



UNIVERSITY OF LAPLAND  
**LAPIN YLIOPISTO**

**JIE XIE**

**SELF-PRESENTATION AND GENDER OF CHINESE  
OVERSEAS STUDENTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA**

**—A CASE STUDY OF SINA WEIBO**

Master Thesis

Media Education

Spring Semester, 2014

University of Lapland, Faculty of Education

# **ABSTRACT**

**Jie Xie**

Self-presentation and Gender of Chinese Overseas Students On Social Media—A Case Study of Sina Weibo

Master Thesis -- Media Education Programme

University of Lapland, Faculty of Education

Spring Semester, 2014

Number of Text Pages: 80; Number of Appendices Pages: 4

Chinese micro-blogging sites have been developing dramatically in the past 5 years. Therefore, China is an interesting context in which to study Chinese young adults' self-presentation and gender identity on the most popular social media, Sina Weibo. This is a master thesis about self-presentation and gender on Sina Weibo. Six Chinese overseas students and their Weibo accounts were under investigation in this research and four participants were also interviewed. Three of the participants are female users and the rest are male users, including two homosexual participants.

The data was collected in November-December 2013 which consists of 6 Weibo accounts and 4 interviews. Content analysis was applied as the main methods in this research. An affordance perspective of social media was utilized as theoretical framework and three affordances were focused on in particular: visibility, interactivity and individuality.

The results from the analysis of three affordances of Weibo reveal that Sina Weibo serves as an open and dynamic platform for Chinese youngsters by encouraging social connection and enabling them to multimedia self-expression. However, social connection on Weibo was found not tight between participants and their audiences. The gender differences in use patterns and preferences were also found on Weibo. However, there is a big gap of social media skill among users, only quite a few users can drive this vehicle well and become opinion leaders. Additionally, Weibo serves as an open virtual community for non-heterosexual group, but it cannot replace the reality from where non-heterosexual group still suffer.

## **KEYWORDS**

Social media, Weibo, Micro-blogging, self-presentation, affordances, gender differences

## **FURTHER INFORMATION**

I give permission the master thesis to be read in the Library.

I give permission the master thesis to be read in the Provincial Library of Lapland.

## Contents

1 INTRODUCTION .....	4
2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	10
2.1 Social Media Studies.....	10
2.2 Self-presentation on Social Media.....	13
2.3 Gender and social media study.....	15
2.4 Theoretical Framework: An affordance Perspective of Social Media .....	21
3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	25
4 METHODOLOGY .....	27
4.1 Research challenges with a second language.....	27
4.2 Participants and the Data .....	28
4.3 Data collection .....	30
4.4 Data Analysis .....	32
5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION .....	41
5.1 Self-presentation on Weibo .....	41
5.2 Gendered Self-presentation .....	57
6 CONCLUTION.....	66
6.1 Self-presentation.....	66
6.2 Gendered practice.....	67
6.3 Limitations and future direction.....	68
Reference.....	70
Appendix 1. Interview questions list.....	81
Appendix 2. Invitation letter for participation .....	83

# 1 INTRODUCTION

According to the recent report by China Internet Network Information Centre (CNNIC) of 2013, the amount of Internet users in China has reached to 530 million and the number of micro-blogging sites users is more than 170 million (CNNIC, 2013). Without any doubt, this is the biggest Internet user group in the world and the shape is still growing with a high speed with the development and ubiquitous of information communication technology (ICT) in China. How such giant group of Internet users applies new media in daily life and how their self-presentations look like on social media is well worth of investigating.

China social media launches a flourish development recently and diverse social media companies emerge with certain attributes. Ogilvy's China created an infographic to show the most popular social platforms in China thriving in place of the major international equivalent (see Figure 1). The info graphic map shows that, the local social media platforms have covered the majority of the social media categories, for instances, renren.com function as Facebook, Weibo is very close to Twitter with similar characteristics.



mainland of China: Qzone, QQ, Renren, Youku and Tudou, Sina Weibo (2013). And Sina Weibo gained became China leading micro-blogging sites with the similar functionalities of Twitter in the West and a great amount of users.

Sina Weibo was launched shortly after the clampdown of many earlier non-China-based micro-blogging services like Twitter, Facebook and Plurk in July of 2009. A Sina Weibo-compatible API platform for developing third-party applications was launched on 28 July 2010 (Fletcher, 2011). Similar to Twitter, Weibo combines blog, immediate news and communication tool together. It enables Chinese users to post status, express thoughts/opinions and build social relationship online frequently and seamlessly. With the dramatically increasing numbers of users in the last 3 years, Weibo has become the most popular one with more than 368 million users in August 2012 as reported. Weibo became the first successful micro-blog platform to be authorized after the clampdown (Ramzy, 2011; Gao, et al. 2011). It is also the first time for Chinese Internet users to connect with each other so tightly that a land agent can help a farmer sell apples and a movie star assists a helpless mother to find her baby. It is found that Weibo has rooted in Chinese daily lives and empowered users not only to obtain information immediately but also express them more freely (Zhou, 2009). Uncountable private pictures, thoughts, comments and emotions are floating on Chinese social media every second.

Besides the similarities with Twitter, Sina Weibo also embodies some distinct features to plead the specific demands of Chinese users. Firstly, unlike the English letter, the 140 Chinese characters limit provides Chinese users more capabilities to express themselves and makes it easier to follow and participate in online

conversations (Sullivan, 2012). Secondly, its celebrities-marketing strategy successfully stirred up public passion and characterizes itself as more white collared and well educated, compared to its main domestic competitor Tencent Wechat. Thirdly, Weibo users are found to be more passionate in content creation. Netpop (2011) reported that, on average, broadband users in China are heavier contributors to social media than their counterparts in the US (as cited in Sullivan, 2012, p.774). Lastly, unlike Twitter and other foreign micro-blogging sites, Sina Weibo inherits censorship from both internal and external sides. The management of Sina Weibo set strict rules of sensitive vocabulary which automatically prevent users from discussing sensitive political topics. Meanwhile, both the Sina Weibo and its users are strictly supervised by Chinese government.

It is much-condemned for China state mass media system with little freedom and presenting the government instead of the public (Hong, 1998; Schell, 1995). As the owner of mass media (Chu, 1994), the Chinese government carries out tremendous measures to prevent any 'harmful' information which potential threat to its domination. Communist party-state still exercises a tight control on press (Chen,1995, p.45). It is well known that there is limited access for people to self-expression and the public is underrepresented on the traditional mass media.

However, the public silence on Chinese media was immensely broken by the emergence of Internet at the beginning of 21th century. New media and communication technologies provide an informal, un-institutionalized and less supervised form of citizenship (Yu, 2006). Internet extremely releases the demand of self-expression on the public issues for Chinese. Those Internet users are described

as “Netizens” who are well educated and living in eastern coastal cities (Guo, 2002; Yu, 2006). Generally speaking, the development of information technologies provides modern Chinese audiences with more possibilities to seek and enjoy the ‘right to know’ and ‘right to speak’ (Yu, 2006), and the authoritarian control is no longer as stable and effective as before.

As the researcher of this study, I am also one of the normal users of Weibo who treat it as their necessities in their lives and spend plenty of time on it. After two years of using experience, I have found quite many interesting phenomena in the online self-presentation which are so diverse and fresh. On one hand, most of female accounts I have followed appear to be well educated, energetic and independent. On the other hand, male accounts appear to be more actively engaged in some ‘soft’ topics such as shopping, fashion, travelling and so on. Additionally, there is an interesting fact that the Weibo accounts of my overseas friends are very different from my domestic friends on Weibo.

Chinese overseas students are considered to be the main objective of this research. They were originally born in China and have cross-cultural experience abroad. With international experience, this new and modern generation of China holds relatively more critical vision and understanding on gender than their peers inside of China. In other words, the representation of the Chinese overseas students with their gender perceptions, to some degree, reflects the modern Chinese culture.

In this study, I apply content analysis method as my main research method to investigate self-presentation and gender on Sina Weibo. There are 6 participants

and correspondingly their Sina Weibo accounts are the main material source for this research. All the 6 participants are Chinese who are studying in the United States, Finland, France and UK separately. The content of their Sina Weibo accounts is the main data resource. Interview method is also applied into this research to collect extra relevant information about Weibo use and its influences.

The thesis consists of six chapters. After the introduction chapter I will present the literature review and theoretical framework which divided into 3 parts: social media studies, self-presentation on social media and gender within social media. The third part of this chapter is dealing with two main research questions of this thesis.

Chapter 4 deals with methodology; research materials, data collection and analysis will be introduced in details in this chapter. In the chapter 5, the results of this research will be presented with a discussion. Chapter 6 concludes the thesis in two perspectives, self-presentation and gendered practice. In the last part of Chapter 6, limitations and future direction are also mentioned.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In this part, I start with social media and then briefly review the literature of self-presentation and gender on social media. In the end, the methodological framework, the affordance perspective is introduced with three perspectives.

### **2.1 Social Media Studies**

According to the sociologists, daily posts contain meanings of poster-self. It is clear that social media are mainly conceived as a medium where ordinary people in ordinary social networks can create user-generated news (Murthy, 2012, p.1061).

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content”. With this general definition, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) divide those various kinds of social media into six classifications regarding to social presence/ media richness and self-presentation/self-disclosure, including collaborative projects, blog, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds and virtual social worlds (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. Kaplan & Haenlein’s classification of social media (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010)

		social presence/Media richness		
		low	medium	high
self presentation /self disclosure	high	blogs	social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Weibo, Weixin)	virtual social worlds (e.g., Second life)
	low	collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia)	Content communities (e.g., YouTube)	virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)

As we can see from table 1, blogs, the earliest form of social media, are considered as having lowest level of social presence due to the lack of effective content exchange. Social networking sites (SNSs) are expected to be on a higher level with text-based communication and virtual social worlds are on the highest level by simulating a real society. According to this definition and classification, Twitter and Weibo can be categorised as being on a medium level, regards to social presences and high self-presentation.

“The rise of SNSs brings both new benefits and dangers to society, which warrant careful consideration” (Wilson et, al, 2012). With the remarkable increase in the use of social media especially the development of social networking sites in the last 10 years, social media has become one of the most powerful sources of news updates. Due to the long-term global ubiquity (Boyd & Ellison, 2012), using social media has

influenced various aspects of both individuals' lives and society as a whole (Khang, Jung & Lan, 2012).

Firstly, the political power of social media has caught the eyes of both politicians and researchers since the social media hit the mainstream of media. The American president Barack Obama's usage of social media in his political campaigns has been regarded as canons. On the other hand, social media was blamed for enable rioting mobs to communicate with each other and organize riots in London in August of 2011 (Fuchs, 2012). With the Internet flourishing in the region, many Arabs are now able to express their opinions more freely online (Shapiro, 2009). There are also several notable political events detonated by Sina Weibo in China since 2009 such as the exposure of corruptions in local governments.

The influences caused by social media especially SNSs are not limited to politics. SNSs have infiltrated in many angles of individual life as well. Individuals may be at the centre of their own universes, and those universes can be very large thanks to the social networking potential of ubiquitous communication technologies (Bennett, 2012). In North America, research shows that 90% of students use social networking websites, 97% said they used Facebook (Smith & Caruso, 2010). "Given that SNSs enable individuals to connect with one another, it is not surprising that they have become deeply embedded in user's lives" (Boyd & Ellison, 2009, p.49). The role of social media play in the social construction has been globally recognized.

Referring to the study of Twitter which broke into the mainstream since 2009 worldwide, a great bulk of research is about its users in terms of a particular group.

For example, Marwick and Boyd (2011), studied on the celebrity group and their practice on Twitter and state that “celebrity practice is theoretically open to all; it is not an equalizer or democratizing discourse” (p.139). Frorini (2014) investigates the black users in term of race on Twitter and she found that the linguistic practice of “signifyin,” serves as a powerful resource for the performance of Black cultural identity on Twitter.

## **2.2 Self-presentation on Social Media**

Before we discuss about self-presentation I would like to specify the term of self which point to large, amorphous and changing phenomena. According to Ashmore and Jussin, self or identity is distinguished into two categories: individual-level phenomena and societal (cultural) –level phenomena (Ashmore & Jussin, 1990, p.6). Scheibe (1985) identifies two branches of societal self study: social roles and impression management. Researcher Goffman (1959) claims that, self-presentation is the process of packaging and editing the self in order to create a certain impression upon the audience and he also claimed that individuals were concerned with self-presentation during all social encounters. In short, self-presentation is a process of impression management or maintenance.

On the other hand, Nancy Thumim (2012, p.21) addresses two terms when referring self-presentation: ordinary people and communities. Community is referred to “a kind of comradeship that rests on a shared (imagined) history” (Thumim, 2012, p.24). It is suggested that self-presentation is the representation of the members’ selves individually from certain community. Due to the features of traditional media, most of

ordinary people in the society were not granted with the freedom to self-presentation instead of being presented until the emergence of digital media.

