CONSTRUCTING, PRESENTING, AND EXPRESSING SELF ON SOCIAL NETWORK SITES: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY IN CHINESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

by

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B.A., Zhejiang University, 2013

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

(Educational Studies)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

December 2015

Abstract

During past few years, social media, particularly social network sites (SNS) have emerged and attracted an increasing number of young people. SNS is a significant venue for youth to construct their identities through the interaction with their peers. Most current literature, available in English, focuses on the experiences of youth with SNS who live in Western societies. This exploratory study explores how undergraduates at universities in China construct, present and express their identity on SNS in relation to others. Five semi-structured interviews were conducted with college students to capture their lived experience with SNS. I drew on concepts of identity, subjectivity and dramaturgy and literature that examine tensions between concepts of collectivism and individualism in China. This study concludes that: Firstly, SNS provides a space for young people to explore and perform themselves towards what they see as their ideal self. However it does not mean young people can construct a brand new identity without the intervention of their offline identity. How they construct themselves and how they are constructed occurs in relation to their offline friendship circle as to the discursive world they live within. Participants spoke about the tensions in trying to balance collectivistic culture and individualistic culture, which influenced participants' sense of self and the way they presented themselves on SNS. Young people are deeply involved in their online presence and reality, and so both discursive worlds influence who they think they are in relation to others. Secondly, SNS is a "front stage" for young people to deliberately present themselves and manage the impression they gave to others. Both written texts and visualized pictures afford young people to "give" or "give off" their performance to their online audience (Goffman, 1959, p. 3). However on SNS the boundary between "front stage" and "back stage" is blurred and it is difficult for participants

to keep track of different online and offline connections and, based on this, what to post. The study points to the importance of understanding SNS use within the particularities of cultural contexts.

Preface

This thesis is the original work of the author, Yu Guo. Ethics approval was required for the

research and approved by the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Broad (BREB) on January 23st,

2015. The BRBE number is H14-03157.

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List of Abbreviations

SNS = Social Network Sites

IM = Instant Message

Glossary

Zheng Neng Liang （正能量）: positive and opstmistic

Yan Zhi (颜值) : (literally: the value of the face). The terms used when the participants talked about their physical appearance, which is valuable in SNS.

Dou Bi (逗逼) : The term used by one participant to describe a person who is funny and silly.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I offer my enduring gratitude to the faculty, staff and my fellow students at UBC, who have inspired me to continue my work in this field. I owe particular thanks to my supervisor Dr. Michelle Stack, who encouraged me and guided me through the whole program, and always trusted me and explored my potentials in research with patience and care. I would like to thank the rest of my thesis committee: Dr. Deidre Kelly and Dr. Hongxia Shan, for their inspired comments, resourceful feedbacks, and great encouragements. I thank Dr. André Elias Mazawi, who acts as my external examiner, for his insightful comments and suggestions.

Special thank to the participants of the study. Thank you for trusting me, and sharing your experience, thoughts, and struggles with me. Your stories moved me and led me to explore the impact of social media to everyday life around us. I have immense respect and gratitude for each of you.

I thank my cohort, whom I learned a lot from during past two and half years. Not only your knowledge and experience but also your kind support during the coursework and research helped me grow in academics and personal life.

Special thanks are owned to my family, particularly my parents, who gave me life to experience the colourful and exciting world, and support me throughout my years of education, both morally and financially. I thank my friends at UBC and in China, who add colour to my life and give me help and support.

To my fiancé, Mr. Yang Liu, for his 9-year love and insightful suggestions on my research.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Personal History and Relation to My Research

China has experienced tremendous economic growth since the1990s (Shi, 2013; Zhang, 2012). A neoliberal economic system and individualism were introduced to Chinese society, which is a shift from the tradition of Confucian and Communist collectivism (Zhang, 2012). At the same time, Internet usage rapidly increased; social media use emerged as common among youth, particularly since the new millennium. Through this study I hope to contribute an understanding of Chinese youth, particularly university students' construction, presentation, and expression of their identity on social networking sites (SNS) in contemporary China.

I was born in the 1990s, and so I not only experienced the growth of economy and globalization with their influence to the culture and social norms, but I also witnessed the development of computers, the Internet, and most recently, social media, particularly to the majority of people in urban areas in China. Because the Chinese educational system of high schools is highly structured, students seldom have spare time to participate in online activities during their school years. Like many people in my generation, I was extensively exposed to social media when I was admitted into a university. The popular social networking site among college students at that time was Renren website; it seemed like everyone set up a personal page on Renren and used it as a tool to express themselves or/and to interact with others. In my experience some students started to use social networking sites (SNS) during high school, but due to the pressure of the College Entrance Examination across the nation, they did not use it frequently until they entered into colleges. What is more, based on my experience, my peers have more time and freedom in university to invest into various SNS. In my social network we had

time to explore and construct our identities through the interaction with our peers. This phenomenon caught my attention, which led me to my interest in better understanding how university students construct, present, and expresses themselves on SNSs in China.

1.2 Statement of Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to analyze my participants – undergraduates at 6 different Chinese universities – construct their identity(ies) in relation to SNS and others. More specifically, I analyze how participants construct themselves in SNS, how they present themselves, and how they perceive others' presentation and its influence to their own online identity(ies) and presentation. Drawing on the notion of identity (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Korostelina, 2007; Jenkins, 2008) and subjectivity (Norton, 2010; Holland & Leander, 2004; Stack, 2010), the study aims to explain how participants identify and position themselves and others in SNS in relation their friends. In addition, the study uses Goffman's (1959) theory of dramaturgy to understand how participants present themselves on SNS stages. Moreover, as young people's engagement with SNS never happens in a vacuum, this study also explores the tensions between collectivistic culture and individualistic culture (Duan & Dholakia, 2015) they feel when presenting in SNS in relation to the larger cultural and societal context in China.

My overarching research question is: How do college students in China construct, present, and express their identity on SNS in relation to their friendship network? I examined this question through qualitative interviews with 6 college students at 6 universities in China.

Based on the research question, this study focuses on four sub-questions:

(1) How do participants perceive their online presentation and identity construction? To understand how they present themselves, I asked participants to talk about their decisions concerning what to put online and their motivations for doing so.

(2) How do research participants visually present their identity on SNSs? I specifically look at how participants visually present themselves through pictures and other visualized productions on SNS.

(3) How do participants perceive their friends' online presentations and its influence on their friendship? I focused on the nature of SNS - socializing and networking, and analyzed the interactions between the participants and his/her online friends.

(4) What tensions, if any, do participants feel when they are managing their on/offline identities? I analyzed how participants spoke about what hinders them from presenting themselves and constructing their desired identity(ies) in relation to culture.

1.3   Significance of Study

This study is significant in the following ways: Firstly, it contributes to the literature in the field of youth's engagement in social media. Secondly, most of the work available in English focusing on youth and social media is located in Western contexts while the literature looking at the Eastern world is relatively small. This study shed light on youth's social media engagement in China and points to the need to complicate theories of youth and social media to encompass globalization within local and national cultural and socio-political contexts. This study can be reference to compare Chinese youth's social media engagement and online presentation with western industrialized countries.

1.4   Structure of Thesis

This thesis has 6 chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction. It includes my personal history that drew me to the field of study, followed by the purpose of the study, research question and four sub-questions, and the significance of the study. Chapter 2 is the review of literature in this field of study. In this chapter I present the background and the context in China, with a review of relevant literature in English and Chinese. Chapter 3 is the conceptual framework that I used to shape my views towards the research question and guide my analysis and discussion of the data I collected. In Chapter 4 I detail my methodological approach and the methods I used and explain my process for recruiting and selecting participants, data collection and analysis, and the limitation of the study. Chapter 5 focuses on my findings based on the 5 qualitative interviews that I conducted. In this chapter, I use the notion of subjectivity (Norton, 2010; Holland & Leander, 2004; Stack, 2010), Goffman's (1959) concept of dramaturgy, and the concept of tension of different cultures in the same context as the lenses to analyze my data. Chapter 6 is my conclusion and presents ideas for future studies that relate to what I learned through this research.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

2.1   Context

2.1.1   Internet access in China

The Chinese government began tracking the Internet development in 1997 through the Chinese Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) (CNNIC, 1997). The total number of computers in China increased from 299,000 in 1997 to 67,100,000 in 2007 (CNNIC, 1997; CNNIC, 2007a). Simultaneously, CNNIC states that the number of people in China who use Internet has grown from 620,000 in 1997 to 668,000,000 in 2015, which constituted 48.8% of the whole population in 2015 (CNNIC, 1997; CNNIC, 2015b).

Despite the expansion of the Internet use throughout the country, there is an uneven access to it based on different geographical areas. In 2007, while over half the population had Internet access in some developed countries (i.e. 69.9% in the U.S. and 67.1% in Japan), only 12.3% of the whole population in China had access the Internet. This rate was even lower than the worldwide average Internet use rate (17.6%) (CNNIC, 2007b). Within the country, the Internet access rate in urban areas is (21.6%) far greater than that in rural areas (5.1%) (CNNIC, 2007b). Even in 2015, only 27.9% of the Internet users in China are from rural areas (CNNIC, 2015b). In terms of regions, the Internet access in the eastern part of China is more than the total rate in the western and middle regions of the country. CNNIC (1999) argues that the rate of the Internet access in different areas corresponded with their economic growth.

As far as educational background is concerned, CNNIC (1999; 2015b) found that people with junior high school education constituted the largest group of the Internet users (30.6%) in 2015, compared to the situation in 1999 when 77% of the Internet users had a bachelor degree or bachelor diploma. According to CNNIC (2007b), the most significant reason for not using the

Internet is the lack of computer and the Internet skills, followed by a lack of equipment and connections to the Internet. I would argue, this is because at the beginning of the Internet age, only people with high education background have access to the Internet from their workplace, but with the development of the technology and Internet literacy, the use of Internet expanded from people with higher education to people without a university or college education .

Herold (2011) argues that though the development of the Internet in China started at the same time as in America and Europe, the operation of the Internet in China has unique characteristics. The foremost characteristic is that the government has the ownership of cyberspace and private companies can only rent the bandwidth from the government, while many other countries allow private Internet service providers to run the network. The second feature is that the Chinese Internet is separate from the rest of the World Wide Web, for the government create barriers for the Internet users to use some webs by four strategies: (1) Great Firewall of China (GFW) that prohibit Internet users from accessing certain websites, (2) enforced blacklisting of specific words or phrases, (3) cooperation with multi-national technology corporations to police the Internet, and (4) real-world access controls such as registration with national ID (Herold, 2011). Herold (2011) also frames the discourse of academic studies on the Internet in China as "control and resistance", which describes the relationship of the government who tries to control the Internet usage and the Internet users who try to resist governmental control. Conversely, Chu and Cheng (2011) understand the Internet in China through two discourses: one is "liberation discourse," holding the view that technology development can enhance the development of a civil society; the other is "control discourse", which suggests the government controls cyberspace in China to consolidate its interest and power (p. 23).

2.1.2   Types of social media

There are several definitions about what social media is. For instance, O'Keeffe, Clarke-Pearson, & Council on Communications and Media (2011) define social media as "any website that allows social interaction" (p. 800). Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) trace back the development of the Internet and the emergence of social media, and they 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" (p. 61). "Web 2.0" is a term to distinguish "Web 1.0" when content and applications were created and published only by individuals. Web 2.0 now allows all users of the Internet to modify the content and applications collaboratively and constantly. By "User Generated Content", Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) refer to the media content that can be accessed publicly and generated by "end-users" (p. 61). I draw on Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) definition, because it explains in detail how technology provides a base for social media users to generate and disseminate their original content, which is a premise of construction and presentation of users' identities online.

