 173 valid questionnaires. Among the samples, females accounted for 63.01% and males accounted for 36.99%; the age was mainly concentrated in 18-22 years old, accounting for 85.55%; the identity was mainly junior college and undergraduate students in school, accounting for 83.82%. Among the 173 valid samples, 116 people had posted WeChat Status, and subsequent analyses on usage behavior, scenarios, motivations, etc. are all based on these 116 people.

Overall, the samples of this study show the characteristics of younger age, higher educational level and a high proportion of student groups, which are basically consistent with the main user groups of WeChat Status. However, since the samples are mainly concentrated in college student groups and the proportion of working young people is low, the research conclusions still have certain limitations in terms of sample representativeness.

4.2. Description of WeChat Status usage behavior

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of WeChat Status posting frequency (N=173)

Variable	Category	Number of people(N)	ratio(%)
Frequency of posting WeChat status updates	Rarely post	57	32.9
	1–2 times per month	55	31.8
	1–2 times per week	42	24.3
	1–2 times per day	13	7.5
	3 or more times per day	6	3.5

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of WeChat Status usage behavior (N=116)

Variable	Category	Number of people(N)	ratio(%)
Visibility of WeChat status updates	Public (visible to everyone)	79	68.1
	Friends only	26	22.4
	Classmates/colleagues only	7	6.0
	Close friends only	4	3.4
	Private (visible only to self)	0	0.0
Deletion of posted WeChat status updates	Never delete	40	34.5
	Occasionally delete	62	53.4
	Frequently delete	14	12.1

Note: Due to missing values in some items, this table is statistically based on the valid sample N=116.

It can be seen from Tables 1 and 2 that the "frequency of posting WeChat Status" among young people is relatively low. Nearly one-third of users almost never post WeChat Status, the majority of users post 1-2 times per month or per week, while the proportion of users who post frequently on a daily basis is relatively low. WeChat Status is more used as an occasional "instant expression" tool. In terms of the "visibility range of posted WeChat Status", public (visible to all) is the most common choice, accounting for 68.1%. Only a small number of users choose group-specific visibility or private visibility, indicating that WeChat Status still retains strong open social characteristics and the willingness to restrict privacy is weak. Regarding "whether you will delete posted WeChat Status", more than half of the users "occasionally delete" their posted WeChat Status, while the proportion of users who "frequently delete" is relatively low, showing that young people will dynamically adjust their posted content.

4.3. Analysis of WeChat Status usage characteristics

Table 3. Distribution of WeChat Status posting scenarios (multiple choice) (N=116)

Context of posting WeChat status updates	Number of people(N)	ratio(%)
Late night alone	27	11.0
During commuting / traveling to or from school	10	4.1
During leisure activities (watching shows, shopping, traveling, etc.)	75	30.6
During study/work breaks	38	15.5
When experiencing emotional fluctuations (happiness, sadness, irritation, etc.)	62	25.3
After gathering with classmates/friends	31	12.7
Other	2	0.8

Note: This is a multiple-choice question, so the cumulative percentage does not equal 100%.

As can be seen from Table 3, the scenarios where respondents post WeChat Status are mainly concentrated during leisure and entertainment and when experiencing emotional fluctuations. Among them, "during leisure and entertainment (watching dramas, shopping, traveling, etc.)" accounts for the highest proportion at 30.6%, followed by "when experiencing emotional fluctuations (happy, sad, irritable, etc.)" at 25.3%. These two scenarios together account for more than half, indicating that WeChat Status is mostly used to record daily emotions and immediate feelings. In contrast, the posting proportions during "study/work breaks", "after gathering with classmates/friends" and "when staying alone late at night" are relatively low. The proportion during "commuting/school commute" is the lowest, only 4.1%, and the "other" scenario accounts for less than 1%.

Overall, respondents post WeChat Status mostly during relaxed, stress-free daily moments or when their emotions fluctuate. They tend to express their current feelings rather than interact with others, which also reflects that WeChat Status is more inclined to private and personal expression characteristics.

Table 4. Distribution of WeChat Status posting motivations (multiple choice) (N=116)

Motivation for posting WeChat status updates	Number of people(N)	ratio(%)
Expressing current emotions (happiness, sadness, boredom, etc.)	84	32.1
Implicitly signaling one's state/thoughts to others	18	6.9
Attracting attention from classmates/friends/someone admired	16	6.1
Recording daily life for memory preservation	70	26.7
Sharing interests, hobbies, or observed experiences	47	17.9
Seeking understanding and emotional support from others	6	2.3
Presenting one's lifestyle to gain recognition	19	7.3
Other	2	0.8

Note: This is a multiple-choice question, so the cumulative percentage does not equal 100%.