It is widely acknowledged that digital technologies have extremely eliminated the limitations of self-discourse and social communication (Buckingham, 2008). “In the never ending platform, epitomising the possibilities of a digital culture, it seems as if ordinary people might really speak for themselves (Thumim, 2012, p.136)”. Recent studies of self-presentation regarding Internet and online games reveals that the online identity and self-presentation are more fluid and changeable than physical identity in the real world (Gergen, 1991; Cho, 2006; Rose, et.al., 2012). Self-presentations of ordinary people today are conducted in high gear all around world with the development and popularization of global social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and Sina Weibo.

Due to China’s state mass media system, Chinese media has been condemned to leave little space for ordinary people to public disclose and Communist party-state system still exercises a tight control on press (Chen, 1994, p.45). However, the public silence on Chinese media was immensely broken by the emergence and ubiquitous of Internet at the beginning of 21th century (Yu, 2006). The great successes of Chinese social media networking sites are the best examples of self-presentation of ordinary Chinese people.

## **2.3 Gender and social media study**

This study addresses also participants' gendered presentation on Sina Weibo and their use patterns regarding gender. In the following part, the gender studies with social media are introduced and Chinese gender literature as a specific field is introduced afterwards.

### **2.3.1 Gender studies with Social media**

Since the early 1950s, a group of researchers have found that there are plenty of generalized differences ascribed to different sex/gender group in terms of roles, activities, psychological characteristics, behaviours and abilities (Hall, 1987; Williams & Best, 1990). The majority of gender/sex stereotypes studies have found that men are mostly characterized as more aggressive, independent, objective, dominant, active, competitive, logical, worldly and ambitious than women. On the other hand, women are stereotyped as generally more talkative, tactful, gentle, religious, neat, sensitive and emotional than men (Williams & Best, 1990; Stockard & Johnson, 1992). Gender discrepancies are considered to be natural. Those previous researches and methods indicate that men tend to be instrumental and most of women are apt to be expressive (Williams & Best 1990, p.21). Researchers have found gender differences in various angles on media in terms of access, attitudes, and use patterns (Li & Kirkupb, 2005).

Being an important part of self-presentation, gender has been a significant category in the study of media and communication fields. The misrepresentation and stereotypical portray of women on the mass media have been criticized and debated by feminists (Tuchman, 1978; Gallaher, 2005). The reason for feminists being interested in media and mass communication is based on a common sense: the media play an important role in constructing reality, eventually influencing audiences'

perception of gender or even producing gender (Gill, 2007, p.12). In the area of traditional media, gender has been fiercely debated regarding to male-dominance and female misrepresentation on media (Carter & Steiner, 2004) “ In the age of the informational and service economy, certain traditional ways of being male, rooted in the industrial revolution and its domestic division of labour, are becoming obsolete” ( Rutherford, 2003, p.1). Until the digital age, feminists argue that the virtual environment allows for the possibility of gender equality.

With the emergence of social media, gender studies on self-presentation and identity robust and gained fruitful findings. The evolution of social media now offer venues where individuals can consciously self-select and present virtual versions of themselves that can conform with, challenge, or defy societal expectations and media presentations (Rose, et. al, 2012). Some feminist commentators praise the rise of social media, including websites such as Facebook, because these tools privilege expressiveness and social skills, traits which is often considered feminine (Webb, 2012). In the late 1990s, some researchers argue that the digital technologies are gendered in some way, with information technologies being traditionally masculine (Wajcman, 1991; Cockburn & Ormrod, 1993). And digital divide of gender mainly referred to access and skills. With the development of information technology among women, the research scale on gender social media studies expand to cover use patterns and the effects of social media in re-producing gender. Research on Facebook finds that there are marked differences in terms of how males and females present themselves across a number of traits, including active, attractive, dependent, dominant, independent, and sentimental (Rose, et al., 2012). Gender differences including gender inequalities were found in the whole communication process.

Firstly, gender differences are observed in the context of social media (content of posts, profile information and images) which generated by user self. By observing the differences between women's and men's use of Facebook profiles, Strano (2008) found that women use their profile picture more than men for the purpose of impression management in order to be seen as attractive. Studies indicate that women are more likely to maintain up-to-date photos of themselves (Kolek & Saunders, 2008; Strano, 2008). Similarly, a study of MySpace, women were found to be more likely to write about family, romantic relationships, friendships, and health in their blogs (Jones et al., 2008). In the previous researches, female users are considered to be more inclined to employ text and images to enhance their impression of being attractive.

Secondly, it is found that gender discrepancies exist in the use patterns of social media such as preference, motivation, interests, language styles and social interactivity between female and male users. For instance, studies indicate that there are more female users on Facebook and MySpace but less on LinkedIn (Joinson, 2008; Lenhart, 2009). Female users in a multi-stage study to discover the motivations of Facebook users scored higher on scales for social connection and posting of photographs (Joinson, 2008). It is also found that men tend to employ competitive, factual, emotionless language, whereas feminine language tends to be expressive, inclusive, passive, cooperative, and accommodating (Webb, 2012). The social-ability of social media affords users to foster social interactivities.

Lastly, beyond the gender differences between female and male, the differences between heterosexual users and non-heterosexual users were also discovered from the gender social media studies. Sexual minorities are found to be more active engaging into social connection and interactive activities. For instance, according to research by Harris (2010) of 2,412 U.S. adults (aged 18 and over), the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) community is more active on social networks than heterosexuals. Aside from being more active on Facebook and Twitter, they are also more likely to read blogs – and as a result, most likely to be receptive to social media marketing (Harris, 2010). Though social media are viewed as a revolutionary platform for LGBTs, the role of social media in the process of gender production not seems always positive. Researcher Elm (2007) states that non-heterosexual identities are not always highly valued in networked publics, especially among young people. From more critical feminist (Rubin, 1993) and queer theoretical perspectives (Butler, 1990; Jagose, 2009) that plea for an anti-normative and anti-identitarian project, SNSs are problematic fixing tools par excellence. The centrality of gender differences has animated recent researches about the relationship between gender and social media.

### **2.3.2 Gender study in China**

“What gender means depends heavily on cultural values and practices; a culture’s definitions of masculinity and femininity shape expectations about how individual men and women should communicate; and how individuals communicate establishes gender that, in turn, influences cultural views” (Wood, 2009, p. 20). According to a great bulk of studies, the latest 30 years of China, women studies and gender studies flourished with fruitful researches. Along with the mainstream of

political ideology, modern Chinese gender study are dominated and led by Marxist feminist theory that causes marginalization of women in term of power relationship between genders (Chow et.al., 2004; Du, 2001). However, the improvement of gender status in temporary Chinese society has not kept the same pace with the fast growing economy.

Compared with western countries, the patriarchy culture is more formidable in China that interpenetrates into Chinese society with the prolonged oppression of women. In the ancient time of China, women were cultivated to obey men absolutely: obey their fathers before getting married and their husbands after. Under the male-chauvinism society, women were encouraged to shackle themselves to please men, even self-mutilation to match man-made beauty standard, such as the condemned foot binding since the tenth century. Foot binding, concubines and poor education are the three hot areas that have been studied concerning the gender inequality in China (Tao, 1994, p.142) Being submissive and inferior to the male-dominant social system has been rooted in Chinese culture for thousands of years which developed into a core code of female conduct.

It is said that, the Confucian tradition, together with Taoism and East Asian Buddhism embody anti-feminist elements that are essentially patriarchal (Lai, 2000). The traditional cultures have been playing extremely important roles in gender definition and behaving in China without doubt. The majority of Chinese women still consciously or unconsciously identify and value themselves with men, nowadays. According to Chen (2005), more than 71% of female college students perceive that

their own success can only be counted for when they get identified by their husbands and children.

Although modern Chinese women are growing up in the 'communist society', and are granted with equal rights literally in most perspectives (Li, 2002; Du, 2001), these literal equalities for women do not guarantee the real equalities in real life. Women's self-awareness and subject consciousness are waiting to be aroused universally (Li, 2001). In short, Chinese traditional customs and moral rules are still playing an important role of preventing women pursuing independence from gender.

By contrast, the research on Chinese women did not stimulate much interest in the subject of men or male culture. There are not many studies about Chinese men and men roles in modern China, let alone independent research about Chinese men.

There are views of Chinese men presented in Chinese women studies where men are blamed to be dominant on most aspects of the society, such as labour market, politics, and family. The portrayals of modern men in the advertisements are still stereotyped as rational, cool, professional successful, wise and powerful (Ouyang, 2005).

Although there is still a long way to achieve gender equality in Chinese community, the improvements of women's status are praiseworthy with the social reformation of China and 'One Child Policy'. According to the Third Wave Survey on The Social Status of Women in China (2011), the gap between males and females in China has

been tremendously narrowed down in last decade in terms of health, education, economy, social security, politics and marital statuses. Additionally, it is reported that female college students have better performance than their male counterparts and women inside of 'high-level talent' hold higher educational background than men (All-China Women Federation, 2011). In short, to some certain degree, the socialization and modernization of women in modern China, as well as the globalization and localization of Chinese gender study point out a new path to gender equality for Chinese. To study the gender consciousness and presentation of Chinese overseas students will be worthy in many perspectives which reflect the modern Chinese changes of culture.

## **2.4 Theoretical Framework: An affordance Perspective of Social Media**

In this research, I would like to involve an affordance lens of social media that affect the way in which users represent themselves. Gibson (1977) defined affordances as all "action possibilities" latent in the environment, independent of individuals' abilities to recognize them, while at the same time dependent on the actors' capabilities (Gibson, 1977). A technological object has some recognized functionality but needs to be recognized as a social object (Zammuto, et al., 2007) Functional affordances are viewed as relations between the technical object and its user (Markus & Silver, 2008). In short, the affordance perspective directs to study possibility and capability. In the specific case of Sina Weibo, self-presentation depends on the diverse functionalities of Weibo and the presentational abilities of Weibo users.

There are plenty of affordances of new technologies being discovered and identified in different fields (See table 2).

TABLE 2. An overview of the previous studies on the affordance of social media.

<b>Researcher(s)</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Affordances</b>
<b>Parks (2011)</b>	social networking sites to support a virtual community	1) Membership 2) personal expression 3) connection
<b>Halpern &amp; Gibbs (2012)</b>	social media for political expression	1) identifiability 2) networked information access
<b>Boyd (2010)</b>	networked publics	1) persistence 2) replicability 3) scalability 4) searchability
<b>The present research</b>	self-presentation and gender on social media	1) Visibility 2) Individuality 3) Interactivity

Parks (2011) derives three affordances of social networking sites to support a virtual community, and they are membership, personal expression and connection. Halpern and Gibbs (2012) identify two affordances of social media for political expression, identifiability and networked information access. Boyd maps out four affordances of networked publics, persistence, replicability, scalability and searchability (Boyd, 2010). Above, the affordances of social media could be discovered differently with different angle. In the specific case of the present research, I mainly investigate the possibility of self-presentation on Weibo and users' capacity of self-expression. Eventually, I formulated three main affordances of social media which mainly based on the previous study on the affordances of social media (Halpern & Gibbs, 2012; Boyd, 2010). They are visibility, individuality and interactivity.

### *2.4.1 Visibility*

The near synonyms of visibility when referring to the openness of information are publicity, searchability and accessibility which means the information is visible to others once get published on social media. Boyd claims that, the introduction of search engines has radically reworked the ways in which information can be accessed (Boyd 2010). Bregman and Haythornthwaite (2001, p.5) note that visibility “refers to the means, methods, and opportunities for presentation; in our usage, it primarily addresses the speakers’ concerns with the presentation of self”. In the particular case of Sina Weibo, users are able to follow all the posts of their ‘followings’, and browse other users’ profile information and all the published information on Weibo. Visibility also reveals the possibility for social media content to be embedding with multiple formats of data. The diverse formats of information make online presentation more vivid and attractive.

### *2.4.2 Interactivity*

The core spirit of social media is to enable people to socialize and to enable users to interact with others. It is widely acknowledged that most social media provides various tools to support public or intimate interactions between participants (Boyd 2010). Social media sites are virtual platforms for interactivity and information exchange (Perlmutter, 2008). Social media users’ interactivity is influenced by functionality (website features) and contingency (interdependence of responses) (Guillory & Sundar, 2008). Online involvement is dependent on website interactivity and personalization (Bruning et al., 2008; Sundar & Kim, 2005). This new medium is designed to facilitate social interaction, the sharing of digital media, and collaboration (Murthy, 2012, 1061).