Social media can be divided into several categories including: (1) Instant Message (IM); (2) Social Networking Sites (SNS); and (3) blogs or microblogs etc. (Huang, 2014). Specifically, Instant Message refers to a computer application that allows synchronous text communication between two or more people through the Internet (Huang, 2014). Recently, the development of a mobile application, WeChat, exemplifies a new form of IM, namely Mobile Instant Message (MIM). MSN Messenger, Yahoo! Messenger, Skype in Western world are included in this category. The popular IM (including MIM) in China are QQ and WeChat. IM is among the most popular social media in China and has the highest access rate (89.3%) among all forms of social media (CNNIC, 2014).

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Social network sites (SNS) are normally used with "social networking sites" interchangeably. boyd and Ellison (2007) defined SNSs well:

We define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (p. 211)

This definition captures the characteristics of different SNS, yet it leaves out another significant characteristic of social network sites: how people express themselves and present themselves through different means including posts, comments and pictures.

SNS developed quickly since 2005 in China. On the influence of Facebook that is popular in Western world, the first social networking site "XiaoNei Sites", which then changed its name to "Renren Net", was established in 2005. Because the Chinese government blocked Facebook, "Renren Net" became the dominant SNS among college students. In 2008, another SNS, Kaixin Sites, was created to cater to young white-collar workers in China (Geng, 2013). In 2009, Sina Micro blog (Chinese equivalent of Twitter, also called Weibo) was established and quickly gained popularity in China. In 2013, WeChat Friendship Circle, as an extension of the original function of MIM, occupied the majority market in China. According to CNNIC (2014), 390 million people use SNS.

A third form of social media is blog. Blogs are websites that usually allow users to create entries in chronological order (Huang, 2014). Like an online journal, bloggers can write their ideas, upload pictures, and also receive comments from audiences. By the year of 2009, 444,300,000 people used blogs in China (CNNIC, 2009). The number is still increasing. QQ

zone and Sina Blogs are the most popular blog service providers in China. Some social media has combined IM, SNS, and blog together (Huang, 2014).

Some scholars and institutions (Huang, 2014; CNNIC, 2014) regard Micro blog as a fourth form of social media because Micro blog are social network sites, but also have other social functions such as providing a public field for opinion expression, which has become a platform to disseminate news and discuss heated political, cultural and societal topics. Sina Microblog (which is also called Weibo) is the first Microblog; it is now the dominant Micro blog in China with 596 million users (CNNIC, 2014). I would argue micro blog belongs to SNS with regard to the function of social networking.

2.1.3 Youth's engagement with social media in China

By the year 2014, there were 277,000,000 youth (79.6% of all youth) in China engaged in the Internet. Among them 92.4% are adolescents from 12 to 24 year old (CNNIC, 2015a). Due to the large population, youth engagement in the Internet has caught academic attention. As not every household or school provide computer and the Internet access, more than half of youth visit "Wangba" (Internet Café), a public place that allows people to have access to computers and Internet (CNNIC, 2009). Although the development of school infrastructure reduces the need of going to Internet Cafés in recent years, nearly half of youth continue to visit Internet Cafés. In Liu (2009)'s study, she examined the reason by the observation at Wangba and in-depth interviews, and found out Wangba serves as a "heterotopian third place", which serves for youth as a place "against the will of various authorities, for a sense of freedom, relaxation, community, and equality as well as fun " (p. 167). As such, Liu argues the existence of Wangba is necessary.

Conversely, many scholars (Cao & Fu, 2007; Huang, 2014; CNNIC, 2009) frame youth as addicted to the Internet. A CNNIC survey indicated that online games, online music and

online videos were the most popular online application among youth and adolescents. Based of the popularity of these sites the CNNIC holds the view that the Internet for youth and children is threatening and leads them to be addicted. Similarly, Cao and Su (2007), by surveying 2630 high school students in Changsha City, conclude that Internet addiction "is not rare among Chinese adolescents", and that the psychological features of Internet-addicted youth are different from those who are not addicted (p. 275). In 2005, the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the China Youth Internet Association state that Internet addiction was a "serious problem" (Golub & Lingley, 2008, p. 62), and they began investigating the Internet addiction in China. In 2008, China became the first country to declare that Internet addiction is a "clinical disorder" (Traff, 2015). With its influence, many Youth Internet Addiction Rehab Centers emerged, aiming to help youth to quit addiction to the Internet (Wang, He & Du, 2009). According to Golub & Linley (2008), clinic treatment is based on "the model of gambling or drug addiction" (p. 62). In 2010, China Youth Internet Association (CYIA) associates with Communication University of China, published the 3rd Chinese Adolescents Internet Addiction Report. It states that there were 240,400,000 adolescents (14.1% of the whole youth Internet users) are addicted to Internet, among which youth aged 18-23 appears to be highest in rate of Internet addiction (CYIA, 2010). Huang and Leung (2009) argue young people in China also face the challenge of Instant Message addiction, and the level of IM addiction is influenced by shyness and alienation from family, peers and school. Huang (2014) expanded the IM addiction to "social media addiction", arguing that youth who spent a great deal of time on IM, SNS, blogs, and microblogs might be addicted. She further proposed four social media addiction symptoms: "constantly alleviate negative emotions through social media, suffer from adverse consequences, and lose interest in offline social activities because of social media use" (p. 127).

In contrast, some other scholars (Szablewicz, 2010; Qiu, 2009; Golub & Lingley, 2008) argue that the youth's addiction to Internet is a moral panic, which results from the fear of technology. Szablewicz (2010) remarks that the moral panic of the Internet and technology distract people's attention away from the real issues such as online citizen activism and censorship. The solution which government proposed such as creating healthy Internet environment for "harmonious society" is a way to legitimize censorship and the Internet control in China. Golub and Lingley (2008) argue the Internet addiction should be understood as a social problem rather than a medical illness, and the moral panic in contemporary China reflects the concern of "consumerist lifestyles and the proliferation of new information technologies" (p. 72).

Although I will not discuss whether youth's Internet use is good or bad, the discussion above does provide a backdrop for what are the concerns and debates in the context of China, and how Internet is understood or framed in the dominant discourse.

2.2   Youth's Engagement with Media

Through researching the relevant literature on youth's engagement with media, I found that the public concern for and academic attention to youth's engagement in media is not new. Whenever a new form of media emerges, which is appealing to children and youth, there are revitalized debates over whether the new media is harmful or not.

According to Lemish (2007), television is viewed historically as having a negative influence to children, for television may convey some content such as violence, sex, consumerism, and it may deliver "false beliefs" and "discriminatory ideologies" (p. 184). As such, media literacy is necessary to protect children from the harm of the television. This protection approach is influential from then on, and even in today's societies, some people still hold the similar view towards media. For instance, in China, as I presented in the previous

section, CNNIC frames the excessive exposure of Internet and social media as "addiction". Scholars in China such as Xu (2009) and Huang (2014) also express concerns about the adolescents' addiction to social media. Similarly, if we look at Western discourse about young people's engagement with social media, it is easy to find similar accounts. Willett (2008) suggests that violent games, sexual images in SNSs, are harmful to young people. In addition, as Willett (2008) and Cheung (2009) argue, some techniques are utilized to immerse children in the culture of branding, consumerism and materialism, and thus reshape their buying habits, and thus children and youth become victims of powerful commercial industries. Critical media educators that focus on the opportunities for self-expression through media also are concerned about consumerism and branding but how this should be approached is different. Rather than focusing on prohibiting certain types of media or telling youth media is bad they look at how to assist young people in understanding and engaging media.

The other side of this debate treat media engagement as a way of empowering young people by providing them with opportunities and venues for self-expression and having their voices heard. Some media educators either in the West (e.g. Buckingham & Domaille, 2009) or in Asia (e.g. Cheung, 2009; Xu, 2009) argue that through media education, students will be armed with the competency to critically "think, decode and analyze" (Cheung, 2009, p. 4). Thus they can not only critically view the media un-representation or misrepresentation, but also make their voices heard, pursuing their social and political goals, or creating their own alternative media products to confront mainstream culture (Lemish, 2007). Besides, Goldman, Booker, and McDermott (2008) argued that youth learned to be participants of civic and democratic practice through their engagement of social media. Meanwhile, they can make use of new technology to better facilitate their social interactions.

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There are other scholars (e.g. Livingstone, 2012) who do not see social media as a good/bad dichotomy. Livingstone (2012) argues that there is more focus on the risks of youth and the Internet than the opportunities. She argues instead of a good/bad dichotomy, that we look at resilience and opportunities. Livingstone (2012) further argues that a small level of risk that children undertake when they are using Internet may enhance their resiliency to navigate unexpected experience later.

2.3   Social Media Engagement: What Do Youth Use It For?

Based on the fact that an increasing number of youth and adolescents are participating in social media, and that it plays a significant role in youth's lives (Park et al, 2009; Vesnic-Alujevic, 2013; Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, & Witty, 2010), some researchers from different academic disciplines such as media studies and psychological studies explain how and why youth use it.

Many scholars (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Lampe, Ellision, & Steinfield, 2006; Park, Kee & Valenzuela, 2009; boyd & Heer, 2006; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010) study social media in a quantitative approach using "Use and Gratification" as conceptual framework. "Use and Gratification theory" assumes that media audience and users are "active, discerning, and motivated in their media use" (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010, p. 3). It indicates that media users turn to a specific kind of media for a specific need. Some are looking at SNSs in general, and found that people use SNSs for maintaining existing social relations and reconnecting with old friends (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Lampe, Ellision, & Steinfield, 2006), conversing with friends and sharing digital artifacts (boyd & Heer, 2006), and learning about new people they met offline (Lampe et al., 2006). Some look at Facebook specifically. For instance, Park, Kee and Valenzuela (2009) argue the reason for using Facebook is first to satisfy socializing

needs, second for leisure and amusement needs, and third seeking and maintaining their personal status, and fourth searching for useful information. Quan-Haase and Young (2010) discuss 6 dimensions of gratification: "getting away from responsibilities and pressures through entertainment"; "expressing concerns and friendship towards others"; "feeling inclusion of the fashionable trend of using Facebook"; "sharing problems"; "meeting new people and overcoming social inhibition"; " knowing what is going on with others and feeling inclusion in a group of peers and community" (pp. 9 -10). Joinson (2008) further decodes the need of social connection into two aspects: surveillance of what happened to their contacts and social searching of maintaining and reconnecting with offline friends. Social connection and friendship are themes addressed in most of the studies.

Psychological accounts mainly focus on the relation between youth's engagement in social media and personal traits. Suler (2004) argues that in the online venue, people feel less restrained and express themselves openly, which Suler (2004) addresses as "*online disinhibitation*" (p. 321). The reason Suler (2004) proposed this is because the nature of social media is such that people's behavior on social media can be anonymous, physically invisible, and asynchronous. In addition, Suler argues without face-to-face interactions, online friend's character in one's mind is shaped not only by their actual presence via text communication, but also by one's internal projection. As a result, one finds it is easier and safer to do things they won't do in reality, which is called by Suler "*solipsistic introjection*". What is more, people are more likely to feel the online space is dissociated from their real life, indicating to them that their online persona is their "imaginary characters " (p. 324). This is termed as "*dissociative imagination*". The last factor contributing to *online disinhibition* is "*minimization of authority*". This means there is less visible authority online.