As can be seen from Table 4, users' motivations for posting WeChat Status are mainly self-expression and recording, while motivations with social interaction attributes generally account for a low proportion. Among them, simply expressing current emotions (happy, sad, bored, etc.) is the most important motivation, accounting for 32.1%; the motivation of recording bits of life as a souvenir accounts for 26.7%. The motivation of sharing hobbies and what one has seen and heard accounts for 17.9%, while motivations with social interaction attributes such as showing life status to gain recognition, hinting one's own status/thoughts to others, and attracting others' attention all account for less than 10%. The proportion of seeking understanding and comfort from others is only 2.3%, and "other" accounts for the least, only 0.8%. Overall, users post WeChat Status more for private self-expression and life recording rather than to gain others' attention or interaction, which further reflects the personalized and non-utilitarian expression characteristics of WeChat Status.

4.4. Analysis of group differences

This paper uses the Chi-square test to analyze the relationships between age, posting frequency and WeChat Status usage behavior, so as to examine whether there are significant differences among different variables. Due to missing values in some items, the valid sample sizes of different variables vary, so the following analyses are all based on the valid samples of each item. Since the expected frequency of some cells is less than 5, the results of the Chi-square test are for reference only. Future studies can expand the sample size or merge categories for re-examination.

Table 5. Distribution of WeChat Status posting frequency among different age groups (N=173)

Age group	Rarely post	1–2 times per month	1–2 times per week	1–2 times per day	3+ times per day	Total
15–17 years old	6	2	4	0	1	13
18–22 years old	44	50	36	13	5	148
23–25 years old	4	2	2	0	0	8
26–29 years old	3	1	0	0	0	4
Total	57	55	42	13	6	173

Note: The Chi-square test was used to analyze the relationship between age and WeChat Status posting frequency, $\chi^2=9.949^a$, $df=12$, $p=0.620$.

As can be seen from Table 5, the results of the Chi-square test show that there is no significant relationship between age and WeChat Status posting frequency ($p > 0.05$). Overall, all age groups are dominated by low-frequency posting, and the proportion of users who post frequently on a daily basis is relatively low. No significant effect of age factor on WeChat Status posting frequency was found. This result, to a certain extent, indicates that as a lightweight and low-pressure expression tool, the usage of WeChat Status has strong universality among young people, and does not show obvious differentiation due to age differences.

Table 6. Distribution of WeChat Status posting frequency and deletion behavior (N=116)

Posting frequency	Never delete	Occasionally delete	Frequently delete	Total
1–2 times per month	19	31	5	55
1–2 times per week	15	23	4	42
1–2 times per day	5	5	3	13
3 or more times per day	1	3	2	6
Total	40	62	14	116

Note: The Chi-square test was used to analyze the relationship between posting frequency and deletion behavior, $\chi^2=5.474^a$, $df=6$, $p=0.485$.

As can be seen from Table 6, the results of the Chi-square test show that there is no significant relationship between WeChat Status posting frequency and deletion behavior ($p > 0.05$). Whether for low-frequency posting users or high-frequency posting users, "occasionally delete" is the most common choice, while the proportion of users who "frequently delete" is relatively low, and the overall difference is not obvious. This result, to a certain extent, indicates that young people's management of WeChat Status content is more affected by factors such as emotional changes, content timeliness and personal expression needs, rather than simply determined by posting frequency. Compared with long-term display content such as WeChat Moments, the short-term visibility feature of WeChat Status also reduces users' content management pressure to a certain extent.

4.5. Interpretation of results

The study found that WeChat Status has become a lightweight and low-pressure daily expression tool among young people. How to use it and in what way to use it also reflect their new changes in expressing themselves and conducting social interactions in the digital age.

In terms of function, unlike WeChat Moments which is a "long-term display", WeChat Status features 24-hour time-limited display, simple operation and almost no need for elaborate content creation, which just fits young people's needs to express emotions immediately and casually share fragments of life. In this study, respondents generally did not post very frequently, most posted publicly, and occasionally deleted their statuses. This shows that young people do not need to spend a lot of time polishing content. A random status word or a simple picture can complete a daily expression with a very low threshold.

In terms of motivation, the main reason why young people use WeChat Status is to express their current emotions and casually record their lives, while utilitarian ideas such as deliberate social display and seeking attention account for a low proportion. This also shows that young people now have a tendency of "social burden reduction": compared with carefully maintaining their image and dealing with various interactions on WeChat Moments, the low-interaction and time-limited form of

WeChat Status has helped them relieve a lot of social pressure, making expression more "for themselves" rather than carefully displaying to others.