### *2.4.3 Individuality*

The revolutionary feature of social media is to provide everyone a platform to present themselves and to interact with the society which means every single user is different from the other by default. Users are encouraged to create content on social media. In this never-ending platform, epitomising the possibilities of a digital culture, it seems as if ordinary people might really speak for themselves (Thumim 2012, 136). Both Twitter and Sina Weibo afford their users to customize their profile page, subscribe different accounts and present personal thoughts, opinions, feelings, and topics. To some degree, every account is unique and distinguishing from another.

Together, the three affordances of social media discussed above are seen as the three main characteristics of Sina Weibo and the affordances theory of social media is also the main theoretical framework in this research. In the 'data analysis' section, the three affordances will be the main framework for content analysis.

### 3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This thesis focuses on the self-presentation and gender of Chinese young generation on Weibo. The goal of this research is to investigate how the young Chinese overseas students represent themselves and their gender identity on Weibo. There are two main research questions for the analysis. In more details, the questions are:

- **RQ1:** How do the participants represent themselves on Sina Weibo?
- **RQ2:** How do the participants construct their gendered presentation on Sina Weibo?

I am interested in this topic for various reasons. First, I am myself is an overseas student and my living and studying experiences occupies a significant part of my self-expression on Weibo. The cross-cultural elements on the use of Sina Weibo obviously distinguish overseas student users from the domestic student users. Secondly, according to the social construction theories, gender is a dynamic and changeable term in the interaction between different social aspects. For Chinese youngsters abroad, their international experience plays an important role in building their personalities and values including their gender value and gender identity.

The two questions are the main hints for me to investigate more and deeper the self representation of this Chinese overseas students group on social media. There are few research have done on the gender representation on Weibo or either the interaction between gender and social media in China at the moment, so this research will refer to some gender media study in the West and tries to provide more fresh information and thoughts about modern Chinese gender.

With this research, I aim to collect valuable information about self representation with gender on social media and to gain a critical insight of gender equality in China.

However, another goal is also to form a solid ground for possible follow-up research and open new doors for further study on the matter.

## **4 METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Research challenges with a second language**

This is a Master thesis in Media Education and I have gone through quite a few challenges during the process of research. The biggest challenges in this research are the language skills. As a Chinese student, English is my second language. It takes me a great time and effort to do the wide reading on gender studies which was beyond my study background. Besides reading, another big difficulty is the translation work in this research. Since the study is based on a Chinese social media and the objectives are Chinese overseas students, most of the materials and quite a big part of related literature are in Chinese. How to explain accurately the features of Sina Weibo? How to quote Chinese references correctly? How to convert what exactly the participants want to say? All of these questions have been more or less hindering on my process of research.

To minimize the misunderstanding caused by languages conversion, I referred to the researches about Twitter and Facebook to describe the exact features of Sina Weibo. There are a lot of similarities between Sina Weibo and Twitter, but there are also many different settings. It helps to make Sina Weibo understood for foreign audiences who are familiar with Twitter and Facebook. Secondly, after the content analysis and interviews, there is an extra contact between me and the four interviewees. The key statements from their narratives and self-presentation on Weibo are double confirmed with them during the interview. Part of the content was also sent to them in English for confirmation, as all of the four interviewees have good English skills.

The third difficulty in terms of language is that there are not many resources of Chinese gender in English. Thanks to the support of my domestic friends, I finally managed to access to two university libraries in China, Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications and Tongji University. From these two online libraries, I accessed to various reliable statistics and resource of Chinese gender study in English.

Another challenge is that there is not much research on the gender of male side, especially about Chinese men. Fortunately, I found more information about Chinese men in the fields of Chinese philosophy and literacy. And this is also part of the reason that I would like to involve male users in my research and analysis their accounts on self-presentation and gender.

## **4.2 Participants and the Data**

For this research, I selected six participants and their Sina Weibo accounts as the main source of research materials. There are two sets of data, content of participants' Sina Weibo accounts and their interviews. Concerning the redundancy of content, high frequency of updating, and also the capability of this research, only the latest 100 posts and the profile information of each Weibo account are under investigation here.

The six participants all volunteered to participate in this research. Four of them participated into interviews, the rest two were not willing to involve in interviews. The sampling method used was snowball sampling. I had direct contacts with two of participants who locate in Finland and UK when the research carried out in

December of 2013. Through my other friends, I reached to two participants who locate in United States. There are also two Weibo accounts, which were found by Weibo search engine. They were verified to be enrolled college students and had given me the permission to investigate and cite the content of their Weibo accounts.

There is a list of the participants in the Table 3. All the participants are enrolled students and at the ages of 20-35, at the moment when the research carried on.

TABLE 3, Profiles of the participants (record time: 17<sup>th</sup> Dec 2013)

PARTICIPANT	SEX	LOCATION	YEARS OF BEING ABROAD	SUBJECT	LENGTH OF USING SINA WEIBO
C	Female	Le Mans, France	4 years	Accounting	2years
J	Male	Teesside UK	2 years	Pre-university	2years
L	male	New York US	1years	Movie editor Film directory	2years
S	Female	Helsinki, Finland	5years	Service Design	2.5 years
P	Male	Los Angeles, US	4years	Neurobiology	2years
X	Female	Plymouth, UK	4 years	economy	2.5years

Except the overseas education background, the frequency of using Weibo is also taken into consideration: all of them have been using Sina Weibo for more than two years; post once per two days on average, in the last three months on Sina Weibo. The amounts of their followers are relatively higher than the normal users on Weibo; more than 100 followers are shown from their profile. Participant L from US has nearly 10,000 followers and participant P is followed by more than 4,000 followers at the time of this research.

After contacting with the six participants, formal invitation letters (see appendix 2) inviting them to participate into the research were sent individually via email. In the invitation, their Sina Weibo accounts and permission of being researched were requested, as well as their consent to be interviewed. Concerning the security issue, all of the six participants and their Weibo accounts are anonymous in this research.

### **4.3 Data collection**

After the permissions of research were given, each participant's Weibo account were 'frozen' at a certain time, and their profile information and latest 100 posts were saved as the main source of data for later analysis.

Practically, there is no 'freeze' function on the Sina Weibo interface. In order to control the collection process and to enable analysis, the 'freezing' processes were conducted by me manually with a screenshot software and Microsoft Office. At first, I recorded the freezing time. Secondly, their profile pages with 'personal information' were captured by a software called 'Awesome screenshot: capture & annotate' (version 3.5.10) and saved as an image. Finally, the latest 100 posts of each account were captured and saved in a same way. Additionally, the content of these 100 posts were also copied and saved into MS Word file for analysis. The purpose of the 'freezing' process here was to avoid the later modification and any other changes of the contents and to enable me to investigate the contents flexibly and independently. After the freezing process, the 100 posts were marked with serial-number from 1 to 100 chronologically and gender related words and posts were highlighted with green

colour pen for further analysis. The details of the content analysis are presented later in this chapter.

As the materials collected from the participants' accounts cannot reveal the sentiments, attitudes and patterns of using Sina Weibo completely, I also interviewed the participants. All the interviews were conducted by me. Due to the results of the content analysis of each participant, the interview questions were slightly different from each other but all focused on the two main research questions, their Weibo self-presentation and gender identities. All the interview questions focused mainly on their patterns of Weibo use, their participations in gendered self-presentation, their attitudes of others self-presentation, as well as their Weibo use stories. Three of the interviews were carried out via online social media such as Skype and QQ. The last one was a face-face interview. All the interviews were recorded and the output of the interviews was saved as substitutive data sources. The data consists of two sets in this study: contents of participants' Sina Weibo accounts and interviews. There are more details as follows.

First of all, I made an appointment with each participant via emails or private message on Sina Weibo. Once the date and time were confirmed, I sent the interview questions list in both English and Chinese before the interview conducted. One interview was conducted via Skype, one via QQ, one is through phone and the last one were a face to face interview. Three of the interviews were voice record, the fourth one was videotaped. All the interviews were carried out mainly in Chinese. Generally, each interview lasted less than an hour.

As mentioned before, there were some difficulties in my research referring to language. Since this is an English thesis, the outcomes of all the interviews were supposed to be interpreted into English from Chinese. To avoid the misunderstanding of their narratives, the translated scripts of each interview were resent to the participants to confirm whether it was understood correctly or not. Only the confirmed narratives were considered to be liable materials for further analysis. More details of interview questions are presented in the appendix 1. I will explain the analysis procedure in the following section.

#### **4.4 Data Analysis**

As introduced above, there are two sets of data need to be analysed: Weibo contents and interview. Content analysis method is applied to decode participants' self-presentation and gender identity in this research. I introduce the analysing methods briefly in the following part and then provide the customized schema specifically for this research.

##### **4.4.1 Content analysis**

Content analysis is “any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying special characteristics of messages” (Holsti, 1968, p.608). Grbich states that “It is a systematic coding and categorising approach which you can use to unobtrusively explore large amounts of textual information (Grbich, 2007, p.112)”. As above, content analysis is an appropriate method for analysing the massive but trivial textual information on social media that reflect the patterns of

social media use; meanwhile it helps to reveal social media as a cultural environment.

Neuendorf (2002, p.9-25) summarizes that there are six certain characteristics in content analysis method: 1) content analysis as relying on the scientific method, 2) the message as the units of analysis, the unit of data collection or both, 3) content analysis as quantitative, 4) content analysis as summarizing, 5) content analysis as applicable to all contexts, 6) all message characteristics are available to content analyse.

There are three main approaches in content analysis method. They are enumerative, combined and thematic approach (Grbich, 2007, p.110). Enumerative approach provides a numerical overview of the data used; combined provides a numerical overview and thematic adds depth of explanation as to why and how words have been used in particular ways and what the major discourses are. It is assumed that the repetition of certain key words means the importance of them in a content analysis, as a results enumerative information is favoured in terms of gathering and assessing data (Grbich 2007, p.114). In this research, a range of gendered words in the context will be classified and measured by frequency, such as woman, man, homosexual and gender.

Regarding to the research questions, numerical approach is applied to provide an overview of the six participants' self-presentations on Sina Weibo. Their profiles, their interactions with followers and followings, the patterns of use Sina Weibo will be

investigated and analysed mainly with numerical approach. Thematic approach mainly deals with the second research question about gendered self-presentation. In the procedure of content analysis, I applied the three affordances of social media framework which mentioned in the theoretical framework in analysing the data collected from participants' accounts. In more detail, they are:

1) *Visibility: profile information and content of posts*

Visibility deals with all the visible information on each Weibo account homepage which is an overview of their outcome. It mainly includes portraits, personal information and posts. Figure 2 is a diagram of Sina Weibo account showing the visibility of a Weibo account.



Figure 2. A sample of Sina Weibo profile page

The main content will be translated into English and decoded into text with four main parts: avatar pictures, personal basic information, social interactions and tags. Table 4 is an example of it in the following.

TABLE 4. An example of profile information

<p><b>Portrait</b></p> <p>Self-pictures of total :19/20</p> <p>Current portrait: self-picture with upper body naked</p> <p>Overview of used portraits: 19 of 20 portraits are self-pictures and 5 of them portrayed with half naked or completely naked upper body.</p>	<p><b>Personal information</b></p> <p>Gender: male</p> <p>Self-introduction: PhD of Neurobiology in XXX University; A host in cbinca.com; feel as misty rains, Live in the sunshine in California.</p> <p>Education: South California University since 2009</p>
<p><b>Social interactions</b></p> <p>Followers: 526</p> <p>Followings:4019</p> <p>Microblogs:1512</p>	<p><b>Tags:</b></p> <p>Junjie Lin, Magic-Realism, Aries A blood, Modern poetry, PhD, Neurobiology, Shanghai, Fudan, Los Angels</p>

All the 600 posts were labelled by the formats of the contexts, including text, pictures, videos, hyperlinks, locations and emoticons according to the specific presentational abilities of Sina Weibo. The posts on Sina Weibo are limited to 140 characters in text, one video, and there are more freedom in using pictures and hyperlinks. And the function of long article is the solution to break the limit of 140 characters. Most of the posts in this research are within multiple formats.

### *Individuality*

As the main goal of this research is to investigate the self-presentation of Weibo users, the individuality of each participant which reflects their identity, values and gender that is highly valued in this research. Based on the process of communication according to Shannon & Weaver Model (Shannon & Weaver, 1949) four scales were computed to assess the individuality of Sina Weibo. They are 1) the original producer; 2) the motivation of posting; 3) the theme of the content; 4) responses?

### *Interactivity*

To assess whether the users on Sina Weibo are actively interact with others, the numbers of followers and followings were recorded by the frozen time. Secondly, the actions of '@someone' 'comment' 'like' 'be re-posted' in each post will be noted and the number of them in every post will be collected. A coding scheme was developed with the aim of extracting and recording the 600 raw posts (See table 5).