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There is also a body of literature arguing that social media contribute to young people's identity construction. Drawing from Erikson's (1968) work on adolescents' formation of identity, Buckingham (2008) argues that social media functions as a venue for young people to reflect on their identities, searching for many possibilities, sharing their concerns with other peers. Similarly, Stern (2008) examines the reason why young people express themselves on personal pages and how they see the reward and value of online expression. Young people might be curious about being online authors, building their online presences and the technical challenges of creating personal sites, which can provide a sense of accomplishment. Moreover, Stern (2008) argues that personal sites are the place for self-reflection, releasing pent-up feelings, and witnessing personal growth. Stern further argues that physical space is often dominated by adults, but with the development of social media children and youth have authority to speak for themselves and to make their voice heard. Similarly, boyd (2008) differentiates "networked publics", which has four properties such as persistence, searchability, replicability, and invisible audience, from physical publics where adults are trying to prohibit youth to have access to adult world. She argues that the reason teenagers turn to MySpace, a social network site in the United States, is that it enables teens to participate in unregulated networked publics while they are in adult-regulated publics such as homes and schools.

2.4 Construction, Expression, and Presentation of Self on Social Media

Stern (2008) argues that online personal pages and social networking sites play an important role in youth's identity formation. She draws from developmental perspective, and understands identity as "how one subjectively views oneself over time and across situations, and is typically believed to evolve throughout the life cycle as one's inner self changes" (p. 97). She argues that the sense of accomplishment of mastering personal sites, blogs, and even SNS

motivate young people to express and construct themselves online. In addition, she continues to address that her participants use personal sites for "self-reflection, catharsis, and self documentation" (p. 101), by which they can form a sense of who they are and how to interact with others, and also explore their "beliefs, values and self-perceptions" (p. 101). Moreover, Stern (2008) states the Internet provide an opportunity to "put their best face forward" (p. 106), and adolescents are eager to present themselves in order to receive more attention.

In terms of self-presentation on the Internet, or specifically on SNS, Stern (2008) and Buckingham (2008) both address the application of Goffman's dramaturgy theory (1959) to explain this issue. Goffman (1959) argues that in real life's social interaction, individuals are performing a role to manipulate how people react and look at him/herself. Goffman developed his theory before the creation of SNS, but according to Buckingham (2008) and Stern (2008), some scholarly work still applies his theory to the field of social media.

The social interactions online between individual and others do not happen in a vacuum where there is no external power or factors. Willett (2008) argues that online expression is constrained by cultural systems, which affect how young people regard and express themselves. He further argues in Western culture systems, due to the neo-liberal discourse and the consumer culture, their choices online are influenced by what media and cultural industries tell them is cool or fashionable. Similarly, Stern (2008) argues, by engaging in personal sites, young adolescents seek to fit in the society. The processing of fitting in, I would argue, is where the culture influences the formation of one's identity, for young people learn the social norms, values, and codes around them.

As youth interact with their friends both online in SNSs and offline in real life, the relation of online and offline presentation is under discussion. Stern (2008) suggests that most

youth online are trying to capture who they are through their engagement with social media, but some youth try a totally new and different identity. Stern's work points to a consistency in what youth present of themselves on and offline. They tend to show a "better" self online, and there are still some relations between online and offline persona. Huffaker and Calvert (2005) suggest online identity is an extension of the offline identity rather than indicating a dichotomy of on and offline. In line with this idea, Clarke (2009), who focused on young adolescents in his research, found that his participants tend to exaggerate personal characteristics that they perceived to enhance their status. There are several reasons explaining the phenomenon. One is that due to the immersion of social media from various devices such as mobile applications, people can constantly interact with others online and offline and this blurs the distinction between on and offline (Takahashi, 2010). Secondly, although some youth fabricate their personal profiles in SNS to avoid search and surveillance from their parents, most youth, based on boyd's (2008) study, fill out their real personal information such as name, geographic location, school attended to connect with their offline peers. As a result, the function of SNS is less to build new friends online than to strengthen the relationship with people whom they have already known in real life. Hence, in order to keep the consistency of offline identity, people may tend to negotiate with and reconsider their construction of online identity.

Some researchers (Takahashi, 2010; Jackson & Wang, 2013) observe culture variations of how youth construct and present their self on social media. Takahashi (2010) compares local social network site Mixi and global but localized social network site MySpace in Japan and concludes that young people tend to construct "me with them" in Mixi while constructing "me and them" in MySpace. This phenomenon indicates that within the Japanese context, SNS users tend to reinforce their friendship in real life and show their collective spirit online. Similarly,

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Jackson and Wang (2013) found that Chinese college students spent less time on SNS than US college students, and that SNS plays a less important role in Chinese college students' life than that of US college students because Chinese value family, friends and their groups over self. Both authors (Takahashi, 2010; Jackson & Wang, 2013) address that eastern culture that value collectivistic culture prohibits SNS users from fully expressing themselves online. These findings shed light on how cultures may act as a constraint to prohibit youth's participation and disclosure in SNSs.

2.5 Girls' Online Expression and Visual Presentation

A number of studies (Selfe & Meyer, 1991; Herring, 2000; Kapidzic & Herring, 2011) have examined gender differences in the domain of computer-based communication. In the early days of Internet participation, the focus of studies was on gender differences in written text. For example, Selfe & Meyer (1991) found that men and high-profile members dominated the discussion in the online conference. Herring's (2000) discovered different language usage between women and men. She found that that women are more likely to use hedges and politeness markers and show a supportive attitude, while men are more likely to make strong assertions, violate conventional politeness norms, and use a more adversarial stance. Similarly, Kapidzic and Herring (2011) furthered discuss that gender differences are shown in the use of speech acts and message tone.

Visual presentations, particularly profile pictures, have become an important SNS communication tool. Ridder & Bauwel (2013) maintain an important part of posting pictures is related to negotiating sexualities and gender practice. Specifically, Siibak (2009) studies Estonian teenagers, and argues that girls tend to choose their profile pictures by the criteria of looking good, whilst the boys' criteria for posting are varied. Similarly, Whitty (2008) found that

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female youth tend to present an idealized version by posting their "glamour shots" for the purpose of attractiveness. Toma, Hancock and Ellison (2008) argued that girls tend to edit their pictures before posting to make them look more attractive. Kapidzic and Herring (2011), through a textual analysis of young people's profile picture, found that girls present themselves seductively, which can be shown from their posture, gaze, and clothing, while boys present themselves as remote and dominant. The study also indicates that in the SNS's context, online gender difference is displayed similarly with gender difference in the real world (Kapidzic & Herring, 2011).

After reviewing Western accounts of youth's social media engagement, I reviewed literature focusing on Chinese context. The majority of existing literature in China of college students' participation in SNSs draws on quantitative tradition, deploying survey as the main method and adopting quantitative analysis. Specifically, Huang (2014) addressed that social media gratifications can be categorized into social, information and entertainment. Zhang and Huang (2012) addressed that there is an instrumental orientation of SNSs use among China's college students, in that the top three uses are social interaction, information seeking, and self-image building. There is extensive research from Western contexts that study how youth use and construct themselves through social media, yet the construction and presentation is differentiated due to the difference of cultural system, in that this process is reflexive and responsive to the external cultural codes.

My research will examine how my Chinese research participants understand their online presentation and construction of self. Moreover, I will focus on my participants' self-portraits, namely their selfie, to explore how they visually present themselves on SNS. Selfie, defined by Oxford dictionary as "a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a

smartphone or webcam and shared via social media" ("Selfie", n. d.). Although the word "selfie" was found in use since 2002, the frequency of use rose dramatically during the year of 2013. Thus, it was selected by Oxford Dictionary as the "word of the year" in 2013 (Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year 2013, 2013).

The existence of selfies not only needs technologies that make instant digital photography possible, but also needs the environment to circulate, such as social media (Shipley, 2015). It is evident that in recent years, the smartphone's camera is developing, with the flourish of many applications that allows users to add filters. Also, as Shipley suggests, social media act as the main platform that make selfies accessible to public.

The emergence of selfie leads to some discussions around it. Shipley (2015) argues that the selfie reshapes basic aesthetic principles of bodies and desires, and also the relationship of privacy and publicity (p. 404). Shipley further argues that selfies, by providing a place to show bodies, can provoke discussion around sex, race, and violence; it is also an engine to circulate content and connect people. Lu (2015) argues that social media users use selfies to positively construct a better self in front of others, aiming for capturing more attentions for personal or even political purposes. Using Goffman's (1959) notions of "Impression Management", Lu (2015) argues that by taking and selecting selfies, people have control over what and how she/he can present on their social media. In Shade's (2008) research, the participants, who are from Canada, express disdain for people who post huge number of photos. Therefore, exploring selfies as visual presentation can help to unpack the issue of identity construction on SNS.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework

I use three concepts to frame my understanding and analysis of this study. The first concept is identity as a socially interactional construction and social positioning; the second is self-presentation as a dramaturgical performance; the third is the tension between collectivism and individualism culture. These three concepts are interwoven in the body of the analysis and conclusion. I will specifically discussion the meaning of these concepts in the following sections.

3.1   Identity and Subjectivity

To understand how participants construct their identities on SNS, the first step is to deconstruct the meaning of identity. David Buckingham (2008) argues that in relation to media education, "identity is an ambiguous and slippery term" (p. 1); it is discussed in different disciplines. Another term, which is often seen as the synonym of identity, is subjectivity. Through reviewing the relevant literature, the distinction between identity and subjectivity is blurry. Some scholars (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006) use these two terms interchangeably, while others view these two concepts from different perspectives.

As Benwell and Stokoe (2006) argue, there are usually two perspectives to approach "identity": one tends to understand "identity" as a stable and fixed term, seen as "an 'essential' cognitive, socialized, phenomenological or psychic phenomenon that governs human action" (p. 3). Another understanding of identity is from a sociological perspective. The following scholars I reviewed have the same ideas but using slightly different foci. Specifically, Benwell and Strokoe (2006) define identity as "a public phenomenon, a performance or construction that is interpreted by other people" (p. 3). Holland and Lave (2001) address that the dialogical relationship between "I" and "other" is a social mechanism to drive the formation of identity. Korostelina (2007) similarly defines identity as "generated, confirmed and transformed in the process of interactions

between groups and individuals; it is a dialectic between similarity and difference"(p. 16). Jenkins (2008) argues identity is never a fixed term; it is a "fluid, contingent, and situational matter with the interaction and negotiation with group of people around" (p. 44). All these definitions fall within the constructionist paradigm. In summary, I would argue these definitions break the boundary of one's inner self and outside world, and propose that one's identity is a relational term constructed in the discursive world. In this sense, identity not only answers questions of who we are, but also answers questions of who we are to others.

Identity in sociological perspective has a close relation with the term "subjectivity". It is where the meaning of two terms overlaps and blurs. The term "subjectivity" is a poststructuralist term, derived from the term "subject", emphasizing that one is "either subject of a set of relationships (i.e. in a position of power) or subject to a set of relationships (i.e. in a position of reduced power)" (Norton, 2010, p. 350). Norton also addressed the features of subjectivity: multiple, non-unitary, changing over time (p. 350.) This definition explains that one's identity is by no means a product of an individual's free choice. Rather, it is influenced by others, including its physical environment, other human beings, and the discourse in a certain social group and context. More specifically, according to Holland and Leander (2004), "The social positioning of persons, and groups, whether through everyday discourse, spatial arrangement, text, film, or other media, is now considered a primary means by which subjects are produced and subjectivity forms" (p. 127). Holland and Leander's account further explain subjectivity as a way of social positioning, and it raises the topic of how media influence the formation of one's subjectivity. Stack (2010) argues that, "looking at subjectivity is to look at how, within social, cultural and political structures, participants are positioned, resist positioning, and position others" (p. 198).

