

Identify the Impact of Digital Censorship on Social Media Usage and Human Thinking: Special Reference to the WeChat Social Media Platform

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Abstract - Social media information and usage are among the highest discussed topics in today's world. The study has been conducted about WeChat social media, which is similarly used to Facebook in China. This platform has been implemented by China, and its mainly used in China currently. Due to the vivid discourse related to social media information in the contemporary world, this research has been conducted to identify the factors and information sharing through censored social media platforms. Further identified the major differences that users feel in the two different social media platforms, such as Facebook and WeChat. This is a qualitative study. This study has collected the data through qualitative methods such as interviews and content analysis. The interviews have been conducted with 20 foreign employees and Chinese PR holders with foreign citizens. The study used the purposive sampling techniques. The data analysis has been conducted with thematic and content analysis. The study indicated that entertainment Celebrations with friends/ Family, travelling and sightseeing, advertising and marketing, achievements and success personal, achievements and success business and official, international fairs and exhibitions, motivational memes, funny memes, food photography and videos are mainly reported through the WeChat social media platform. Further, the study indicated that the WeChat social media platform is safe to use as a social media, and it's making daily life easier. The e-wallet safety is a very important option in WeChat, as per the respondents. Moreover the WeChat is an official and personal social media platform in China. As per the analysis, it indicated that there are the least cyber discriminations and conflicts, no fake information and false news, no cyber harassments, no sensitive and emotional contents, no online Chatter, hate messages and incitements. Therefore, the present study results support the hypothesis that digital censorship on social media creates a safe and secure society and it positive impact towards human thinking. More interestingly, it indicated that the censorship doesn't interfere towards the freedom of speech and thinking as long as there is no harm to society and social behaviour.

Keywords - WeChat, Social media platforms, Digital censorship.

I. INTRODUCTION

With the invention of the internet, the world's communication systems and technology have been developed. Therefore, different new media platforms were born in the world. With this the human communication was changed, and it created a networking communication system for the masses. Social media was the invention of networking among human society. Further the social media could be identified as a creation of technological development to emphasise Americanization to the world in a different way. Because the social media domains and servers are under the control of the United States and they have the power to control the social media platforms. But American-invented social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp are used by many countries in the world which has a democratic political system.

Even though most of the countries in the world use the Western domain social media, China, as a country, do not use any of the Western domain social media platforms. Therefore, China invented their own platforms instead of Western platforms. Therefore, China has WeChat, Alipay, Yuko, Weibo, Meituan, etc. Which are more developed and have added more functions than the American-invented social media platforms? As China is a communist-based nation in the world, they do have censorship for digital media platforms. People are free to use social media platforms in China; hence, they can't harm the people or the state through information sharing. This

present study has been conducted in order to identify the major differences between censored and uncensored social media platforms and their impact on society. Further, the research indicates that the information and content are reported through censored social media. The present study has two main hypotheses: that media censorship creates a safe and secure society, and it has a positive to human thinking in society.

II. METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study. Data has been collected through content analysis and interviews. Interviews were conducted with 20 foreign employees and Chinese PR holders with foreign citizens who use both censored and uncensored social media platforms (Facebook and WeChat). Further, the study used WeChat content analysis for a period of a period 01.10.2024-02.11.2024. The data were collected under a purposive sampling strategy. Data was analysed through content and thematic analysis.

III. FINDING RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As per the interview analysis, the present study identified several themes as the major differences between censored and uncensored social media information. Therefore, the indicated themes could be specified as below.

A. Safety of Using Social Media

The participants mentioned that WeChat is very safe to use as a social media platform. This can only create one account for one person, as it requires the ID card and face recognition. Further, the User name cannot be changed, and it will be the same user's name forever in the WeChat account. Therefore, it's not possible to have any fake accounts in WeChat, as on Facebook. According to the participants, this is one of the safest social media platforms they have used in their lives.

Further, the participants have mentioned that it has more secure functions than Facebook. WeChat could link to the personal bank accounts to make all types of payments, as China is least encouraged to use physical currency. As per the participants, it's not possible to live in China without WeChat, as China has made everything digitalised in today's world. Further, the participants mentioned that it's very important to have a WeChat account in China, and it's very easy and safe to use.

Moreover, they have mentioned that WeChat posts will not show publicly, and they can only be seen by friends. Even the mutual friends won't be able to see the posts. Therefore, it has the safety of sharing the posts and images as they can only be seen by known people. As per the participants, WeChat is a combination of WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and PayPal. Because WeChat has many features in one platform. The participants also indicated that WeChat has high security features, so the person won't have any safety issues with money transferring and online payments. This security has been implemented due to the high censorship of the government, where users won't be able to engage in fraudulent activities by using social media.

The participants indicated that they as foreigners, they feel safe using WeChat as it has fully secure functions. Further, they have mentioned that any security issues that occur with the WeChat payments and making friends from WeChat will be stopped automatically unless the security exam is passed by the user. The participants mentioned this could be identified as the major difference between WeChat and Facebook.

B. Making Daily Life Easier

As per the participants, they have mentioned that WeChat is making their daily life easier in China. According to them, there is no one living in China without a WeChat account, as it's the main and easiest way to do many things in China.

They have mentioned that they are using the app to purchase day-to-day essentials from shops, quick and safe money transfers, purchase transportation tickets, movie tickets, mobile recharge and many more daily essential services. According to the participants, none of the social media they have used to made their daily life work easier. They also mentioned that they can post their images and ideas in WeChat moments.