TABLE 5. A Coding schema of the content of Weibo accounts.

<b>Affordance</b>	<b>typology</b>	<b>item</b>	<b>definition</b>
<b>visibility</b>	formats	with user's own text	the post contains the user's own word(s)
		with picture(s)	the post contains picture(s), which could be from user self, or from the 're-post'
		with video(s)	the post contains video(s), which could be from user self, or from the 're-post'
		with Link(s)	the post contains Link(s), which could be from user self, or from the 're-post'

TABLE 5. A Coding schema of the content of Weibo accounts.

Affordance	typology	item	definition
		with long article	the post contains long article(s), which could be from user self, or from the 're-post'
		with location	the post contains the user's own location,
		with emoticon(s)	the post contains the emoticon (s) by the user self
<b>Interactivity</b>	social	@someone	a post contains ' @someone'
	interactiviti es	reposts	a post contains other's post
		comments	comments about the corresponding post
<b>individuality</b>	themes	entertainment	a posts contains entertainment information, including (not Limit to)art, travelling, cultures, sports, music, movies, fashion, celebrities' daily Lives and so on
		news	a posts contains news
		personal experience	a post about slice of personal Life, emotions, values, thoughts, opinions about events or news or topics
		social topics	a posts discussing social events, social phenomena and other social aspects
		practical information	a posts contains practical information, including introductions, guidelines, directions contents
	Motivations	Information sharing or seeking	A post to share relevant events and conditions in immediate surroundings, society and the world or A post seeking advice on practical matters or opinion and decision choices
		Personal Identity	a post to share slice of personal life, emotions, values, thoughts, opinions about events or news or topics
		Integration and Social Interaction	A post which try to contact with others or the society, or wants to gain other's response; gain insight into circumstances of others; gain a sense of belonging

TABLE 5. A Coding schema of the content of Weibo accounts.

<b>Affordance</b>	<b>typology</b>	<b>item</b>	<b>definition</b>
		Entertainment	A post helps relaxing, filling time, emotional release
	original creation	original creation	A post originally created by user self
	International related	international related	a post contains international component.
		international terms involved	a post contains other countries, regional name, international celebrities, organizations, or other cultural terms
		foreign Language using	a post contains other languages except Chinese, ( Foreign names are not count on)
		international experience sharing	a post contains user self or acquaintances' international experiences sharing

During the second step, the gendered posts were picked up from the initial posts of each account to study in depth their gendered self-presentation. Regarding the gender presentation of these four interviewees, they were divided into two classes, sex (male users and female users); sexual orientation (heterosexual users and non-heterosexual users). According to the previous researches of gender differences (Hall, 1987; Williams & Best, 1990; Li & Kirkupb, 2005) which indicates that gender differences are assumed to exist in social media, the present research mainly focuses on the willingness of self-expression, the engagement of social connectivity, as well as the differences of their attitudes about Weibo between heterosexual participants and non-heterosexual participants. Interviews with the participants will be supplementary to the gendered content analysis.

#### **4.4.2 Analysing interviews**

In order to confirm the results from content analysis and to enrich the research material in this present research, interviews were conducted to investigate participants' attitudes, sentiments and other user experiences which can only be presented by participants themselves.

Interviews have been used as both a practice and as a methodological term in modern time, since pure data cannot cover all the information for research. The interview is being conceptualized as an occasion for purposefully animated participants to construct versions of reality intentionally rather than merely purvey data (Hostein & Gubrium, 1995). Interview seeks to describe and the meanings of central themes in the life world of the subjects. The main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say (Kvale, 1996). In the interview process, a semi-structured interview method with certain guidelines and core words were given to the interviewees.

It is said that there are three fundamental types of research interview: structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Stewart, et al., 2008). Semi-structured interviews consist of several key questions that help to define the areas to be explored, but also allows the interviewer or interviewee to diverge in order to pursue an idea or response in more detail (Britten, 2008). In the process of interview, I try to encourage users to share their experiences, thoughts and feeling in details with semi-structured questions.

After the interviews were conducted, a narrative framework was utilized to decode the interviewees' preferences, perceptions of gender and other Weibo experience. The interview questions were partly different from each other due to the outcomes of the posts analysis. But they are mainly focus on their Weibo experience, attitudes about Weibo, gender perceptions and attitudes both online and offline. Eventually, there are three aspects in the analysis framework:

1. **An overview of Weibo Use.** Interviewees were asked to give an overview of their Weibo use. This could be either a biographical elements or descriptive information about their use patterns and friends.
2. **Their gender identity and attitudes.** Every participant was asked for their gender identity and attitude. Also the role of cross-cultural experiences in their gender perception building was examined.
3. **Use stories of Weibo.** Participants are asked about their stories with Sina Weibo and their Weibo 'friends'.

## **5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In this section, I will present the main findings with a discussion which divided into two parts: self-presentation and gendered presentation on Weibo.

### **5.1 Self-presentation on Weibo**

With the affordance perspective, I can better investigate and understand how the participants formulate their self-presentation on Weibo. There are three main affordances of social media, visibility, interactivity and individuality which enable normal users to present themselves and communicate with others.

#### **5.1.1 Visibility**

There are a great bulk of features on Weibo facilitating information sharing/seeking and visualizing the online information, such as open registration, search engine and the recommended content in the right bar of the page that enable users to access the people and information shortly and effectively. In the present research, I will mainly focus on two questions, 1) How do the users demonstrate the information? 2) What is visible from a personal user's Weibo account?

From the data in the present research, pictures contribute the dominant part of Weibo content. As we can see from the Table 7, pictures are widely used, there are 470 out of the 600 posts with pictures. There are more than 60% of original posts were attached with at least one picture. While there is only less than 3% of the posts

were attached with video. Except the format of text, emoticon is the second popular format on Weibo; there are 25.67% of posts containing emoticons.

TABLE 7. An overview of the usage of 4 information formats from 600 Weibo posts.

	Total (N)	with text (N)	with Text (%)	with picture (N)	With picture (%)	with video (N)	with video (%)	with emoticon (N)	with emoticon (%)
all posts	600	471	78.50%	470	78.33%	17	2.83%	154	25.67%
Original posts	111	110	99.10%	69	62.16%	1	0.90%	28	25.23%

There are several reasons for the great popularity of using pictures on Weibo. Firstly, the interface of Sina Weibo is friendly for adding and editing pictures. There are multiple functions facilitating pictures posting: adding multiple pictures, stitching picture, screenshots and upload pictures to Weibo album. And there are a lot of affect buttons available for simply editing the raw pictures.

Secondly, the ubiquity of mobile devices such as smartphone in China provides the great convenience for ordinary people to take pictures of their life with little limitation of time and space. As it reported, the number of Internet users via mobile phone in China has increased to 500 million by the end of 2013 (CNNIC, 2014) With the availability of high-quality cameras connected to smartphones, the ways in which we can record, experience, visualise and memorialise events is changing (Hinton & Hjorth, 2013).The mobile devices nowadays embedded with cameras are increasingly inspiring people to capture the fleeting moments in their lives.

Thirdly, the unique features of picture endow this format of information with advantages of presentation in a creative and enjoyable way. Participant L is a professional photographer and he keeps uploading his work of photography and names them “Daily New York” with a brief explanation regularly. The photographs are his language to communicate with the unknown audience and he has been doing this since he arrived at New York in October 2013. And all his 83 posts were mainly demonstrated with pictures.

Refer to the text format, pure text is far less attractive than multimedia posts, but conveys a more specific and accurate message from broadcaster. For example, 90% of Participant X’s posts were generated without any user own words that disseminate ambiguous presentation. As a result, though participant X is active re-posting other’s speech on Weibo, few responses were raised from her audiences. Additionally, the 140 characters limits on Sina Weibo is found to be not obviously influencing users’ daily presentation, since most of the posts are one or two sentences which are far less than 140 words.

On the other hand, whether or not a pure text post is attractive to audiences is significantly rely on author’s ability of mastering language. Good skill of Chinese on social media easily raises more attention. Participant P is currently a part-time host in a Chinese student radio in United States and he is proficient in Chinese writing. He generated 45 original posts and 55 posts in 41 days that makes him the most active user among the six participants in contributing 100 posts. All his 100 posts are demonstrated with text and 29 posts are only purely texted. Even for the re-reposts,

he still presented his thoughts, opinions and other descriptions with good wording skills which helped raise quite many responses from his audiences. There are nearly one thousand pieces of comment on his 100 post, nearly 10 comments per each on his Weibo account.

As discussed above, most of the posts in this research contain both text and picture. Emoticons, links, videos, location map, long articles as supplementary materials are far less popular than the former two. One of the reasons is that they are relatively time consuming for reading or loading compared with text, pictures and emoticon. It takes time for the video loading from micro-blogging interface; audiences have to click the link for more information. The location information only means to certain audiences. The long article function was designed to compensate for the limitation of 140 character limits, but it is too long for audiences who want to get brief information. In short, text and picture are the main popular means for fast information consuming environment.

Personal experiences are the most popular on Weibo. Firstly, according to the data from the six participants, personal experiences take the biggest part of their Weibo posts; nearly four out of ten posts are related to personal experiences which illustrate their real lives (see Figure 3). The second most popular theme is 'social topics'. Among the six Weibo accounts, there are 163 posts discussing about social topics in the investigation of 600 posts.

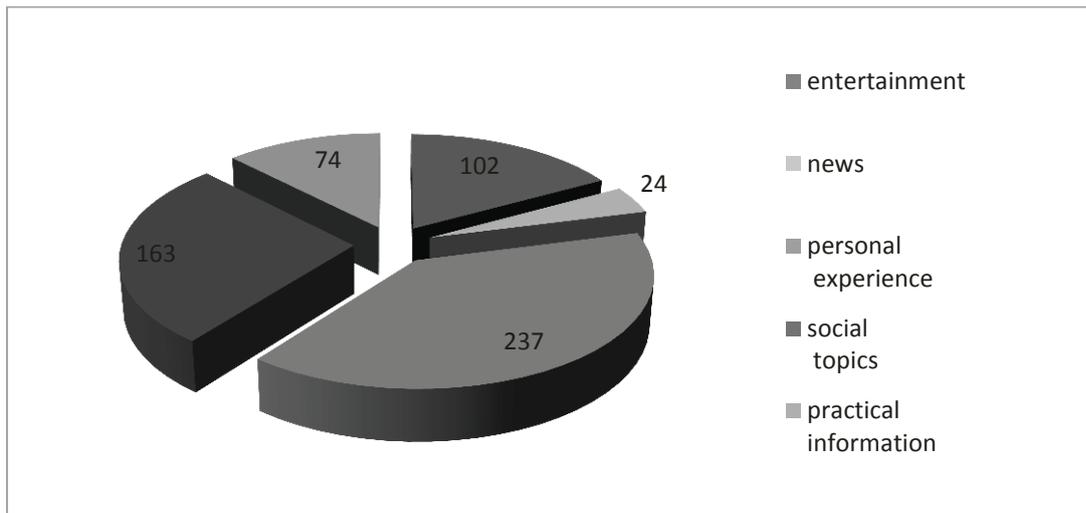


Figure 3. An overview of post's themes

Secondly, it is found that the participants disclosed their personal information in an honest way. Sex identities of the six participants in terms of being male or female demonstrated on their accounts are true. Four of them were using their own portraits as avatar pictures. The email address and name of schools of 3 participants are also open. Participant L uses his real name and got verified by Sina Weibo, which means that anyone who knows his name can find him by searching for his real name.

Through the interview, all of the interviewees stated that Weibo is not a separated world from real life but part of real one.

*I use it daily and I post what exactly is about my real life. (P)*

*Weibo serves as my dairy for me to remember the fleeting moments of my life. (L)*

The participants incline to open their personal identity and share their personal lives on Weibo. The personal topics preference of Sina Weibo was also proven by other researchers. It is found that Weibo users are more likely to discuss something related to personal issues, instead of talking about organization such as politic

parties or other institutions (Gao et.al, 2011). The visible information from individual users is shown to be more private.

### **5.1.2 Interactivity**

On Sina Weibo, there are multiple options for users to interact with others. First of all users can use '@someone' to target certain audiences when they contribute posts. Secondly, there are 'like', 're-post' and 'comment' buttons in the bottom of every micro-blog. Thirdly, there is also private message functionality on the top of profile page enabling users to interact with each other directly and privately. In this research, I mainly focus on the former four social connection actions (@someone, be liked, be re-posted, be commented) which are visible for audiences. From the data I collected, there are big discrepancies between different participants. The responses are not necessarily raised with the number of audiences or followers. For instance, Participant L is the one who has the biggest audience group, but his interactive actions with his audiences were lower than average level among the six participants.

The number of those 4 interactive actions (@someone, be Liked, be re-posted, be commented) for each individual post to analysis how interactively connection between participants and their audiences (see Table 7).