She uses the framework of "mediatized subjectivity" to analyze how the participant youths "articulate and position their media voices in relation to their self-perceptions" (p. 198).

It is also clear that sociological perspectives of identity share some similarities with the definitions of subjectivity. Both of them submit identity is fluid, and situational, which is a production through social interaction and social positioning. For both, power is the core concept. In this study, I employ both concepts for analysis. When I ask how my participants construct their identity in their social network sites, I am looking at how they identify, dis-identify and perform themselves on SNS, but I am also interested in how their identities are influenced, or positioned, by the discourse in contemporary China. As social media provide a virtual space for young people, it has established its social institutional discourse that might be convergent or divergent from the real-life discourse in different contexts. In this virtual sphere, the identity that young people construct may align with other's identities in their SNS friend circle, which significantly influence how they understand what should be and how it should be presented in SNS and what should not.

3.2   Dramaturgy: Impression Management

Another important theory to further explain how youth construct and present their identity in the venue of social media is Erving Goffman's *The presentation of self in everyday life* (1959), where he developed a "dramaturgical" account.

In Goffman's argument, one constructs the self in front of other people intentionally and controls his/her impression on other people (which is known by "impression management"). Every person in nature plays a role in the society, and wears a "mask" in front of people to construct who he or she thinks is appropriate. The "mask" is not a false self, but rather a "truer self" that "become our second nature and an integral part of our personality" (pp. 19-20).

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According to Goffman, individuals express themselves in two ways: one is "gives" (p. 2), which is the "verbal symbol or its substitutes" an individual uses to convey some information; the other is "gives off " (p. 2), which are non-verbal symbols that an individual uses to project an "expected" identity through actions (p. 2). In his account, "gives" normally refers to the traditional ways of communication, such as writings and oral speech to directly express information about oneself. On the contrary, "gives off" usually refers to the actions that others can treat as indirect symbolic signs conveying information, which can be different from their verbal communication. The expressions we "give off" may be inconsistent with the expressions we "give", because individuals have less control over their actions and body language than they do over verbal communication. For instance, in a scenario of having dinner in a host's home, even if the guest dislikes some dishes, she/he may still say how delicious the food is verbally, while in terms of actions, she/he may accidentally make a disgusting expression towards a dish, which might be caught by the host. From the inconsistency between the oral praise and the uncontrolled action, the host can tell that the guest might dislike the dish although he/she tried to hide the true feelings. However, though individuals have less control over their actions, the expressions that one "gives off" can also convey wrong information, which is called by Goffman "feigning" (p. 2). For instance, in a poker game, one may perform to be confident of his/her cards to stress his/her opponents, even if his/her cards are not good. Here the look of confidence is what the person gives off to others. The two impressions are achieved through "*dramaturgy*", which refers to a set of techniques people use to construct and control their expressions in social interactions.

"Dramaturgy" theory indicates that human's behavior in front of others is a "*performance*". The individual is like a performer, who is consciously presenting self in a way to

give their "audience" the kind of impression and thus "lead them to act voluntarily in accordance with his own plan" (p. 4). Goffman further brings the concept of "front", which refers to "the part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance" (p. 22). The *front*, as Goffman describes, consists of equipment that performers use in front of their audiences. The "settings" involving "furniture, decor, physical layout" (p. 22) and constitute parts of "front". Similarly, at a micro level, every person has a "personal front", which Goffman divided into "appearance" and "manner" (p. 24). "Appearance" are "those stimuli which function at the time to tell us of the performer's social status" (p. 24), indicating how an individual conveys desired information by what he looks like; "Manner" are "those stimuli which function at the time to warn us of the interaction role the performer will expect to play in the oncoming situation" (p. 24), indicating how an individual behaves or takes action to present in accordance of his social status or position.

The performance in the social interaction does not happen only to an individual, but also to a group of people, which is termed "*team*" by Goffman. As Goffman describes, "team refers to any set of individuals who co-operate in staging a single routine" (1959, p. 79). The members of the team are mutually dependent to collaborate on a performance. As opposed to the audience who sees the performance in the front stage, the individuals in the team are "in the know" to maintain the defined situation. It means that people in the team share the secrets that the audience would never know. For instance, in some popular reality shows in China, some superstar couples expressed their love and loyalty to their partner by languages such as "I love you", or actions like embrace and kiss in front of the TV audience, however later people found out that they broke up secretly long before the show. In this case, their presence as a loving

couple in the show was a performance, which was practiced by the two-person team: the wife

and the husband.

With the parallel of the drama metaphor, Goffman continues to argue that there are three

differentiated regions in terms of social interaction: "front stage", where performance happens;

"back stage", where individuals relax and have a rest without taking any roles; and "off-stage",

where an individual actor in a team gives a specific performance to the audience (pp. 106-140).

With the development of the Internet and social media, some scholars (boyd, 2008;

Kernaghan & Elwood, 2013; Lin, Wu, & Hsieh, 2009; Buckingham, 2008) find dramaturgy

theory is still applicable in social media sites. boyd (2008) used "*networked publics*" to refer to

the place where online social interactions and performance happen. Similarly, Kernaghan &

Elwood (2013) implement Goffman's dramaturgy in cyber space when studying cyber-bullying.

They argue that the different roles defined by Goffman as performer, audience and outsiders are

still recognized in online interactions. Performers in online-settings have much more control

through "gives off", because they can choose from different means of communication, such as

blogs, emails, IM, to present themselves (Kernaghan & Elwood, 2013). Through their profiles,

performers attempt to manage impressions that they expect to leave with their perceived

audience (boyd, 2008; Kernaghan & Elwood, 2013).

However, other theorists argue there are different ways of performing and impression

managing from traditional physical social interactions (boyd, 2008). boyd argues that when

people manage their impression on others in the physical world, they use their bodies through

movements, clothes, speech, and facial expressions to project information about who they are.

Learning about others' responses to their behaviors can assess their performance and adjust their

actions accordingly. She further argues that in social network sites, as bodies cannot always be

seen directly by audiences, people have more control online. For instance, people can choose information to be public while eliminating their everyday reactions in real life. Kernaghan and Elwood (2013) have a similar account, arguing that there is only one version of self at the same time offline, while online people can successfully manage different versions of self in different sites.

Kernaghan and Elwood (2013) further address the limitation of using Goffman's theory to frame online social interactions. The boundary of three regions (front stage, back stage, and off-stage) is blurred, and it is difficult to have an absolute divide between front stage and back stage. However, given the fact that Goffman's key concepts--such as performance, audience and regions--are still recognized, it is still useful as a conceptual framework to analyze online interactions (Kernaghan & Elwood, 2013).

3.3   Tension Between Collectivism and Individualism

Takahashi (2010) argues that there is cultural variation of social media use. In the case of SNS, the peer relationship is built not only on the function of the social media, but also on the culture embedded in people's lives. In addition, as Goffman (1959) put it in dramaturgy theory, social interaction never happens in a vacuum; rather, the performance and expression are required by the "tradition of his [sic] group and social status" (p. 6) Sometimes the individual's performance is unconsciously presented by the impact of traditional view of a particular role (p. 6). Thus, I deem culture that is associated with tradition plays an important role in providing a structure to impact youth's presentation on social media.

Culture is defined as a "constellation of loosely organized values, practices and norms shared by an interconnected group of people in a given nation" (Jackson & Wang, 2013, p. 910). Hofstede (1983) identified four dimensions to label different cultures, among which the

dimension of collectivism-individualism is the most important one to distinguish different national culture. Although this distinction has been criticized for being simplistic, it is still reasonable to some extent when interpreting different patterns of usage of social media in China as compared to Western societies. China is a prototypical collectivistic culture, which is rooted in the historical and philosophical foundation of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism (Jackson & Wang, 2013). People in collectivistic culture treasure the benefit of the family, friends and their group over themselves, and value modesty over pride. In terms of social relationships, people tend to highlight group harmony and avoid confrontation (Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995). The collectivistic culture, as I emphasized, sheds light on how people in China perform and interact with each other every day in real life, and even in social media, where people present themselves under the constraints of social norms.

Collective culture is not the only influence on young people. What youth do and say on SNS is also influenced by global media. Due to the economic growth and globalization, young people in China experienced a transforming time in terms of social value, which is from traditional Chinese value that encourages suppressing desires, saving money and delaying gratification, to individualism, materialism, consumerism and hedonism (Duan & Dholakia, 2015). Duan and Dholakia (2015) argue that Weibo plays a significant role in transforming Chinese consumer value. From their content analysis of Weibo, Duan and Dholakia (2015) found that young people in China demonstrate their desire for consumption items and flaunting their wealth, to show their willingness to consume and possess material goods. This research indicates that young people's life in China is under influence of materialism and consumerism, and these values are expressed and presented values through the platform of social media.

According to Willett (2008), the implementation of market structure and consumer practice forms the construction of identity. Markets create different choices of products, by which it separates and distinguishes consumers into different human beings. As Willett (2008) argues, "consumption can mark social status--defining oneself (or who one wishes to be) as well as defining those whom one is not (or wishes not to be)" (p. 54). Willett (2008) further argues consumer culture enforces the idea that through a purchase, one can make him/her a better self and brand him/herself. This idea of branding oneself by individualization sheds light on youth's online activities, such as their participation in blogs, downloading music of their own taste, and creating personal online space. In line with these ideas, I would argue that consumer culture, in fact, is a motivation to show oneself as a differentiated individual by making different choices than others. This embedded culture influences youth's engagement of social media on the conception of presenting themselves as a unique self.

It is thus obvious that youth are mainly under the influence of two contradictory cultures within one context. On the one hand, youth are presenting themselves within the structure of collectivistic culture, within which group benefits and harmony is addressed and individual interests are ignored and sacrificed. On the other hand, individuals' unique choices are highlighted and differentiated to serve the purpose of individualism due to the influence of consumer culture. Hence, when an individual in China is presenting him/herself online, there may be a tension between collectivism and individualism which operate to constrain his/her choices of performance.

The concepts I highlight here (identity and subjectivity; presentation as a dramaturgical performance, and the tension between collectivism and individualism) work together to frame my understanding of how Chinese undergraduates present themselves and construct their

identities in SNS. I would argue, in the venue of social media, none of these concepts separately

explains youth's online activity, as the boundaries of national culture and the online/offline

dichotomy are blurring and bringing complexity and variations to youth's online participation.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1   Knowledge Claim

Methodology, Roulston (2010) instructs researchers, must be consistent with the epistemology and theoretical assumptions about knowledge production. I am in the social constructivism paradigm that assumes human beings "seek understandings of the world in which they live and work" (Creswell, 2009, p. 8), and thus the meanings towards certain objects or things are constructed subjectively. According to Creswell (2009), the constructivist worldview assumes that "meaning are constructed by human beings", and through engagement of the world and interaction with human communities, humans "make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives" (pp. 8-9). Given these assumptions, Creswell (2009) argues the research question is open-ended allowing participants to contribute their views to the researcher; the research carried aims to understand the context that are embedded in, and in turn, helps to construct the participants' life; the research is inductive rather than deductive, which means the meaning comes from the participants' experiences, rather than existing theories.

In relation to my research topic, how college students perceive their online presentation and constructed identity is an open-ended question. I seek to understand their perceptions and experience, which in Creswell's word, is to capture how my participants to make sense of SNSs in relation to their world. Their engagement of SNS can be also viewed as a way of social interaction with their online community and offline community. In this sense, my research is well fitted in the constructivism paradigm.