In terms of variable relationships, there is no obvious correlation between age and posting frequency, nor between posting frequency and deletion behavior. This shows that the usage mode of WeChat Status, a lightweight expression tool, is quite common among young people, and there will be no particularly obvious differences due to age or how often they post. Of course, many respondents also mentioned that the current WeChat Status still has problems such as insufficiently novel forms, inability to save content for a long time, and too single interaction methods. These limitations also make it temporarily unable to fully meet young people's needs for personalized and continuous expression, and there is room for optimization in the future.

In conclusion, WeChat Status has become a low-cost and low-pressure small space for young people to express themselves. It meets respondents' needs for instant expression, emotional release and casual recording in a lightweight way, and to a certain extent, reflects that the social expression of young people in the digital age is gradually shifting from "strong social display" to "self-expression with weak social pressure".

5. Discussion

5.1. WeChat Status as a daily "technology of self" for young people

WeChat Status has become a daily practice of digital "technology of self" for young people, embodying the core connotation of Foucault's "concern with the self". Users express their emotions and record their lives through posting behaviors to achieve self-cognition and emotional regulation; they independently regulate the boundaries of self-presentation and complete the selective display of self-image by setting visibility ranges; they revise and clean up existing content through deletion behaviors to realize the dynamic adjustment of their own states. Goffman argued that individuals constantly adjust their behaviors and expressions through "impression management" in social interactions to shape their self-image in the eyes of others [1].

This "technology of self" has the characteristics of low cost, low threshold and high autonomy. Compared with persona-based social spaces such as WeChat Moments that require long-term maintenance, WeChat Status does not need complex creation and continuous operation, allowing young people to complete self-expression and self-regulation in a more lightweight and immediate way. Its focus has also gradually shifted from "showing to others" to "expressing true feelings at the moment", reflecting young people's active self-care and self-management in digital social interactions.

5.2. WeChat Status presents a "semi-private social" characteristic

WeChat Status constructs a "semi-private social" space between public and private, with characteristics such as lightweight, weak interaction, short-term visibility and controllable social circles. The 24-hour time-limited display reduces the social pressure caused by content precipitation, weak interaction reduces users' burden of feedback and evaluation, and the permission setting dominated by public visibility retains the basic social connection function, forming an expression field that "combines openness and privacy". Foucault long ago proposed that individuals in modern society are often in a state of continuous "being watched" [8], and WeChat Status has weakened this continuous "gaze" pressure to a certain extent.

This semi-private characteristic has reduced the expression risks and social burdens of young people to a certain extent. On the one hand, openness can maintain basic connections in acquaintance social interactions; on the other hand, time-limitedness and weak interaction allow users to avoid excessively catering to others' evaluations, making it easier to express immediate emotions and true states. WeChat Status has thus become an important buffer space for young people to seek a balance between self-expression and social maintenance.

5.3. Insights into the social situation of young people

Contemporary young people live in a social environment intertwined with intensifying involution, workplace pressure, family expectations and face culture. Traditional social scenarios require them to bear multiple burdens such as image maintenance and human interaction, leading to a continuous rise in social pressure. With its characteristics of low pressure and light expression, WeChat Status has become an important outlet for young people to relieve social anxiety and release emotional pressure, serving as a social buffer zone in the digital age.

This practice of technology of self is essentially an active adjustment of young people to cope with social pressure: they achieve emotional catharsis through lightweight expression, maintain psychological balance through self-regulation, and protect their personal space through semi-private social interactions, reflecting young people's pursuit of comfortable social interactions and true expression. From a social perspective, the popularity of WeChat Status reflects young people's reflection on excessive and utilitarian social interactions, and calls for a social model that respects individual feelings more and has lower burdens.

In the future, social products should continue the design concept of lightweight and autonomy, optimize content forms, retention mechanisms and interaction methods, and create an expression space that better meets the needs of young people. At the social level, attention should also be paid to young people's social and psychological needs, and an inclusive and relaxed social atmosphere should be created to help young people achieve healthy self-practice and social life.

6. Conclusion

German thinker Byung-Chul Han pointed out in **The Burnout Society** that individuals in modern society are moving from a "disciplinary society" to an "achievement society", and people gradually fall into mental exhaustion in continuous self-presentation and self-optimization [10]. With the continuous development of digital social interaction, more and more young people have begun to rethink the way people connect with each other, and they are trying to pursue a social relationship with lower burdens and more respect for individual feelings. Compared with "managing their personal personas", perhaps they prefer to keep their own emotional space. Behind those "WeChat Statuses" that appear briefly and disappear quickly, there may be a way for them to find a place for themselves and practice self-care in a fast-paced society.

Certainly, this study still has certain limitations. The samples are mainly college students, with insufficient coverage of working young people, and no significant differences have been formed between some variables, indicating that the usage logic of WeChat Status still has room for further discussion. Future research can combine methods such as in-depth interviews and platform observation to further explore the self-practice methods of different young groups in digital social interactions.

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