TABLE 7. An overview of each participant's social actions on Weibo.

participants	followers	tag someone	Like	Re-posts	comments	total interactive actions
total	17836	56	692	704	1555	3007
P	4038	10	423	541	988	1962
C	776	2	60	5	86	153
S	576	31	22	66	295	414
L	11418	1	153	80	80	314
X	619	6	3	1	3	13
J	409	6	31	11	103	151

Table 7 shows the amounts of 4 interactive actions (@someone, be Liked, be re-posted, be commented) for each individual participant to analysis how interactively connection between them and their audiences.

(NB: Response activeness= the amount of interactive actions/the amount of followers/the amount of posts)

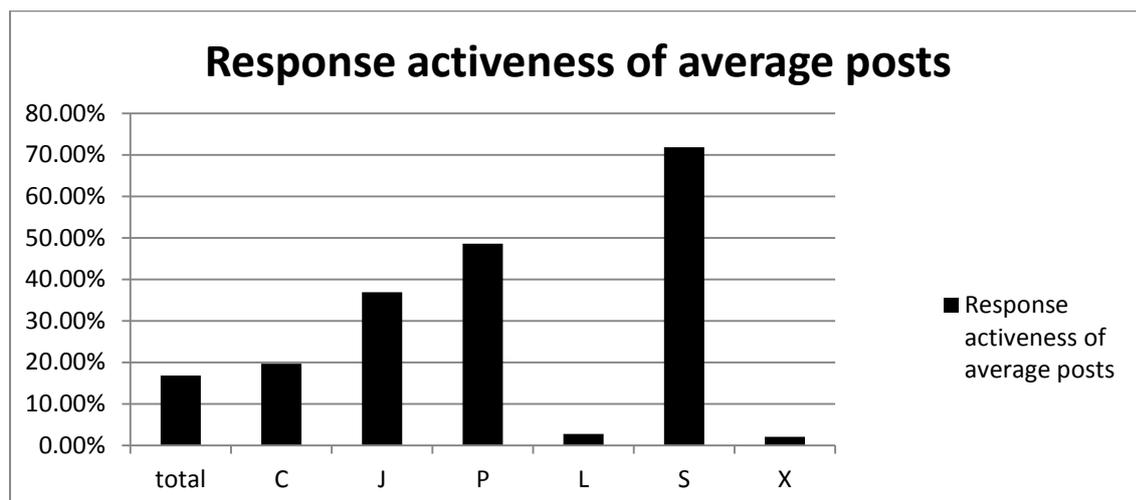


Figure 4. Average response for every post of each participant.

From Table 7 and Figure 4 above, the Weibo account of participant J is the most interactive one; the activeness of her account is 77.88%, which means almost 8 out of her 10 audiences are involved into an interaction in her every 100 posts. The second active account is participant P, its rate of that is 48.59%. And Participant X's account holds the lowest rate, only 2.1%.

There are several reasons affecting the activeness of Weibo accounts. Firstly, the relationship between broadcaster and audiences plays a significant role in arising interactivity on Weibo. Participant J used @ actions more regularly than the rest participants and the audiences she tagged are mostly her acquaintances who are active in contributing comments in her Weibo accounts. There is one organizational account was been tagged for seven times and one private account have been tagged six times on her Weibo posts. For those posts had been tagged to someone usually received more comments than those posts without tagging anyone.

Secondly, the posts of high quality are poetically inviting audience to react to. Most of pictures on participant L's account were taken and edited professionally which gains him 153 'likes'. However, the themes of posts are also important. Firstly, practical information is encouraging responses. There are 8 out of top ten interactive posts in Participant S' account are about practical information seeking or sharing on her account.

Thirdly, posts of personal experiences sharing are also quite popular among audiences. Participant P usually shared his personal life with well edited words and self-pictures which brought him quite a lot attention from his audiences. In his top 10 interactive posts, half of them are about his own personal life and feeling. And the top one is about his female friendship with an intimate picture together gained him 46

comments, 43 'be –repost' and 23 'Like's. The top 2 posts describing his sickness and his fear, brought him 63 comments, 13 'Like's and 1're-post'.

As observed from the 6 participated Weibo accounts, the interactivity on Sina Weibo mainly conducted between intimate 'friends' rather than strangers. The lack of public discussion tradition, plus, the culture differences, Chinese users on social media are still inactive in social discussion, even among these overseas students. Most of the audiences are silent and numb leaving no response.

### **5.1.3 Individuality**

As mentioned before, new information technology allows for great freedom to the way of online presentation and behaviour, everyone has the chance to speak for him or herself in their preferred way. As a result, individuality is another great affordance of social media. Users of social media were granted to present and disclose themselves in their own styles. From the data I collected from the six participants, diverse motivations of using Weibo, various interested topics and distinguishing ways of wording construct their online self-presentation.

All the participants have their own patterns in using Sina Weibo. From the six Weibo accounts, there are four characters can be extracted from them, lone poet, silent tube, information seeker and opinion leader. Some of them use Weibo as a platform for expression without paying much attention on their audiences, like a lone poet. Some of them use Weibo as a platform for relaxing and information sharing, rarely

present themselves with their thoughts and feeling, but repost the content with interest. They behave as a 'quiet tube' on Weibo. On the other hand, there are also some active users who take the advantages of Weibo to seek information and help; they are more like 'information seekers'. Lastly, only a few participants can be called as 'opinion leaders' who hold a great popularity and easily involve their audiences into discussions and other forms of interactivities. There are more details about those four main kinds of Weibo users I found from my data.

### ***Lone Poet***

From the findings of interactivity, generally there are not frequent interactions between broadcaster and his audiences. Weibo as a platform for ordinary people's daily micro-blogging encourages users to express themselves briefly, but not so tempting people to be sociable. 4 participants in this research are seen to be more individual than sociable.

Participant L is the most popular user on Weibo with more than 11 thousand fans and he is also the most passionate one in creating original posts. 83 posts were created by him-self with pictures in his latest 100 posts. However, there are not many interactivities visible from his account. From the figures of his 4 different interactive actions, the number of 'Like' is the highest, 153, 80 comments, 80 times of being repost. As he is a professional photographer and he create an online event named as 'Daily New York'. He posts the photographs about his daily Life with a brief explanation in English defining the address where the picture taken and poetizing his understanding of the pictures. He mostly doesn't share specific

personal experience but his abstract thoughts and feelings with his own disclosure style, like a lone poet.

*“He lives on a lonely island”.*

(This is a post with a photograph of a wandering guitar player in a subway station, nobody else around him. The photograph is a bit blurring in a old fashion tone)

*‘When you find me, then you will search for no more.’*

(This post is attached with a photograph of a girl’s back. She is a skinny girl who wears tight jean and short leather jacket, standing by the street. It is a black and white photograph with the focus on the girl)

*‘He would learn what he had never experienced before during his wandering, which would lead his life to a wider and further boundary just like water.’*

(This is a post of his own personal life with a picture of his back. He is standing on a busy crossroad with his left hand pointing to the sky. The tone of the picture is white and black. )

Participant L self-presents mostly his photography work and his poetry style words on Weibo that different from normal expression. He acts like a lone poet to present what he sees and what he thinks in a poetized way which might not understood by others. What he wants to do is to share not expecting responses and he even doesn’t react most of the comments on his Weibo.

### ***Silent tube***

The main motivation for using Weibo for participants is dynamic and changing all the time. The passion of self-expression and content creation seems fading on participant X in my research. She is a master student in UK with the age of 24. As I observed from her account, she used to be a quite passionate micro-blogger 6 months ago, but in her latest 100 posts, she acted like a silent tube on Weibo. As we can see from the Table 8, 90% of the posts were direct reposts without own words. She rarely present her thoughts, feelings, personal life, there is only one post was originally created by her in the 100 posts, 99% of them are re-posts. What's more, she did not used far less text or emoticon than the other participants.

TABLE 8. An overview of participant X's Weibo account.

X	original creation	with user's own text	with picture(s)	with video(s)	with Link(s)	With long article	with location	with author's emoticon(s)
Number of the posts	1	10	93	2	0	4	1	1

There are several non-individual accounts she is following passionately and repost some of their micro-blog directly without further explanation. For instance, there are 22 reposts directly from the account called 'curative psychology'. Most of the content of 'curative psychology' is similar to 'chicken soup for the soul', it tells audiences how to deal with romance, friends, family, work, age and life by quoting words from famous books, psychologists and celebrities. Participant X is a follower of this account; she picked some of them and re-post on her account, but not presenting any of her reflections.

The accounts which have been frequently reposted by participant X are non-individual accounts which are run by certain organizations or companies. They are about health, discount information, 'chicken soup' for life. In the process of Weibo using, she acts as a tube or 'gate keeper', who decides which posts are worthy of being re-posted. Those posts are being broadcast further and wider by disseminating them through her account and finally reach to her followers.

### ***Information seeker***

Due to the possibility of swift and wide responses, Weibo has become a great source for information seekers. There is search engine bar on the top of each individual main page which enables users to search the information they need. What's more, to ask questions or ask for help is also a popular way for user to collect the information they want and they are also enabled to target certain audiences even without any connections between each other. There are plenty of corporate accounts broadcasting professional knowledge of certain fields and answering questions for audiences. For instance, Participant X is a follower of 'British discount' which provides the fresh discount information which helps to her to purchase goods many times.

From the four participants, participant S is the one who use Weibo to seek certain information most. There are 41 posts were post to share or seek information. She just moved to Helsinki when the research carried out. She took the advantages of

Weibo to make her new life there easier by asking for help from the other Helsinki residents.

*'Does anyone know if there are bowling alleys in Helsinki? Thanks in advance.'*

(When she posted this post, she also tagged two of her friends' accounts and one university account. This post gained the first comment a few minutes after she post and totally gained 18 comments in 3 days. Generally speaking the information get from Weibo' comments might not be as comprehensive and systematic as the information get form search engine, but they are all from a trustful source which means more valuable and practical for certain user.

*'How do I invite my parents to visit Finland? Should I go to police station or immigrant station for the application form?'*

In this post, one Chinese students-union account was targeted for help. But instead, she got other four friends responses and guidelines for Finnish visitor visa application. Twelve comments were made on this post. In the case of participant J, most of her posts seeking for certain information or help were responded swiftly by her friends on Weibo. In short, for the information seeker, Sina Weibo served as a credible source, especially for the users whose audiences consist of a big part of acquaintances. The information communicated by friends and relatives is construed as more credible, honest, and trustworthy than that generated by marketers (Pan & Crofts, 2011). For the information seekers, Weibo is considered to e a unique platform for more liable information that search engines cannot provide.

### ***Opinion leader***

In this research, I chose Chinese overseas students as my objects, because the overseas students are more likely to be the opinion leaders among their peers with their relatively wider vision and richer experiences. From the analysis of participant P's account, his opinions and thoughts were identified by his audiences. Participant P is a PhD student in Los Angeles of United States, and he is also a host of an online radio channel. He is the most active participant in using Weibo among all the participants and his latest 100 posts were contributed in only 47 days. What's more he is only the most passionate one to express his personal thoughts, opinions and feeling about both himself and others.

Firstly, participant P is an active user with good wording skills. He presented his feelings or thoughts, opinions in his every post and also gained comments more than other participants. Word is one of the most precise ways to make ones' presentation understood by audiences. What's more, P have been partly working in a media organization, his communication skills and writing skills are relatively better than normal users on Weibo.