4.2 Method: Qualitative Interview

4.2.1 Introduction

Related to my research question and my knowledge claim, I decided to adopt qualitative research interviewing. Qualitative interviewing, according to (Brinkmann, 2013), is the key method in human and social sciences, education and health sciences. Though different scholars in different schools have their own interpretation of what qualitative interviewing is, from the perspective of constructionism, qualitative interviewing is not seen as a way to generate objective "reports", but rather to generate "accounts" that are localized and situated (Roulston, 2010). I draw from Kvale's (2007) understanding of qualitative research interview. He states that "interview seeks to obtain descriptions of the interviewees' lived world with respect to interpretations of the meaning of the described phenomena" (pp. 10-11). He also suggests that qualitative research interviewing not only encompasses "what is said" but also captures "how it is said" (p. 11). As opposed to the daily conversation between two individuals that only focuses on a "factual level", the qualitative interview aims to comprehend the interview in both "factual" and "meaning" level to capture the meaning of the conversation underneath (p. 11). Meanwhile, Kvale (2007) also proposes qualitative interviewing aims to elicit qualitative knowledge, encouraging interviewees to describe their lived experience and specific situations. Applied to my study, I seek to understand how undergraduate students perceive their construction, presentation and expression on SNS. This topic is closely related to their life experience. My goal is to unpack the issue and seek how they make sense of SNSs in relation to their friendships. Their accounts will not be quantified. Rather, their interview data will be examined to catch the complex views and nuanced meanings.

I draw on Foley's (2012) typology of interviewing – survey interview, in-depth interview, and ethnographic interview – and applied an in-depth interview. In-depth interview, defined by Schensul and LeCompte (2013), is an "exploration of any and all facets of a topic in considerable detail during the course of an interview so as to deepen the interviewer' knowledge of the topic" (p. 134). Therefore, it enables me to gain deeper understanding of the respondents' perceptions of social media and the impact of social media on their communication and behavior. As Foley (2012) argues, the in-depth interviewer acknowledges that there are multiple truths and that the interview is "a collaboration between researcher and respondent" (p. 307). The co-constructive nature of the in-depth interview corresponds with the constructivist approach. Besides the fact of co-constructive nature, the in-depth interview still mainly focuses on what is being said when doing the data analysis; the respondent is constructed as the teacher (Foley, 2012). In this research, the participants experienced engagement of SNS, and they observed their peers' use of SNS; they are treated as the insider and knower of knowledge, thus, the analysis will mainly focus on the content of their interviews.

Regarding the question type, I used semi-structured interview. In semi-structured interview, researchers can determine the structure and agenda of the interview while participants determine the information to be told (Corbin & Morse, 2003). As far as my research is concerned, semi-structure is a good combination of preliminarily prepared questions and newly emerged questions, which enables me to not only capture the knowledge I want to explore, but also to be open to surprises and challenges to my assumptions.

4.2.2   Interview questions and areas

In order to build a rapport with my participants, I designed and asked questions about their general use of SNS, such as whether they like SNS or not, the reasons why they like/dislike

it, and the reasons. After asking rapport-building questions, I gradually transitioned to my interview questions that are based on my research questions. I divided my research questions into four areas: (1) Self-presentation on SNS, including such questions as content they usually post; the criteria of what to post and what not; their perceived audience; what they want to show in terms of their impression left online to others. (2) Questions about their observations of others' presentation; their perceptions of the influence of others online to their own online presentation and online identity. (3) Visual presentation, including the motivation of posting selfies; the criteria of what to post and what not; their observation of how gender plays a part in their visual presentation; the behaviors of editing selfies. (4) Construction of identity on and offline, including questions about how they identify themselves on and offline; how they perceive the similarity and disparity of their online and offline identity, and what tensions or constraints they feel when they were presenting or constructing themselves on SNS. Throughout the semi-structured interview, I encouraged participants to comment and express their ideas at any time during the interview, which indeed gave me some surprising accounts that I had not expected before. I will discuss the themes that emerged in the finding parts.

4.3   Participants and Recruitment

4.3.1   Recruitment method

In February 2015, I posted the electronic flyer with research background and recruitment criteria in my Sina blog, Weibo, and Wechat[1] to ask for volunteers. The recruitment criteria are as follows:

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[1] 1 In this thesis, as I mainly focus on Social Networking Sites, I use Wechat to refer to the Wechat Friendship Circle.

(1) Preferably live in Taiyuan City. This is because I was living in this city and can conduct face-to-face interview conveniently.

(2) Currently undergraduates studying in China between 18 to 25 years of age;

(3) Who are familiar with three SNSs (WeChat; Weibo, Renren, QQ Zone);

(4) Who have some thoughts and interest in sharing their SNS's participation experiences;

(5) Who are available to spend approximately one hour to talk with me, in person or through Skype.

The electronic flyer made it easy for people who are my friends to repost the flyer to their friends on and offline and to disseminate the recruitment information. In addition, I posted the printed flyers on the information board in Taiyuan Normal University and Taiyuan University of Technology. Based on the flyer information, two undergraduates students contacted me via phone, while three undergraduates saw my electronic flyers in their SNS and contacted me through Wechat. I invited these five people to share the recruitment information about my study with friends and others, and informed them that they could do the interview with friends. As Kelly, Pomerantz and Currie (2006) suggest, interviews with pairs of friends can elicit greater spontaneity in conversation. One of the participants (Journey) successfully invited her cousin (Mengyu), who was also interested in participating in this research, and they decided to do the interview together. Six college students participated in this study. Though their hometown is in Taiyuan, all of them attend different universities across China. I scheduled five interviews and decided on the place for the interview based on participants' preferences. Three interviews were conducted in McDonald's because it was close to their place of living, one was in a Chinese cuisine restaurant, and the other was in a teahouse. I emphasized before the interview that their

participation is totally voluntarily, which means they have the right to refuse or stop the interview or even the participation at any time they wish.

4.3.2 Summary of participants' demographics

The chart below demonstrates the biographies of the participants. The names are the pseudonyms they picked.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Major	Year of Study
Dominique	Female	18	Optical Engineering	1st
Mengyu	Female	21	Nursing	4th
Journey	Female	18	Finance Management	1st
Mike	Male	20	Biology	2nd
Xing Xing	Male	22	Tourism Management & German	4th
Xiao Ya	Female	20	Broadcasting and Communication	3rd

Table 4-1: A table of participants' demographics

Their ages ranged from 18 to 22, which was the normal age of college students in China. There were four female students and two male students. They came from a variety of backgrounds and different years of study, which enriched the scope of the data and allowed different perceptions towards SNS engagement.

4.4 Data Collection

4.4.1 Data collection procedure

As both interviewer and my participants' first language is Mandarin, the interviews were conducted in Mandarin. Before interviews, I tried to build rapport with my participants, as I explained in 4.2.2. The interviews' duration varied from 45 minutes to 75 minutes. I asked questions based on the interview guide (Appendix I), but I also had the flexibility to change the

sequence and add follow-up questions based on my interviewee's responses. At the end of my interview, I invited my participants to ask me questions related to this topic and my research, and I gave them an opportunity to express their thoughts freely. After the interview, I asked them to pick a pseudonym to protect their personal information. I also audio-recorded the interviews with the permission of my participants.

After every interview, I wrote field notes based on the notes I took during the interview, including my thoughts and reflections that emerged during and after the interview. I also added descriptions of some non-verbal and embodied language I observed and captured during this procedure to my field notes. These field notes were used as references when I analyzed my data in the next phase.

4.4.2   Translation of the transcripts and quotes

As the interviews were conducted in Mandarin, I summarized each interviews in English and translated parts of the interviews that are impressive to me. I also reported my summary to my supervisor, who gave me advice for coding data and selecting quotes. I translated selected quotes from Mandarin to English. In order to ensure the accuracy of the translation, I first consulted my committee member, Dr. Shan, who is fluent in both English and Mandarin, to review my translations and my interpretations Then I consulted my friend at Simon Fraser University, who immigrated to Canada when he was 10 years old and is also fluent in English and Mandarin and has a deep understanding of Chinese cultural context. He provided me with peer-review of my translation of the selected quotes. As for some newly emerged popular words the participants used, I left them un-translated in the quotation, and used Pin Yin (Chinese official phonetic system) to represent the words in the quotes. Meanwhile, in the analysis, I used English words and phrases to describe the meaning of those words in the context and tried to

catch the nuanced meanings behind the literal meaning. The reason of doing so is related to my methodological stance. In the social constructivism paradigm, the meaning is generated in the specific context. Without pointing out the nuanced meaning when translating, the meaning at a discursive level would be missing. Therefore, when my participants used idioms that are popular both online and offline, I decided to describe the underlying meaning instead of the literal meaning. In order to secure the confidentiality of the participants, when I was consulting with my friend, I identify the participants by their initials of their pseudonym. I did not show any identifiable information about the participants.

4.5   Data Analysis

4.5.1   Thematic analysis

I adopted thematic analysis as my main analysis method. As a widely used analysis tool in qualitative research, it is a method for "identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). In order to assist my coding procedure, I used qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti. The data I analyzed are the interview transcripts. I coded the data twice. For the first round, I used "bottom-up" method and generated codes that are merely based on the transcripts. In this way, I avoided paying attention only to the pre-assumed phenomenon while neglecting the emerging codes. At this stage, I created codes such as "show off", "edit selfie", and "content of posts", etc. This generated 77 codes in total. Then I started to code for the second time. This time I used a "top-down" method, trying to relate the existing codes with the research questions and conceptual framework. At this stage I rephrased some of the codes in order to connect the content of the transcripts and theories. Based on the modified codes, I then summarized codes into 8 code families, such as "visual presentation", "identity", "audience", etc. Each code family can either be used to shed light on one sub-question

or one aspect of several sub-questions. The first-round of coding can also be understood as analysis at a descriptive level, while the second-round of coding can be framed as analysis at an analytical level.

4.6   Limitation of the Study

4.6.1   Self-reflection on the interviewing process

Reflecting on the interview process, I find that my positionality as a Chinese young women both helped me to generate interview data and hindered me from getting more detailed information. On one hand, I was born in Taiyuan City, and thus participants shared some similarities in terms of geographic culture and the experience of growing up in the similar context. It helped me understand the words they used, and the way they spoke. Moreover, it was easy for me to build relationship with them quickly, which is good for interviews. On the other hand, as I am 2-5 years older than them, and have more experience in studying and working. They may have regarded me as a serious, and sometimes authoritative person, particularly at the beginning of the interviews. As a result, the participants might seek to provide answers to my questions based on their assumptions of the "right" answer from an adult or official perspective, rather than expressing their own emotions or feelings. For example, when I interviewed Journey, she held a critical view towards selfies, and expressed her scorn towards others' selfies. However after the interview when we exchanged the SNS contact, I found she liked to post her selfies and only part of her friends can have access to them. My guess is that posting selfies is seen by adults or her parents as unfavorable behavior, which made her unwilling to share her true feeling towards selfies.

4.6.2   The limitation of generalization

Another limitation is that as it is an exploratory study, and that the epistemology I am using is not aiming for statistical generalization; therefore, this study cannot be referenced to generalize some trends or patterns to represent the geographical areas. In addition, most of the participants lived in urban areas and came from middle-class families, and thus the research is limited in the way that it neglects young people who live in remote areas. As I mentioned in Chapter one there is still uneven access to Internet in Mainland China, the role SNS played in young people who are living in rural areas might be different. What is more, this study does not focus on how socio-economic status of young people influence their presentation and formation of their identity on SNS.