They can also communicate with people using video, audio and text message options. Therefore, the participants mentioned that in China, they need this WeChat app to do everything, which makes daily life in

China. The majority have mentioned that they cannot see any Western domain social media platform which makes daily life safer like the WeChat app.

C. WeChat is an Official and Personal Social Media Platform

As per the audience, they have mentioned that WeChat is one of the official and also a personal usage social media platform. Thus, this is very different from Facebook. As per the participants the WeChat is used inside companies, schools, government offices and etc. for their official work. They do have a separate QR code for different works created by the company or the department, and the WeChat users could do the work by scanning the QR code through their own WeChat. Therefore, this WeChat make official work easier and smoother. Further, the WeChat official work is more credible and accurate.

Further, the official WeChat accounts by the companies could share their own company news, and the WeChat users could read the news and information as well. The news shared through the platform is true and accurate. Therefore, it's easy to get most of the official work done with having WeChat account in China. Moreover, even in the office place the information sharing and spreading mostly happens through WeChat platforms. The petty cash, emergency cash and etc. also being done through WeChat money transfers, which is official and safe. The WeChat groups are created for employees to share any information through the platform for all members, and this is more popular in China than email information sharing. This is a very quick and easy way to share information in the workplace. Therefore, the participants have indicated this as the major difference in the WeChat social media platform.

D. No Cyber Discrimination and Conflicts

The participants indicated that WeChat has no news related to spreading religion or political information. Therefore, participants mentioned that the two most spoken-about topics on Facebook aren't sharing information on WeChat. The most spoken, discriminating and conflicting topics according to the participants were religion and politics.

Thus, this makes the mental peace to use WeChat as a social media platform. Because on FB, politics and religion are major issues which create more discrimination and issues in society. WeChat had no space for this information and no political and religious discourses, extremist ideas, nor conceptual sharing. Moreover, WeChat doesn't have the space for any gender discrimination on the WeChat platform. According to the participants, this makes the users feel safe and at mental peace.

E. No Fake Information and False News

Further, they have mentioned that there is no fake information, misinformation, disinformation or mal information. According to the respondents, this is one of the major differences they have identified through WeChat. As WeChat has high censorship, there is no fake information shared with the users. This makes the society safer by only sharing true and accurate information with the audience.

Due to this, the audience uses WeChat and does not have any issue trusting which shared through the app. As the participants mentioned, most of the time, Facebook includes fake and false information, which makes the audience not trust the information shared through Facebook. Further, this has been a huge issue for the users as well. But with WeChat, they started to see lots of fake news, which is not happening on WeChat due to censorship. Thus, this male society is more peaceful and safer.

F. No Cyber Harassment

The participants have indicated that no cyber harassments through WeChat. On Facebook, most of the time, it shows information harassing celebrities, women, and different people, which makes the users feel very unsafe and insecure. Due to high security and censorship, it's not allowed to harass anyone through the WeChat platform.

This situation is making the audience use WeChat without any issue, and it doesn't see any negative ideas and vibes about different parties. Hence, the participants mentioned that Facebook pages make an open and free platform for users and cause some users to lose the freedom of some users with harming their personal life. As

per WeChat, it is not allowed to share or comment to harass anyone through their accounts. This saves the user's personal life.

G. No Sensitive and Emotional Content

The participants have mentioned that no sensitive contents are being reported or shared on WeChat, such as accidents, harassments, deaths in wars, murders and other sensitive contents. According to the participants, this is a good thing as society does not have any negative influence on their minds and does not get any true story experiences and influence themselves to do any harmful activities.

According to the participants, this is a huge difference between Facebook and WeChat. As Facebook could share any sensitive content and it has a huge negative impact on human thinking, which will not happen through WeChat, which makes society more peaceful. The users are not influenced to any negative activities through WeChat information due to censorship, and this impact positively to society's thinking.

H. No Online Chatter, Hate Messages and Incitements

The participants have indicated that the online chatter is one of the biggest things that they cannot observe through WeChat. Because WeChat moments can only be seen by friends, it's not possible to see the comments or reactions from mutual friends. Therefore, the online chatter, which is highly influential for human perception, isn't encouraging through WeChat. As per the results, this is impacting positively on society as there is no negative e-WOM for the different incidents in China. This makes a safer society.

As society faces many issues due to the flow of information, China has made an initiative to limit these issues from occurring through social media platforms. Further, the incitements and hate messages are not being seen through the WeChat social media platform due to censorship. The participants indicated that much research indicates that social media hate messages and incitements are affecting human thinking negatively, and this could create issues in human society. Thus, in China, it is not happening due to censorship.

Table 1. The Content Analysis Indicated that the Most Reported Information on WeChat

Factors/ Information Themes	Reporting Frequency		
	Low	Medium	High
Entertainment – Celebrations with friends/ Family, Travelling and sightseeing		X	
Advertising and marketing			X
Achievements and success – personal		X	
Achievements and success in business and official			X
International fairs and exhibitions			X
Motivational Memes		X	
Funny memes		X	
Food photography and videos		X	

Therefore, it's clear that social media usage is basically for personal and official purposes. Thus, the main use is for business development and official content to share.

IV. CONCLUSION

According to the majority of the participants, WeChat has more safer, user-friendly approach than Facebook. Further, the censored social media is positively affecting society and social development. As per the participants, the WeChat social media is not limiting freedom, hence it limits the issues which could occur in a bigger society. According to most of the participants, censorship in social media is making a fully secure society with positive mindsets and approaches. Therefore, the present study results support the hypothesis that digital censorship on social media creates a safe and secure society and has it positive impact towards human thinking.

V. REFERENCES

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