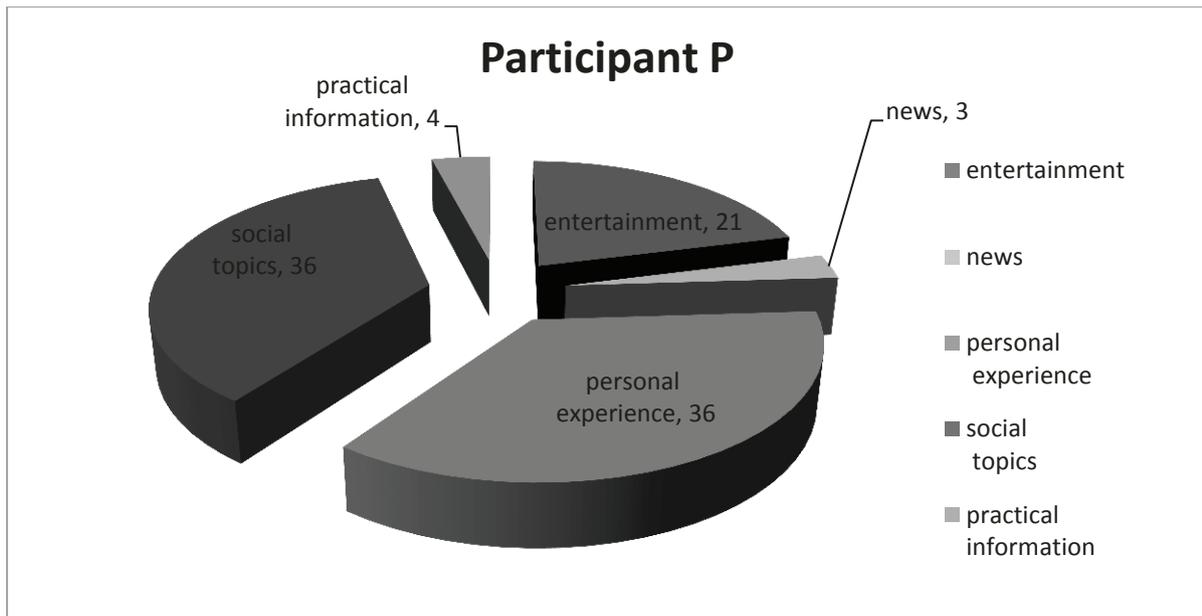


Figure 5. An overview of themes from participant P's posts

Secondly, the themes of the posts are relatively balanced. From figure 5, we can see personal experience, social topics and entertainments are the three main themes on P's account. What's more, most of the social topics P reflected on his Weibo are quite fresh and hot at that moments, such as Cameron visited China, Chinese superstar Lee-Hom Wong's flash marriage and the debate of GM food in China. Positive engagement in these hot social topics end entertainments brought him quite a lot attention from his audiences.

For instance, there is a post he made fun of the hot super-star Lee-Hom Wang to declare his friendship with a female student in Columbia University. Here is the post:

*I am happy today. Everyone should pursue love and deserve being loved. However, only a girlfriend from Columbia University can follow up current. Mine is called 'Bao', department of Statistics, Columbia University. 8 years together, such a nice girl! May*

*we can go forward on the way to our scientific dream together. Thank you for all your support.*

(This post was also attached with a picture of him and his girlfriend, even the gestures of them copy from Lee-Hom Wang's post. At last, this post received 46 comments from his audiences.

In a word, participant P is catholically engaging into diverse topics on Weibo and also passionately presenting himself with good expressional skills that allow him for active interaction between him and his audiences.

## 5.2 Gendered Self-presentation

### 5.2.1 Male participants are found to be more expressive

According to the analysis, male participants in this research are found to be more expressive than their female counterparts. Table 9 and figure 6 show that they are more passionate in content creation and also more willing to share personal lives on Weibo.

TABLE 9. An overview of themes from the 600 posts.

items	Female posts	Rate of female posts	Male posts	Rate of male posts
Original creation	103	34.33%	163	54.33%
with user's own text	177	59.00%	294	98.00%
entertainment	62	20.67%	40	13.33%
news	12	4.00%	12	4.00%
Personal experience	84	28.00%	153	51.00%
social topics	76	25.33%	87	29.00%
practical information	66	22.00%	8	2.67%

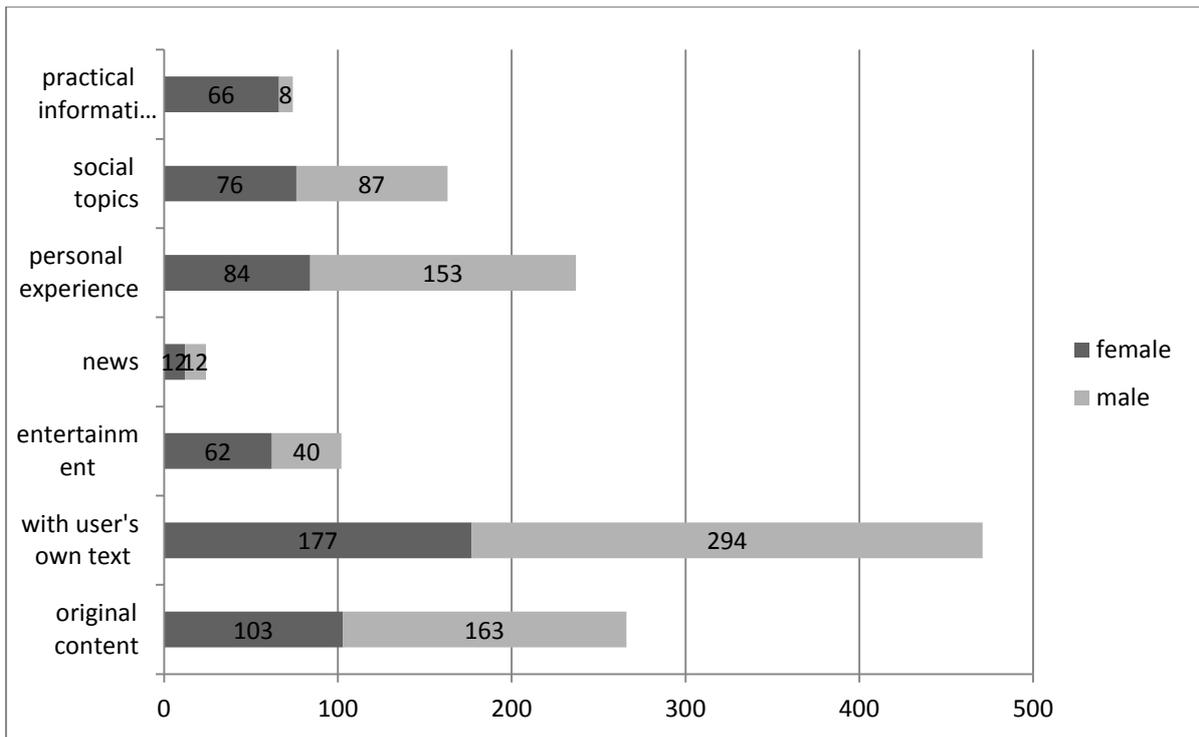


Figure 6. The expressive practices between female and male participants.

Female participants appeared to be surprisingly less expressive than male participants in this research. Firstly, we can see that there is a big gap of original creation between male participants and female participants. Male participants produce more than half of their posts by their own, whilst, only 34.3% of female posts are originally created by female participants. What's more, male participants appear to be more likely to present themselves by writing text in both their original generated posts and re-posts. Almost all the male posts are embedded with their own text, while the figure of female participants is less than 60%.

Secondly, we can find that female participants are more interested in entertainments and practical information than male users in this research. Compared with female participants, male participants present more than half of their posts about their

personal lives, while there are only 28% of posts from female participants related to personal experiences. The interview materials from 4 participants provided additional evidences, both female users considered Weibo as a platform of information seeking and sharing.

*Weibo become more and more a platform for fresh news and entertainment information. (J)*

*One important reason for me to use Weibo is the discount information there. (X)*

By contrast, male participants regarded Weibo as a personal space for self-presentation. They are relatively more passionate in content production and self-expression. Weibo is more likely a private area for them.

*I would like to share my personal life and feelings with my followers on Weibo. It does not matter that whether I know them or not. It is just my presentational platform. (P)*

*I post on Weibo for myself. It is more like an online diary for me to record my daily Life in New York. (L)*

On the other hand, , 2 of the 3 male participants post more 10 photos of themselves in their 100 posts and both of them used to post half naked photos with exposing their upper bodies.

According to the narrative materials, the female inactive expression of personal experiences dues to privacy concerns and friends circle. Firstly, both participants J and X mentioned about online security, too much exposition of personal experiences in front of unknown audiences was considered to be unsafe. Secondly, friends are the first targeted audience for female participants to share their personal lives. And

both of them mentioned another more private social media Wechat where only invited friends are allowed to view the content. They stated that personal experiences consist of big part of their self-presentation on Wechat and most of their friends are gathering there as well.

### **5.2.2 Female participants are passionate on social interactivities**

Based on the data, it is hardly to tell which gender group is more engaged into social interactivities. As discussed before, the interactive activeness is relative low among the 6 participants, only participant P and participant J are relatively more passionate in interacting with their audiences. From all the 4 interviewees, none of them considered Weibo as their first option to interact with others. Participant P rarely replied to his unknown audiences who leave comments or private messages on his account. Participant J interacted with her audiences actively, only because the audiences are her friends in real life.

Secondly, female participants are also found to be more perceptive than their male counterparts in this research. It was found that certain non-personal accounts on Weibo such as discount information, chicken soup for soul, practical information for daily life are well received by female users. All the 3 female participants have followed some accounts loyally and treat them as reliable and trustful sources. Participant X was not active in content creation, but she had re-posted a lot posts from her following accounts without any comments.

*'Weibo has become an important platform for information receiving. I like makeup products and there are usually better price from Weibo. All those discount information from Weibo is the fastest and fleshiest.'*(X)

*'To get the flesh news and practical information is the main purpose to log in my Weibo account nowadays. And the account of 'news of blue gays' is one of my favourite account I would like to follow. I rarely use it to contact with others. (J)*

It was found that, there are distinct inclinations in the followers of female accounts in this research. On the Weibo account of X, there are 22 reposts from a same source called 'curative psychology' which usually cites wordy wisdom about life and people. From participant C's account, it is found that she is a big fan of 'Anne Baby' on Weibo who is a popular female writer in China. What's more, most of her re-posts are relatively soft. I also found the mirror phenomena on participant J's account. She is tended to follow gay's topics and certain gay's accounts. Comparing with those female accounts, there is not obvious tendency on the three male accounts in this research. News is the most popular themes in the reposts by male participants.

### **5.2.3 Non-heterosexual participants appear to be more active online**

There are two homosexual participants in this research, whose data supports previous study that non-heterosexual people as the minority group is more active engaging in social interactivities and they also enjoy more freedom to talk about gender identity and gendered topics on social media.

From the Figure 7, we can see participant P, who identified himself as a gay, gained 988 comments and 423 'likes' on his latest 100 posts. And Participant S, a lesbian, had tagged different audiences for 31 times which is the highest among the six participants. Additionally, participant S also reacted to the comments by her audiences very actively; most of the comments got her responses. From her narratives of interview, it was her friends who motivated her to use Weibo.

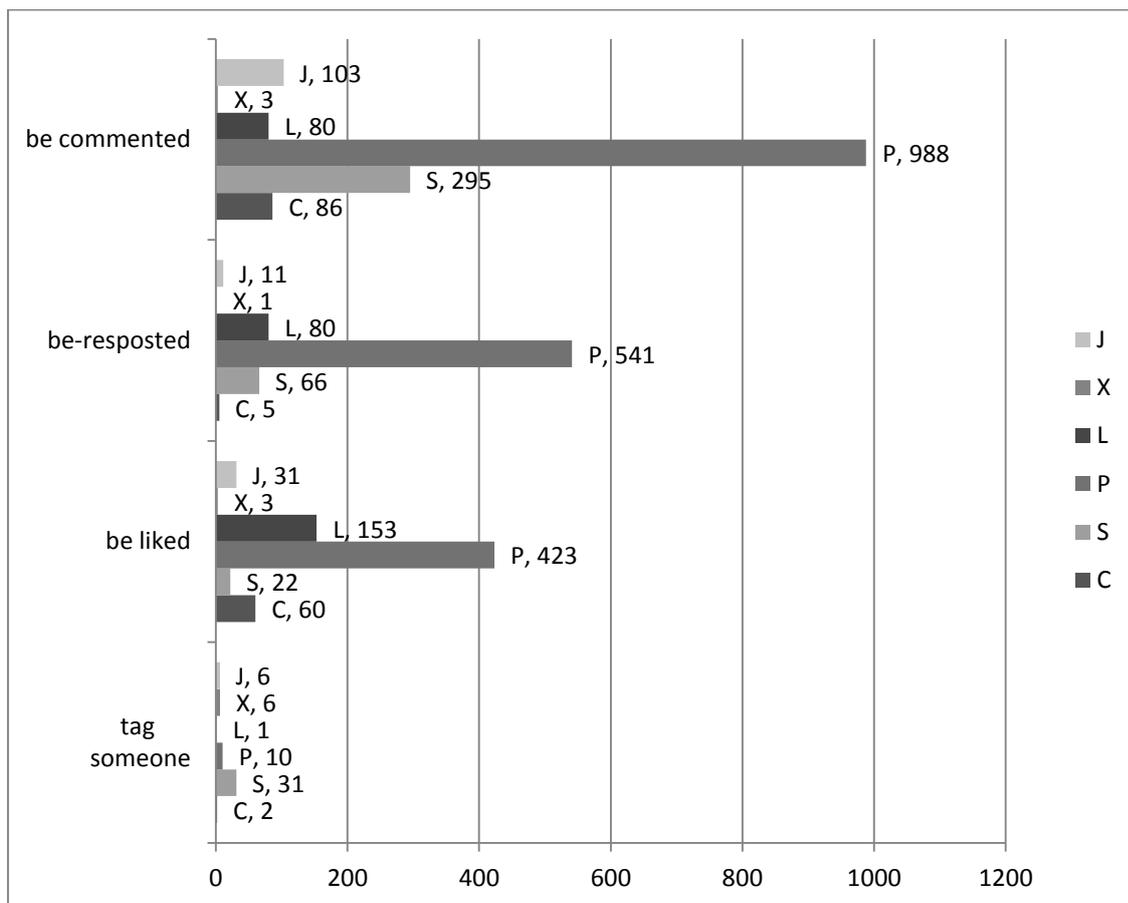


Figure 7. The social action among the six participants

Besides social connecting, the two non-heterosexual participants are also active in gendered content generation. They appear to be very interested in gendered topics and more sensitive with gender inequality than the rest participants. Table 10 shows

the frequencies of six gendered words in each participant's account, the six words are 女 (female), 男 (male), GAY, 同志 (homosexual), 性 (sex), 爱 love. As we can see from the table, the non-heterosexual participant S and P mentioned gendered words much higher than the rest participants.