This study included 6 participants, and their experience and perspectives might only speak about their context and their culture, while it is hard to generalize this experience across China. However, as my research epistemology is constructivism, which values the individual's lived experience, my design of this research does not aim for generalization. Thus, it still worthy to research since every person's story is constructed in a certain environment, and it may enlarge our horizon to approach the meaning in the richness of its particulars.

Chapter 5: Findings

5.1 Introduction

My research question is: How do college students in China construct and present their identity on SNSs in relation to their friendship network? I found four data areas based on my research findings. Area 1 focuses on the content, motivation and technique of online presentation the participants used. Area 2 assembles their perceptions and experiences of visual presentation, mostly how they use photos, including selfies, to present themselves and construct their identities. Area 3 summarizes the data regarding how participants perceive others' presentation, and how this influences their sense of self and the relationship with their friends on and offline. Area 4 mainly analyzes the tensions and constraints participants feel when they construct their identity and present themselves online. Also explored is where, why and how these tensions and concerns arise. Based on these four areas of data, I identified themes and sub-themes that address my research questions. My conceptual framework (identity and subjectivity, dramaturgy, and the tension between collectivistic culture and individualistic culture) is employed throughout this chapter.

5.2 Theme One: Online Presentation: Content, Motivation and Impression Management

5.2.1 What to post? Travel, food, and positive energy

When asked about what content they normally posted, the participants had different answers, but what came up most were the emotions they were feeling at some point, funny things they encountered in their daily life, and popular topics.

For instance, Mike revealed he likes to post things that are popular, which provokes heated discussion in the SNS sphere. He gave me an example of his posts and comments on the international discussion "white and golden dress" that is spread through different SNS in a very

short period of time. The background of this hot topic is that a person in Scotland posted a dress picture of a dress in Tumblr in February 2015 and asked for people's opinion about the color of the dress. Because her friends could not agree on it: some said it was blue and black while others said it was white and gold (Koerner, 2015). Surprisingly this post was shared and debated by people around the globe, and the topic was even translated in Chinese and circulated in Chinese major social media including Weibo and Wechat Friendship Circle. Mike told me the reason for posting: "Because I am curious about different opinions and wanted to raise discussions under my post". His account shows his willingness to keep up with the latest trend in social media and to attract more attention online.

Most of the participants stated that they posted about food, travelling, and "positive energy". Specifically, four out of six participants mentioned they liked to post about travelling and food. Xiao Ya's reason for posting about travelling and food is to share the novel things she encountered:

> 你到了新的地方，你自己会很新奇，拍一堆照片，你想把这些东西给你的朋友看到，所以选择分享一下。吃的，可能也是以前吃了一个好吃的，或者是第一次吃，也想让大家了解一下。（小雅）

> When you arrive at a new place, you will be curious and take lots of pictures. You want to show these things to your friends, and so choose to share. In terms of food, I want to let people know something I ate for the first time, or something I have tried before that is worth mentioning. (Xiao Ya)

> 因为我爱吃，我爱旅游。(Dominique)
> Because I love eating and I love travelling. (Dominique)

Though participants concluded that the content they chose had to do with personal interests, they admitted that their taste of what is appropriate to share on SNS is influenced by

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others' posts. I will discuss how others' online presentation influences their way of presenting and their sense of self in the following themes.

Besides posting about food and travel, five participants mentioned they liked to write positive posts to cheer up themselves and people around them. Like Xingxing said:

（我）喜欢发正能量，就是激励自己激励别人的状态。比如我就喜欢发那种照片配文字。就是一个照片很漂亮，上面写着：不忘初心方得始终。或者是：未来的你会感谢现在努力的你。（星星）

[I] like to post those [items] with positive energy (Zheng Neng Liang), which is to cheer myself and others up. For example I like to post pictures with some, like a beautiful picture with words, saying, such as 'Don't forget your dream you stick to', or 'you will thank yourself in the future for working so hard now'. (Xing Xing)

"Zheng Neng Liang", which I translated as "positive energy" in the transcript above, cannot fully capture the original meaning of the phrase in Mandarin. Four participants (Mengyu, Xiao Ya, Xing Xing, Journey) used this word when describing what kind of things they wanted to post. "Zheng Neng Liang" is a word showing an optimistic and positive attitude, and it became popular in SNS among youth during the past few years. As Mengyu further explained, showing positive posts refers to not only showing good things they encountered in their life but also framing bad thing they experienced in a positive way:

Researcher：在社交网络上，你愿意发表什么样的东西？能不能举例子？
Mengyu：首先，我觉得应该正能量，比较重要，会发自己一些最近的状态。然后但是，一般是，就算是我最近发生一些比较悲惨的事情，但是最后总结也会说，希望以后会变的好。整体来说是比较正能量的，因为我觉得，别人看你的东西也会受到一些影响。因为你每天发一些负能量的东西，可能别人就不太喜欢接受你这种。

Researcher: In SNS, what do you like to post and examples?
Mengyu: First, I think it should be Zheng Neng Liang, which is important. [I] posted my recent situations. And then, but, normally, even if some sad things happened to me, I will conclude, like ' hope things will get better'. Generally speaking what

I posted are Zheng Neng liang, because I think it will have impacts on others. Because [if] you post negative things every day, others might not like or accept you.

From Mengyu's account, Zheng Neng Liang means the way in which they construct themselves in front of their audience on SNS. They would like to show the good part of their life, in order to be seen as positive and shiny.

5.2.2 Audience and the desire for recognition

Audience plays an important role in participants' presentation as it defines what and how they present in SNS. During the interview, I asked the participants whether they considered the audience consciously when they were posting. Among the six participants only one said no, while all of the rest participants recognized that they had the particular audience in their mind. When I asked about the particular audience they imagined, they responded with descriptions of particular posts. According to the interviewees, their imagined audience varied, but Mengyu's answer is very typical among six participants:

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Researcher：你觉得什么样的人会看你的或者是你想让什么样的人看你的？
Mengyu:    首先肯定是我比较喜欢的人，我比较关注的人，想让他们也关注我。
Researcher：close friends 多一点，还是 not close friends 多一点？
Mengyu：    嗯，not close friends 吧。不是特别亲近，但是我想让她(他)关注
           我。
Researcher：就是对他（她）有好奇心，希望建立更近的关系？
Mengyu：    对对。就是跟他（她）不是特别熟。但是又觉得挺好的，她这个人印
           象还不错。
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Researcher: So who do you think will see your post, or who do you want to see your post?
Mengyu: First it must be people I like and I pay attention to. I want them to pay attention to me as well.
Researcher: More close friends? Or more not close friends?
Mengyu: Eh, not close friends. Not especially close, but I want her (his) attention to me.
Researcher: Are you very curious about him (her), and do you want to build a closer relationship?

Mengyu: Right, right. I have not established a close relationship with him (her), but I think he/she is a good person who gave me a good impression.

In Mengyu's assertion, she could not have chance to get acquainted with some people she knew in real life due to the physical distance and lack of opportunities. However, she was curious about them and willing to establish a closer relationship with them. It is these people that consist of her imagined audience. She wanted to build the relationship through interactions in social media and leave a good impression on them, so that ultimately she could befriend them. From Goffman's Dramaturgy perspective, Mengyu regarded her SNS as a "front stage" to perform, which she employed to control her impression on others. She consciously presented and performed herself to the target audience and expected that eventually this audience would like to make friends with her in real life based on the impression they had about her on SNS.

On the contrary, in Journey's case, the audience in her mind was old contacts, especially high school classmates who were physically away from her, and whom she wanted to update about her newest situation.

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Researcher：为什么想让大家看到合照？
Journey：   最主要的还是想让高中的同学看到，因为他们不知道我的情况。
Researcher：但是你一般会发你比较好一点的状态是吧？
Journey：   对。
Researcher：你发的时候心态时怎么样的？
Journey：   嗯，想让别人羡慕。就觉得挺厉害的。
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Researcher: Why do you want people to see your group photo?
Journey: Mainly because I wanted my high school classmates to see this, as they did not know what happened to me.
Researcher: So you usually post those regarding your good situation?
Journey: Yes.
Researcher: What was your feeling at that time?
Journey: Eh, I wanted to be envied by others. To think I was great.

This excerpt was captured when I asked Journey about a specific group photo she posted. When she presented herself on SNS, she wanted her posts to be seen by her high school classmates. She told me later in the interview that she was only concentrating on her studies during high school and did not have time to care about clothing and makeup. However, in the college she knew how to dress up. As such, she wanted to show the new look to her old friends, aiming to transform the way in which her previous friends looked at her. In addition, she expected that from her presentation on SNS, her old friends would envy her and feel jealous of her. This phenomenon can be explained by Goffman's notion of "defined situation". By posting her pictures, she gave her audience a signal that she would like to be seen as a pretty and popular girl, the expectation being that her audience will be jealous of how good she is and how good her life is. The image or even the words under the image is situation-defining, which she used to help build her identity on SNS.

5.2.3 Impression management: the technique they use to present

During the interviews, many of the participants told me that they were consciously aware of the impression they gave on their SNS, and thus they have some techniques to control their impression on SNS.

When I interviewed Xing Xing, he was confident of his own posts, because he consciously controlled his writing in his Weibo:

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Xing Xing：因为我发的时候肯定深思熟虑，效果很好。才会发。
Researcher：所以你发的时候是要想一阵的。不是随随便便就发。
Xing Xing：不是。有时候随随便便发。有时候，大部分还是要想一下的。
Researche：为什么要深思熟虑呢？
Xing Xing：因为要做到万无一失。
Researcher：万无一失什么呢？
Xing Xing：就是比如说发一个东西，首先不要废话太多。嫌别人比较啰嗦。其次，
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标点要正确。其实这个也无所谓啦。就是不要废话太多，要言简意赅。要表达的意思中心思想要明确。对，就是要有个中心思想。

Researcher：为什么不想让自己废话太多呢？不想给别人留下一个？

Xing Xing： 很啰嗦的形象。

Xing Xing: Because I'll definitely double check and ensure that the effect is good before I post.

Researcher: So you mean you'll take your time before posting rather than just post whatever?

Xing Xing: No. Sometimes I just post whatever. But for the majority of my posts, I'll think twice.

Researcher: Why do you think twice before posting?

Xing Xing: To make it perfectly safe.

Researcher: What needs to be made perfectly safe?

Xing Xing: Say I am posting something; first I should cut out the superfluous words. I am sick of people blabbing. Secondly, the punctuation must be correct… Actually this doesn't matter. Point is there shouldn't be too much nonsense. The main point needs to be clear and concise. Yeah, must make the main point clear.

Researcher: Why do you avoid saying too much? You don't want to leave…?

Xing Xing: An obnoxious impression.

When Xing Xing talked about his posting on Weibo and Wechat, he described how he consciously used concise words to express himself. To convince his online friends that he was a clear and organized person, he edited his texts to avoid being seen as a wordy person. Goffman argues that verbal expressions as "gives" are a direct way to manage one's impression. It is thus apparent that he "gives" his expression intentionally on his SNS aiming to construct a capable and effective person.