TABLE 10. An overview of the frequencies of gendered words from each participant.

Participant	女 (female)	男(male)	GAY	同志(homosexual )	性(sex)	爱 love
C	7	0	0	0	5	8
J	6	5	0	0	1	15
L	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>S</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>P</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>50</b>
X	16	5	0	0	10	25

The content of their posts not only indicates their interest in gendered topic, but also implicates their gender values and concerns. For instance, Participant S is an independent young woman who opposes the rigid stereotypical norms of masculine on Weibo. There is a post of defining women in China which Participant S commented on.

*The original post: women who do not accept the responsibility of housework, either take a pride in children will be discarded by society at last. It is propitious for re-employments to get married and bear children as early as possible. Those who do not aware of these cannot be counted as women. It is ridiculous and miserable to be a baby-free woman in any perspectives.*

Participant S commented on the post above: *Hopelessly uneducated, you would better be died in the old time. (S)*

However, there is no post in her latest 100 posts directly identifying her gender orientation. She just partly opens her gender orientation to certain close friends and strictly hides from her family who are not aware of either her Weibo account or her gender orientation. Personally, she does not talk about gender orientation with acquaintances in real life and Weibo provides her relatively private platform for gender self-disclosure

On the other hand, it is not difficult to identify participant P's gender orientation from what he has posted: a gay. And he is also enthusiastic in engaging into homosexual rights, improvements, social norms of gender roles, intimate relationships and marriage on Weibo.

*'Actually, Jeff Chang is the first man I ever loved.'* (Implicating that he is attracted by men) (P)

*'It's necessary for every gay to have a girlfriend in Columbia University. Fortunately, I do have one, you will see her tomorrow.'* (Clearly identifying himself as a gay) (P)

However, he is also concerned about his family, especially his parents who are not aware of his gender orientation and expecting him to have a girlfriend. He is careful about his friends on Weibo and tries to make sure none of his Weibo friends have the possibility to share his secret with his parents.

*The traditional social norms of gender in China are still very strong and I don't think it will be a good idea to open my sexual orientation with my family at the moment.*

*That is also part of the reason that I would like to stay in US.* (P)

For both participants S and P, Weibo performs as a freer platform for gendered self-presentation. However, they still feel a lot of pressure to present self-identity of gender from the real life. Another difference between homosexual group and heterosexual groups is the sensitivity of gender. Being the marginal group, both S and P are much more passionate in engaging into gendered topics, especially, related to their own identities, such as gay liberation, gender equality and gender roles.

## **6 CONCLUSION**

My main research question is how the participants, the Chinese overseas students, generate their self-presentation and gender identities on China social media, Sina Weibo. To state the comprehensive literature background and to present the accurate results in this English thesis took me a great effort. Hopefully my work can bring readers fresh thoughts about China social media and Chinese online self-presentation. From the results and discussions of this study, I incline to present an overview of self-presentation and gender on Chinese Social media.

### **6.1 Self-presentation**

As discussed above, social media is a dynamic platform with diverse format of content and endless information flow. From the affordance perspective of a specific social networking site, Sina Weibo, the participants appear to be active users in presenting themselves on Weibo with good ICT skills. Weibo serves as a relatively freer platform for self-disclosure and it facilitates users to develop their online identities. The affordances of Sina Weibo allow for diversities of use patterns and motivations.

However, there is a big gap in online wording skills and social skills among Chinese youngsters abroad. The one who is able to master Chinese language is more likely to become the opinion leaders. Meanwhile, it also acts as a great information source for users to seek certain information, especially the practical information with personal experience are more perceptive than the information from search engine.

As a social media, Sina Weibo appears to be not as intimate as other instant message social media in this research. Though Weibo interface allows for unlimited connection (mostly, the 'follow' button is available for every user), the interactivities between users are relatively inactive. On this platform, it is more motivated to share rather than to talk. It is found that normal users present themselves with their own motivations and interests. Individuality can be observed from their profiles, content of posts, interested theme and patterns of use Weibo. However, different users are in different level of mastering their presentation. Most of the hot topics and popular speeches are only from a few opinion leaders, who manipulate their followers as tube to disseminate their posts in a wide way. Rumour dissemination from a celebrity's account is problematic on Sina Weibo nowadays.

Although most of the Chinese adolescents are equipped with multiple technological devices such as personal computer, smart phone, tablet-computer and so on, it still necessary to carry out ICT literacy education among schools and universities. How to evaluate online information? How to present themselves accurately in a preferred way? How to protect their privacy online? With the heavy infiltration of social media in people's daily life, ICT literacy in terms of Social media turns out to be urgent and necessary.

## **6.2 Gendered practice**

Gender differences are found not only between female participants and male participants but also among non-heterosexual group and heterosexual group, but the differences in this case appear not to correspond to the previous research. Female

users with high education background appear to be increasingly independent and self-esteem. On the other hand, the portray of male users is no longer as 'rigid' as before, plenty of soft words, comments, pictures are generated or uploaded by men users on Weibo. The patterns of male users to certain aspect could be a symbol of gender liberation in the community of China.

As a traditional Asian country, China, to some degree, is still a very controversial community who shows limited openness to non-heterosexual group from the government to public. For those homosexual users, Weibo performs as an open sphere for their self-presentation with their 'un-welcome' gender orientation in the real society. However, the world reflected from social media is not the real world. Those users belong to the marginal group of gender are depressed and threatened by the social norms and traditions in the real world. They appear to be more conscious about their audiences. On the other hand, Chinese young generation holds more open attitude about this special group than their parents. As a result, gay users enjoy more freedom and honest on social media when their audiences are youngsters.

### **6.3 Limitations and future direction**

The focus group of this study provides a fresh insight into the pattern of online self-presentation among Chinese youngsters. It also helps to investigate the gender identity and perception among the college students. However, this study is only the first step. The discussion only reveals the practice experiences and cultural phenomenology of a limited number of Sina Weibo users; they also shed light of

Sina Weibo as a cultural environment. However, they do not reveal the interaction between Weibo and user, or the effects of Weibo in shaping and reshaping users' gender or other social identities. Focus groups are also limited into the extent to which they can illuminate the actual process of self-presentation and gendered perception on Weibo. Longitudinal study that compare participants' self-presentations between real world and social media and track their perception over time would better ascertain how the Chinese young generation present themselves and what role the social media plays in building their self-presentation and gender perception.

## Reference

All-China Women Federation. (2011). The third wave survey on the social status of women in China. Retrieved from

<http://www.wsic.ac.cn/academicnews/78621.htm>

Ashmore, R. D., & Jussim, L. (1997). *Self and identity: fundamental issues*.

North Carolina: Oxford University Press.

Bennett, W. L. (2012). The personalization of politics: political identity, social media, and changing patterns of participation. *Journal of The ANNALS of the American academy of political and social science*. 644(20), 20-39.

DOI: 10.1177/0002716212451428

Boyd, D. (2010). Social network sites as networked publics: Affordances, dynamics, and implications." In Papacharissi, Z. (Eds), *Networked self: identity, community, and culture on social Network Sites* (pp. 39-58). . New York America: Routledge.

Boyd, D., & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social network sites: definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-mediated communication* 13(1), 210–230. DOI: 10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x

Bregman, A., & Haythornthwaite, C. (2001). Radicals of presentation in persistent conversation. Presented at the proceedings of the Hawai'i international conference on system sciences. Retrieved from

<https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/bitstream/handle/2142/489/Radicals%20of%20Presentation%20in%20Persistent%20Conversation.html?sequence=2>

Bruning, S. D., Dials, M., & Shirka, A. (2008). Using dialogue to build organization–public relations, engage publics, and positively affect organizational outcomes.

*Journal of Public relations review*, 34 (2008), 25–31.

Buckingham, D. (2008). Introducing identity. In Buckingham, D. (Eds), *Youth, identity, and digital media* (pp.1–24). Cambridge, America: The MIT Press.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York, America: Routledge.

Carter, G. C., & Steiner, L. (2004). *Critical readings: media and gender*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press

Chan, A. (2002). From propaganda to hegemony: Jiaodian Fangtan and China's media policy. *Journal of Contemporary China* 11(30), 35-51.

Chow, E. N., Zhang N., & Wang J. (2004): Promising and contested fields: women's studies and sociology of women/gender in contemporary China. *Journal of Gender and Society*, 18(2), 161-188.

Chu, L. L. (1994). Continuity and change in China's media reform. *Journal of Communication*, 44(3), 4–21.

CNNIC (2013): The 32<sup>nd</sup> report of Internet development in China. China Internet Network Information Centre. China. Retrieved from

<http://www.cnnic.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwxzbg/hlwtjbg/201307/P020130717505343100851.pdf>

CNNIC (2014): The 33<sup>rd</sup> report of Internet development in China. China Internet Network Information Centre. China. Retrieved from

<http://www.cnnic.net.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwxzbg/hlwtjbg/201401/P020140116395418429515.pdf>

Cockburn, C., & Ormrod, S. (1993). *Gender and technology in the making*. California, America: SAGE.

Elm, M. S. (2007). Young people's presentations of relationships in a Swedish internet community. *Journal of Young* 15(2), 145–167.

Florini, S. (2014). Tweets, tweeps, and signifyin': communication and cultural performance on "clack Twitter". *Journal of Television new media* 15(223), 145-167.

DOI: 10.1177/1527476413480247

Fuchs, C. (2010). Social media, riots, and revolutions. *Journal of Capital & class*, 36 (3), 383-391. DOI: 10.1177/0309816812453613

Fletcher, O. (2011, October 26). "新浪英文微博 挑战 Twitter? ". *Wall street journal*.

Retrieved from <http://cn.wsj.com/gb/20110609/rth145806.asp?source=article>

Gallagher, K. (2005). *Gender differences in mathematics: an integrative psychological approach*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press

Gao, Q., Abel, F., & Houben, G.J., & Yu, Y. (2011). A comparative study of users' microblogging behaviour on Sina Weibo and Twitter. Presented at 20th International Conference, UMAP 2012, Montreal, Canada, July 16-20, 2012. Retrieved from

<http://202.120.224.199/picture/article/81/f2/99/5a4dcd89499eba2b4caf15d45755/d0deb899-a715-4f08-a10e-c3d579613393.pdf>

Gergen, K. J. (1991). *The saturated self: dilemmas of identity in modern Life*. New York, America: Basic Books.

Gill, R. (2007). *Gender and the media*. Cambridge, UK: Polity

Gibson, J.J. (1977). The theory of affordances. In Shaw, R. & Bransford, J. (Eds.), *Perceiving, Acting and Knowing* (pp.127-143). New Jersey, America: Erlbaum.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York, America: Anchor Books.

Grbich, C. (2007). *Qualitative data analysis: an Introduction*. London, UK: SAGE.

Guillory, J., & Sundar, S.S. (2008): Can interactivity in corporate websites influence public perceptions of organizations? Paper presented at the International communication association conference, Montreal, Canada (2008).

Gubrium, J. F & Holstein, J. A. (2001). *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*. London, UK: SAGE.

Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (1995). *The active interview*. London, UK: SAGE

Guo, L. (2002). China and the Internet, a game of cat and mouse?

Retrieved from: <http://www.rand.org/nsrd/capp/events/catandmouse.html>;

Hall, J. A. (1987). On explaining gender differences the case of nonverbal communication. In Philip, S. & Clyde, H. (Eds), *Sex and Gender* (pp.177-200).

California, America: SAGE.

Halpern, D., & Gibbs, J. (2012). Social media as a catalyst for online deliberation? exploring the affordances of Facebook and YouTube for political expression. *Journal of Computers in human behaviour*. 29 (2013), 1159–1168.