Apart from written words, the participants used pictures to represent themselves deliberately as well. For example, when I interviewed Mengyu, she told me in detail about how she controlled the content to give audience a perception that she was popular and had lots of get-together activities with her friends:

还有一个例子就是我在实习的时候，在科室里面并不是特别开心，但是发的那些比较开心的例子，其实是特别渺小，我就把它总结到一起。然后不说伤心的事情，体

现了自己性格比较好相处。朋友圈会把好的事情放大。现实中挺一般的。还有很多情况，和同学出去玩，吃个饭哇。回来都会发。大家聚餐的时候，比如吃烧烤，就会发。就会表现出来经常这样。（濛雨）

Another example is when I was doing my internship. I was not happy in the sector that I was working in, but I posted those happy things, which actually were tiny. I summarized the happy things together, and did not talk about the sad things to demonstrate that my personality is easy to get along well with. I exaggerated the good things in WeChat Friendship Circle, while in reality my life is just so so. There are many situations when I posted, like hanging out with my classmates and eating food. I always post events when I got together with others, like having barbeque, to pretend that those things happened a lot. (Mengyu)

In Mengyu's account, in order to give her online friend an impression that she had lots of friends in real life, and that she was always invited to participate in many get-together dinners or hang-out activities, she only posted newsfeed in WeChat Frienship Circle when she had activities with her friends, while keeping silent when she was alone. As such, she amplified the aspect of her social activities and gave an impression to her online friends that she is easygoing, popular, and has a lot of friends. In her post, she did not talk about how easygoing she is. Rather, she uses pictures to demonstrate the events that she wanted others to know. This phenomenon can also be analyzed by Goffman's term: "gives off". She disclosed her life selectively in her pictures to control the information she "gives off" to her online audience, for the purpose of leaving an easygoing and popular impression.

Similarly, when Dominique talked about her friends' activities on social media, she told the following stories to me:

Dominique：好多人都是网上盗的图，说哎我今天去吃了一家新寿司，怎么怎么样。
Researcher：真的有人这么做？
Dominique：哈哈，真的。
Dominique：天哪我都不知道。有个人特别逗。有一次。。
Researcher：但是骗大家她去那儿吃？
Dominique：对对对。就是七夕还是啥，某个重要的节日，明明那天我就知道她跟

我都宅在家，我俩还在聊天了，然后我突然发现，我就刷朋友圈，发现，哎，她发了一张吃的照片。哈哈。

Researcher：你觉得她这么做是为什么？

Dominique：可能，是哪个来着，我不记得，反正是一个重要的节日，好像就是情人节。我估计她就是不想让别人觉得她一天无所事事宅在家的感觉。

Dominique: Many people steal pictures online to post in their social media, saying that he/she had eaten Sushi in a new place, and so on.

Researcher: Really?

Dominique: Ha-ha, yes.

Researcher: I did not even know.

Dominique: Oh, God, Someone is really funny. Once…

Researcher: Lying that she went somewhere to eat?

Dominique: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It was Qixi Festival[2], or another important festival. I exactly knew that she, like myself, was staying at home, and we were chatting via Wechat at that time. And then I found, when I was checking the newsfeeds in my Wechat Friendship Circle, that she posted a photo of food. Haha.

Researcher: What do you think why she posted that picture?

Dominique: Maybe, I guess she just didn't want others to think she was staying at home doing nothing."

Dominique described that her friend, who was afraid of being seen as lonely and boring, posted a fake picture of having food to pretend that she was hanging out with someone in an important festival, while in fact she was staying at home. According to Dominique, this case is not unique, as she also found other people showing fake pictures to pretend they were hanging out or eating food somewhere. Similar to Mengyu, Dominique consciously controls her image on her social media through pictures aiming to make people think she has something to do and some important dates. However, the difference is that she used a fake picture to present herself. In relation to Stern's (2008) account that young people have more control over their impression online, this case shows that managing one's online impression is not as easy as it seems.

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[2] Qixi Festival is Chinese Valentine's day, which is on the seventh day of July in Chinese lunar calendar.

Although Dominique's friend was trying to present an image to her audience, Dominique caught her making things up because Dominique had a closer real-life relationship with her friend and thus knew more about her friend's offline situation. It clearly illustrates that offline relationship and friendship may intervene in one's impression management, as offline friends may intrude in the "back stage" of their online presentation.

5.3 Theme Two: Visual Presentations

5.3.1.1 Physical image and the decision of visual presentation

As I mentioned in Theme 1, my participants liked to post pictures about food and travelling they experienced. Apart from these pictures, they also posted their self-portraits and particularly, selfie, on SNS. What I found from the interview is that physical beauty is reinforced in the SNS sphere, and it became a shared focus of all my participants.

When I asked Mike whether he visually presented himself by posting his pictures, he admitted that he had done so at one time but not anymore. When I asked about the reasons, he said:

因为我颜值不高 (Mike)。
Because my 'Yan Zhi' is not good. (Mike)

"Yan Zhi" is a phrase that can be literally translated as "the value of the face", indicating how good-looking a person is. This word is now popular through the dissemination of social media a "measure" to judge a person's physical appearance. Mike said his "Yan Zhi" is not good to indicate that he saw himself as a person who is not physically beautiful. When he said he was not good-looking, I detected a tone of lacking confidence. "Yan Zhi" here can also be understood through the notion of "capital" brought by Pierre Bourdieu (1986), meaning "accumulated labor ," either in "objectified" or "embodied" forms (p. 81). It is an asset to understand the

structure of the social world, or as a means to enhance one's social mobility. In this excerpt, "Yan Zhi" is treated as an asset, or an embodied capital, for the participants which is highly recognized in the venue of SNS.

Xing Xing, another male participant, expressed his ideas towards self-portraits in the following way:

我对我的长相不咋自信，而且我也不想污染别人的眼球，哈哈。
I am not confident of my appearance, and I don't want to pollute others' eyes. Ha-ha. (Xing Xing)

He had this idea of not showing himself on social media after he reviewed others' self-portrait pictures on Weibo. Xing Xing followed some superstars and other friends that he was not familiar with in his offline world. In Weibo, he received numerous pictures that either he originally posted or shared/re-posted with his online friends. He was exposed to extensive pictures of good-looking males and females, which he said made him not willing to post his pictures.

The other five participants expressed similar ideas about how they viewed their visualized self-presentation on SNS. For example, Xiao Ya and Journey admitted that they would like to select those adorable pictures of themselves to post on Wechat Friendship Circle. It seems that the physical beauty has become a top criterion, or a capital, to determine whether or not to post their self-portraits.

Participants' perceptions of themselves are largely influenced by what they saw on SNS. Stack's work of "mediatized subjectivity" can be used to explain this phenomenon. Weibo is a virtual discursive world that promotes certain kind of physical beauty, which is constructed as a fundamental rule to position people in this discursive world. As Xing Xing mentioned, by seeing

others' selfies on Weibo, he felt himself lacking this capital in Weibo, and thus he was

positioned, in his perception, as deficient in physical beauty. Although physical beauty has

enjoyed its importance for a long time, and it is not a new capital that is appreciated only in SNS,

it is evident that SNS reproduces and reinforces the importance of physical beauty, which

intensifies the pressure for the participants who deem themselves as not handsome or pretty.

5.3.2 Editing self-portrait: a better self?

In addition to how social media influence one's sense of self, the real-life experience of

what is seen as good-looking is also projected on participants' behaviors on SNS. Continuing the

question of pictures they post, some of the participants edited their photos before posting in order

to present a more beautiful self in front of others on SNS. Some participants used photo-editing

applications on mobile such as "Mei Tu Xiu Xiu"to make slight changes to their faces or bodies,

while others used some mobile camera applications such as "Mei Yan Xiang Ji" to add filters

automatically upon shooting.

For example, when I interviewed Xiao Ya, she told me the following thing:

Researcher：你发照片的时候有没有修过片？
Xiao Ya：　　PS。其实用的就是 360 相机。就是自带那种效果的。
Researcher：想问你和你的朋友会经常这么做吗？
Xiao Ya：　　我觉得现在至少是自拍的时候应该没有人用手机的原装相机。
Researcher：你觉得你想用它的原因是什么？
Xiao Ya：　　当然是，把瑕疵遮住。。
Researcher：　瑕疵你指的是什么？
Xiao Ya：　　就比如说我脸上有痘痘么，用那个就看不出来么。虽然就是一个本来
　　　　　　　的，相当于, 也就是个本来的自己。

Researcher: Have you edited your pictures when you post?

Xiao Ya: PS[3]. Actually I was using a 360 camera, which automatically put filters on pictures.

Researcher: Do you and your friends often edit pictures?

Xiao Ya: I feel like no one uses the default camera on their mobile phones, at least when they take selfies.

Researcher: What do you think is the reason for you to edit photo?

Xiao Ya: To hide the flaws, of course…

Researcher: What do you mean by "flaw"?

Xiao Ya: Say, if I have pimples on my face, it won't be seen if I use the 360 camera. Although, actually, it is, it equals to the authentic self.

In the interview, Xiao Ya used one mobile camera application called "360 Camera" to take pictures instead of the built-in camera of her mobile phone. "360 Camera" can modify her look automatically, cover the pimples on the picture, and thus she can present a modified self in front of others on her SNS. However, as she mentioned, she thought it was still an "authentic" self rather than a "modified" self. Xiao Ya's story provides an example of how efforts at a flawless visual online performance are naturalized in quest to be seen as authentic. Besides, based on her experience, everyone uses filtered cameras to take selfies in order to produce a better look. The action of posting edited selfies is naturalized and normalized. It is become a common action, as stated by Xiao Ya, to modify one's look using mobile applications before posting. However, what is underneath is the idea that they have flaws, which is framed only based on their "value of the face". They saw themselves in this way only in relation to others' visual presentation in their SNS, and adopted the habit of using modified selfies through the engagement of their SNS.

Mengyu, talked about the details of how she perceives editing pictures:

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[3] PS was originally meaning Photoshop, a software to edit photos but later it refers to all kinds of software and mobile applications that enable people to edit photos and add filters.

Researcher：为什么要修照片呢？
Mengyu：　　因为可能就是整体都挺好的，可能眼睛稍微小了点。稍微调大点就更好了。
Researcher：那就是说在发照片的时候接受不了真实的自己？
Mengyu：　　对，不是特别能接受。
Researcher：为什么接受不了真实的自己而愿意发一个假的自己呢？
Mengyu：　　哈哈哈。那也不是假的自己。只是把眼睛放大而已。
Researcher：对，那也不是真的自己啊。
Mengyu：　　因为可能我自己，我明确自己面部是有一些缺陷。
Researcher：但是别人真实认识你的人也知道啊。
Mengyu：　　但是首先不会很明显。我一般放大不会放的太奇葩。

Researcher: Why do you edit pictures?
Mengyu: Because, I guess everything is good except for the little eyes. It could be better if I enlarge my eyes.
Researcher: Do you mean you can't accept the real you when you post pictures?
Mengyu: Yes, I can't accept it really.
Researcher: Why can't you accept your real self but would like to post a false self?
Mengyu: Ha-ha-ha. That is not a false self. I only enlarged my eyes.
Researcher: But that is not the original self, is it?
Mengyu: Maybe, myself, I know I have imperfection on my face.
Researcher: But people who know you offline know what you look like.
Mengyu: But my adjustment is not obvious. I usually make tiny changes.