Harris, N. (2010). *Gay and Lesbian Adults Are More Likely and More Frequent Blog Readers (Social Networks, Blog Popularity Remain High for Gay Americans over Past Three Years)*

Retrieved from

<http://www.harrisinteractive.com/NewsRoom/PressReleases/tabid/446/mid/1506/articleId/435/ctl/ReadCustom%20Default/Default.aspx>

Hong, J. (1998). The internationalization of television in China: The evolution of ideology, society, and media since the reform. Connecticut, America: Praeger.

Holsti, O. R. (1968). Content analysis. In Lindzey, G. & Aronson, E. (Eds.) *The handbook of social psychology*, (pp.608-629). New Delhi, India: Amerind

Hinton, S., & Hjorth, L. (2013). Understanding social media: participation and user created content. London, UK: SAGE

Jagose, A. (2009). Feminism's queer theory. *Journal of Feminism & Psychology* 19(2) 157–174.

Jonathan, S. (2012). A tale of two microblogs in China media. *Journal of Culture & society* 34(6), 773-783.

Jones, S., Millermaier, S., Goya-Martinez, M., & Schuler, J. (2008). Whose space is MySpace? A content analysis of MySpace profiles. *Journal of First Monday* 13 (9).

Retrieved from

<http://firstmonday.org/article/view/2202/2024>

Joinson, A. N. (2008). 'Looking at', 'looking up' or 'keeping up with' people? Motives and uses of Facebook. *Journal of Online social networks* (April 5-10, 2008) 1027–1036.

Judit, L. (1978). Dominant or dominated? Women on Prime-Time Television. In Gaye, T., Arlene, K. D., James, W. B. (Eds), *Hearth and Home: images of women in the mass media* (pp.51-68). New York, America: Oxford University

Kaplan. A. M. & Haenlein. M. (2010): Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Journal of Business horizons*. (2010) 53, 59-68.

Retrieved from <http://openmediart.com/log/pics/sdarticle.pdf>

Khang, H., Ki, E. J. , Lan, Y. (2012). Social media research in advertising, communication, marketing, and Public Relations, 1997–2010. *Journal of Journalism & mass communication*, 89 (2), 279 - 298. London, UK: SAGE

Kolek, E. A., & Saunders, D. (2008). Online disclosure: an empirical examination of undergraduate Facebook profiles. *Journal of NASPA*, 45 (1): 1–25.

Lee, C. C. (1994). Ambiguities and contradiction: Issues in China's changing political communication. *Journal of International communication Gazette*, 53 (1-2), 7-21.

DOI: 10.1177/001654929405300102.

Lee, C. C. (2000). *Communication patterns and bureaucratic control in cultural China*. Illinois, UK: North-western University Press.

Lenhart, A. (2009). *Adults and social network websites*. Pew Internet & American Life Project. Retrieved from

[http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP\\_Adult\\_social\\_networking\\_data\\_memo\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Adult_social_networking_data_memo_FINAL.pdf)

Li, N. and Kirkup, G. (2007). Gender and cultural differences in Internet use: a study of China and the UK. *Journal of Computers and Education*, 48(2), 301–317.

Marwick, A., & Boyd, D., (2011). To See and Be Seen: Celebrity Practice on Twitter. *Journal of Convergence*. 17(2), 139–158. DOI: 10.1177/1354856510394539

Markus, M. L. & Silver, M.S. (2008). A Foundation for the study of IT effects: a new look at DeSanctis and Poole's concepts of structural features and spirit.

Journal of The association for information systems, 9(10), 609-632.

Morozov, E. (2009). Iran: downside to the 'Twitter revolution'. *Dissent* (2009 Fall), 10–14.

Murthy, D. (2012): Towards a sociological understanding of social media: theorizing Twitter. *Journal of Sociology* (46(6), 1059-1073.

Neuendorf, K. A. (2002): *The content analysis guidebook*. London, UK: SAGE.

Ogilvy. (2011). Infographic: China's social media evolution. Retrieved from

<http://www.thomascrampton.com/china/china-social-media-evolution/>

Pan, Z. D. (2000). Improvising reform activities: the changing reality of journalistic practice in China. In Lee, C.C. (Eds) *Power, Money, and Media: Communication Patterns and Bureaucratic Control In Cultural China*, (pp.68-111) Illinois, America: North-western University Press.

Pan, B., & Crofts, J.C. (2011). Theoretical models of social media, marketing implications, and future research directions. In Marianna, S. (Eds). *Social media in travel, tourism and hospitality theory, practice and cases* (pp.73-86). Surrey, England: Ashgate.

Parks M. R. (2011). 'Social network sites as virtual communities', in Z. Papacharissi (Eds), *A networked self: identity, community and culture on social network sites*. (pp. 105–123). New York, America: Routledge.

Perlmutter, D. D. (2008): *Blogwars*. New York, America: Oxford University Press.

Ramzy, A. (2011). Wired up. *Time Magazine*, 21 Feb. Retrieved from:

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2048171,00.html>

Rose, J., Mackey, K. S., Shyles, L, Barry, K., Biagini, D., Hart. C., & Jack L. (2012): Face it: The impact of gender on social media images face it: Journal of Social communication quarterly, 60(5), 588-607. DOI:10.1080/01463373.2012.725005

Rubin, G. (1992). Misguided, dangerous and wrong: an analysis of anti-pornography politics. Retrieved from <http://culturalstudies.ucsc.edu/EVENTS/Spring09/Rubin%20-%20Misguided%20Dangerous.pdf>

Rutherford, J. (2003). Identity: community, culture and difference. London, UK: Lawrence and Wishart.

Schell, R. (1995). Maoism vs. media in the marketplace. Journal of Media Studies 9(3), 33–42.

Scheibe, K. (1985). Historical perspectives on the presented self. In B.R. Schlenker (Ed.), *The self and social life* (pp. 33– 64). New York, America: McGraw-Hill.

Smith, S. D., & Caruso, J. B. (2010). The ECAR study of undergraduate students and information technology, 2010.

Retrieved from

<http://anitacrawley.net/Resources/Reports/ECAR%20study%20highlights.pdf>

Shapiro, S. M. (2009). Revolution,Facebook-style. New York Times, (22 January), 34.

Retrieved from

[www.nytimes.com/2009/01/25/magazine/25bloggers-t.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/25/magazine/25bloggers-t.html)

Shannon, C. E., & Weaver, W. (1949). The mathematical theory of communication. Illinois, America: University of Illinois Press.

Spence, J.T., & Helmreich, R. L.( 1978). Masculinity and femininity: their psychological dimensions, correlates, and antecedents. Austin, America: University of Texas Press.

Stern, S. (2008). Producing sites, exploring identities: Youth online authorship. In Buckingham, D (Eds) , *Youth, Identity, and Digital Media* (pp.98) Cambridge, America: The MIT

Stockard, J., & Johnson, M. M. (1992). *Sex and gender in society*. New Jersey, America: Prentice Hall

Strano, M. M. (2008). User descriptions and interpretations of self-presentation through Facebook profile images. *Journal of Psychosocial research on Cyberspace* 2 (2). Retrieved from

<http://cyberpsychology.eu/view.php?cisloclanku=2008110402&article=5>

Sullivan, J. (2012). A tale of two micro-blogs in China. *Media, Culture & Society* 34(6) 773–783.

Sun, T., Chang, T. K., Yu, G. (2001). Social structure, media system, and audiences in China: testing the uses and dependency model. *Journal of Mass communication & society* 2001, 4(2), 199–217.

Sundar, S & Kim, J (2005). Interactivity and persuasion: influencing attitudes with information and involvement. *Journal of Interactive research*, 5 (2), 5-18.

Tao, P. C., (1994): The Anti-foot binding Movement in Late Ch'ing China: indigenous development and Western influence. *The Journal of Modern Chinese women literature*. 2(1994) 141-178. Taiwan, China: Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica.

Tuchman, G. (1987). *Making news: a study in the construction of reality*. New York, America: Free Press

Wajcman, J. (1991). *Feminism confronts technology*. Pennsylvania: Wiley.

Webb, L. M. (2012): Social networking sites: Facebook. In M. Kosut and G. J. Geoffrey (Eds.), *The Sage encyclopedia of gender in media* (pp. 24-26). California, America: SAGE.

Williams. B., & Gulati, G. J (2007). *Social networks in political campaigns: Facebook and the 2006 midterm elections. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, America, August 30<sup>th</sup> -September 2nd, 2007.*

Wood, J. T. (2009). *Gendered lives: communication, gender, and culture*. Belmont, California, America: Wadsworth.

Williams, J. E. & Best, D. L. (1990): *Measuring sex stereotypes: a multination study*. California, America: SAGE.

Wilson, R. E., Gosling, S. D. & Graham, L. T., (2012). A review of Facebook research in the social sciences, *Journal of Perspectives on psychological science* 7(3) 203-220.

Yu, H. (2006). From active audience to Media citizenship: the case of Post-Mao China. *Journal of Social Semiotic*,16(2), 303- 326.

DOI:10.1080/10350330600664888

Zammuto, R. F., Griffith, T. L., Majchrzak , A., Dougherty, D. J. & Fara, S.(2007). Information technology and the changing. *Journal of Organization science*,18( 5), 749–762.

Zhou, X. (2009). The political blogosphere in China: a content analysis of the blogs regarding the dismissal of Shanghai leader Chen Langyu. *Journal of New media & society* 11(6): 1003–1022.

## **Appendix 1. Interview questions list**

1, Could you brief your story with Weibo? What do you think of it? How important is the Weibo for you?

你可以讲一下你的微薄使用及你对微薄是什么态度吗？

6. Could you please describe your friends on Weibo? (Their age, career, gender or sex, education background, location and cohesion and so on) As well as the accounts you are following with? How do you interact with each other?

能描述一下你微薄上的朋友圈吗？(年龄，职业，性别，教育程度，与你的亲密程度等)

以及你关注的人群和帐号？你们在微薄上是如何互动的？

2, How much gendered information you meet on Weibo? Do you have any expectations of behaving a man or a woman on Weibo?

你经常关注性别有关的账户和言论吗？(性别差异，性别特征，刻板印象，性取向，婚恋观念)等的言论吗？你会特别关注某些以讨论性别相关话题为主的帐号吗？

3, Have you ever met or read some heavily gendered information which you cannot bear with or you cannot agree more on Weibo? Could you please describe such information?

在微薄上什么样的性别言论，是你最不能接受的？你会关注那些跟你性别意见不一致的帐号的微薄吗？

4, Do you concern your gender identity when use Weibo? Will you open it or hide it or fake it?

你在使用微薄过程中，有自我的性别意识吗？（在发某些内容时会不会考虑到自己是男人或者女人吗？，比如发裸体男人的照片？或者发与某同性亲密动作的照片或话语？）

5, Have you met sex harassment or gender discrimination on Weibo? Have you ever concerned security issue?

你在微薄遭受过性骚扰或者性别歧视吗？如果有，你是如何面对的？如果没有，是否有在微薄使用过程中，是否有自我保护意识？

7. Could you please tell about how you build your gender awareness? And could you please recall the most impressive incident in your gender identification?

能描述一下你的性别意识时如何养成的吗？促成你对自己性别定义中印象最深刻的事是什么？

8. What are your main reasons for using Weibo? (Information seeking or sharing, self-identity, integration and social interaction, entertainment) how do you think it satisfies your expectation or not? Will you continue using Weibo in future? Why?

你使用微薄的主要目的是什么？你觉得微薄满足你的期望吗？会继续使用微薄吗？为什么？

## **Appendix 2. Invitation letter for participation**

Dear XXX,

My name is Jie Xie who contacted with you via Weibo before. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree in Media Education. I would like to invite you to participate into my research about the Chinese self-representation and gender on Weibo and share your user experience with Chinese social media.

In particular, you will be asked questions about how you identify your gender on Weibo, your user experience of Weibo in general and how do you think about your gender identity shaping and other related questions as well. The meeting will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and place, and should last about 1 hour. The interview will be videotaped or voice record so that I can accurately reflect on what is discussed. The interview material will only be reviewed by my thesis supervisor and me. I also would like to ask for your permission to trace your latest 100 posts on your Weibo account for more information about your use of Weibo. Some of your posts will be studied and may be quoted in my research as well.

You may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to. Although you probably won't benefit directly from participating in this study, we hope that others in the community/society in general will benefit by what you share with us.

I would like assume you that your participation is confidential and your identity will not be revealed for your privacy.

Thank you for your consideration. Attached to this email is the introduction part of my research right now. If you would like to participate, please reply me with 'yes'. I will contact with you within the next week to discuss when and how we can have the interview at your convenience. Look forward to your participation in my study. Many thanks in advance.

Best Regards,

Jie Xie

Master student of Media Education, Lapland University, Finland

Email: [jxie@ulapland.fi](mailto:jxie@ulapland.fi)

Mobile: +358 0417060480