According to Mengyu, the reason she edited her pictures is that she thought her eyes are small, and as such not seen as beautiful. She edited her pictures to look beautiful in the way that promotes her self that she thought would be more attractive and garner more respect online. She stated that her face was imperfect only because the "value of the face" is not high. However, what brought them to see themselves as "imperfect"? Journey reflected on her own experience during the interview:

Journey：　　我接受不了鼻子低，眼睛小之类的，脸大。
Researcher：为什么你觉得脸大就丑呢？你觉得这种观念是？
Journey：　　还是跟大家一样，被同化啦。如果大家都觉得脸大好看的话，我肯定也觉得脸大好看。上高三之前我就不觉得这有啥。自从我和我同桌关系比较好以后，她就天天说，你这是出门被撞出门被撞撞扁啦，鼻子就凹进去啦。哈哈。之后我好像就比较在乎了。

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Researcher：他们是怎么知道鼻子高是好看的？
Journey： 大家都觉得么。大家都觉得鼻子高好看。

Journey: I find it hard to accept my flat nose, small eyes, and big face.
Researcher: Why do you think it's not good looking to have a big face? How did you come to adopt this idea?
Journey: Like everyone else, I've been assimilated, I guess. If everyone thinks a big face is beautiful, then I will think the same way. Before my senior year in high school, I did not think it mattered. After I got close with my deskmate, she started to joke about my nose, saying my nose got flattened by the door, ha-ha. Ever since then I started to care about my nose.
Researcher: How do you know a tall nose bridge is good looking?
Journey: Because everyone thinks it is good looking.

Journey talked about her criteria of beauty. She considered a high nose, big eyes, and small face are the dominant norms for beauty. I further asked her where the norm came from, and it is clear that she did not set up the norm by herself. Instead, she adopted this social norm from those around her, which in turn influenced her value of what is beautiful and what is not, and how she thought of herself. A small joke in her high school made her aware that her nose was flat and that her nose is not beautiful by others. The flat nose for her was no longer a neutral term; rather, it indicates her imperfection. She projected this perception in her engagement of SNS, and she always adjusts her eyes, nose and face before posting.

However, not every participant held a positive view towards the behavior of editing photos. For example, Xing Xing was skeptical and confused about why others like to edit their selfies:

你总归要见人的，有本事一辈子不出门。（星星）
Unless you never step outside, you simply have to meet other people. (Xing Xing)

From the excerpts of the interview, it is apparent that the discourse in real life and the discourse in SNS mutually constitute each other. On one hand, it appears participants are

influenced by what they have seen as beautiful in the SNS and internalize those norms and discourse of importance of physical beauty. On the other hand, participants' real life experience affects their perception of self, which further adjusts their behaviors in SNS.

In addition to that, it is clear that physical beauty that once a capital in real life become important capital online. Comparing with doing cosmetic surgery or using cosmetics in real life, participants use mobile applications to modify their look on SNS. It is thus evident that SNS provide a new platform to change the way in which physical beauty is experienced and practiced.

Dramaturgy theory suggests "when the individual presents himself [sic] before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society more so, in fact, than does his behavior as a whole" (Goffman, 1959, p. 35). Goffman frames this performance as "idealization", because the individual has "a desire for a prestigeful [sic] place but also a desire for a place close to the sacred center of the common values of the society" (p. 36). In the venue of social media, physical beauty is seen as a privilege, and the behavior of editing selfies can be interpreted as a way to enhance their appearance for the sake of placing themselves on a higher level in the hierarchy.

5.3.3   Group selfie

Another kind of selfie that the participants discussed is the group selfie. It is surprising to me that the group selfie enjoys a larger popularity than individual selfies.

In Dominique's case, she liked to post herself with her friends. She mentioned she was shy and not "open enough" to post her own pictures. She took selfies for "self-appreciation", by which she meant that the pictures were privately kept only for herself, not to share on SNS. However, in terms of her pictures with a group of friends, she no longer felt embarrassed to present herself. Going back to my conceptual framework, I cited Takahashi (2010)' s argument

that young people in Japan tend to construct "me with them" rather then "me and them" in their national social media to appreciate the friendship and collective spirits. This argument can be applied in this excerpt to analyze Dominique's action of posting group selfies rather than individual selfies. With her friends in the selfie, she felt more at ease, and have more courage to show the self in front of others, indicating her desire of showing a collective spirit on SNS.

Also, this phenomenon indicates the tension between the collectivistic culture and the individualistic culture. On the one hand, participants wanted to show themselves to their audience, to present their individual uniqueness as an independent human being. On the other hand, however, the soil of collective culture constrains them to present their self solely. As Xiao Ya and Dominique mentioned, they felt embarrassed to post their own pictures and sometimes needed more courage to do so. In the collectivistic culture people tend to be seen as a member of a group rather than an individual. Thus, the group identity is promoted instead of the individual identity. When an individual is surrounded by a group of people, the one would feel a sense of belonging and safety. As such, when Dominique posted group selfies with her friends, her anxiety and fear of being watched was largely reduced.

The second issue involved in the group selfie is the role the participant is playing in the group. Dominique revealed that in the group selfie there was also an issue of social positioning:

Dominique：就比如说我们会一起去 KTV 唱歌，然后我们四个人会摆一个 pose，然后一般就是，我扮演的就是，集体中我扮演的角色就是那种增强笑点的功能。哈哈。逗逼。哈哈哈。就可能会做一些让人觉得特别逗，比如说鬼脸啊，或者什么比较卖萌啥的。
Researcher：那其他人扮演的是什么角色呢？都一样么，都逗逼么？
Dominique：有些人会跟我一起走逗逼的路线。哈哈哈。有些人就会比较装装淑女啊，哈哈哈。
Researcher：那你觉得什么样的人他会走逗逼路线，什么样的人会走淑女路线？
Dominique：我觉得平常文静的人一般都是淑女路线，平常像我这种比较疯癫的，哈哈。就逗逼。

Dominique: For example, when we went for KTV, we four made a pose. And usually my role, in the group, is to make people laugh. Ha-ha, like a "Dou Bi". To make people think it is funny, say making a mop, or trying to be cute.

Researcher: What about others? Are they the same as you, like a "Dou Bi"?

Dominique: Some people are like me to play the role of "Dou Bi". Ha-ha-ha. Some people are playing the role of ladies, ha-ha-ha.

Researcher: Who do you think would like to act as "Dou Bi" and who would like to act as ladies?

Dominique: I think people who are usually gentle and quiet play the role of ladies, and people like me who are relatively crazy, ha-ha, play the role of "Dou Bi".

In her group selfies, Dominique acted as a "Dou Bi". "Dou Bi" is a Chinese word that is popular in recent years in social media and daily discourse. "Dou Bi" was firstly used in a Chinese comedy performance by Comedian Degang Guo and Qian Yu to describe a person who is funny and silly (Dou bi, n. d.). In this case, she identified herself as "Dou Bi" to make funny postures and facial expression as opposed to acting as a lady. When I further probed her ideal self on SNS, she admitted that she wanted to act as a lady rather than a Dou Bi, however as most of her online friends in Wechat are her real-life friends, she could not explore her ideal self. She told me that her image--neither gentle nor quiet--had been already constructed by her real life friends, so that if she wanted to construct a "lady-like" personality, it would be too weird to her friends. It is obvious that she was positioned as a Dou Bi on SNS, which was not her original attempt.

5.4 Theme Three: Other's Presentation in SNS and Friendship

5.4.1 Others as reference

Engaging in the SNS is never a one-way activity. Instead, the participants and their audience established a mutual relationship. Other's online presentation is important to the

participants because it lets people have access to their friends' recent situations, which might be difficult to know without SNS.

When I asked whether he saw his SNS's news feeds posted by others, Xing Xing gave me an affirmative answer. In his eyes, taking a look at others' situation is necessary, as it is a reference to rethink his own life:

> Researcher：你为什么想查一下微信朋友圈？
> Xing Xing：看别人过的咋样。
> Researcher：为什么想看？
> Xing Xing：因为自己在那儿瞎过也不知道自己过的咋样。看微信看看别人过的好不好，对比一下就能知道自己过的咋样。从别人那儿也能知道他们是怎么活的。就能体验他们的生活。

> Researcher: Why do you want to check the news feeds in Wechat Friendship Circle?
> Xing Xing: To see how other people are doing.
> Researcher: Why do you want to see that?
> Xing Xing: I won't know how I'm doing if there's nothing to compare to. I can peek at how others are doing through WeChat and find out how well I'm doing in comparison. I can also learn how others are living and get to experience a little of their lives.

Xing Xing described others on SNS as a mirror and a reference. Without others' presentation online, he would not know what happened to others. He mentioned that others' lives could help him navigate his own life. In real life Xing Xing seldom knew what happened to his friends, especially those old friends in his primary school or high school due to the physical distance. However the news feeds in his Wechat Friendship Circle enabled him to know the most recent news of his offline friends. Xing Xing further told me that he does not want to be left behind:

> 就是我不要比他们差太多。就是他们的生活在那个档次，我不能太 low，我也得差不多点，也不能太差。虽然没有比较的心里，但是也不希望比他们差太多。(星星)

I don't want to be left behind too much by others. If they are at a level, I should not be too low. Although I don't want to make a comparison with them, I still don't allow myself to be left behind. (Xing Xing)

Although he admitted that there were no standardized criteria of what a good life is and what it is not, he still wanted to keep the same pace of development with his previous friends. It is interesting to catch the nuanced feeling of comparing with online friends. On the one hand, Xing Xing knew that everyone had his own unique life and the difference between him and his friends should be tolerated; on the other hand, he still wanted to know how others lived their life in order to keep up with them.

Similarly, in Mike's case, he thought knowing others' information could motivate him to study:

有些同学说一些，自己到哪到哪。就觉得自己学习不行。一起高中同学的学校好，觉得自己要努力啦，差的好远。(Mike)

Some of my classmates said in SNS about which university they went, which made me realize that I am not good with regard to my studies. My high school classmates went to a better school than mine, and it made me think I had to study hard and see the gap between us. (Mike)

Though similar to what Mike encountered, Dominique put it in a more negative way:

看到别人比如这个学术啊，或者有参加什么获奖啊。或者我又找了个新男朋友。然后我就想，我到现在都还没有男朋友。心里就很郁闷。(Dominique)

For example I see people with academic achievements, or won awards, or even getting a new boyfriend... I don't even have a boyfriend yet. That's depressing. (Dominique)

As the participant suggested, SNS does provide a lot of information to them to know their friend's recent situation; however, knowing more is not always a positive thing. The participants tend to compare others to themselves and place themselves in relation to their friends' lifestyle and achievements. In Mike's case, others' academic achievements motivated him to study harder

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to keep up with his high school mates academically; however in Dominique's case, seeing others having a new boyfriend made her upset. The commonality, however, is that all of them regarded others' presentations online as a reference to rethink about themselves.

5.4.2 Influence on friendship

Others' presentation on SNS not only influences how the participants see themselves, but also how they relate with their friends on and offline.

In Dominique's case, she happened to know a piece of news about her friend that she had not known before:

> 印象当中有一个事特别那啥。我有一个同学，她就是那种，他跟我我一个，她是我一个初中同学，我们是一个初中的，后来到了上大学的时候，我们一直这三年保持的关系还是不错的。后来是上了大学我才知道他们已经好了两年啦。但是我深深的感到了背叛。而且我还是刷她的朋友圈我才知道。两年都没有告我。(Dominique)

> In my impression, a thing really made me… I have a classmate, who was, who was my senior high classmate. We are in the same senior high school, and then when we went to College, we remained in a good relationship. However, I did not know that she has a boyfriend until I went to my university. And it was from WeChat Friendship Circle. She did not tell me anything during that two years, which made me feel betrayed. (Dominique)

Dominique kept a good relationship with her friend and regarded her friend as one of her best friends. However, one day she knew from Wechat Friendship Circle that the friend had a boyfriend 3 years ago without telling her. She felt she was "betrayed". A similar issue happened on Xiao Ya, who told me that three friends of hers, whom she regarded as her best friends, got together and had dinner without telling her. She happened to see their group selfies in their SNS, so she realized that she was excluded by her friends. It is very clear that without SNS, both Dominique and Xiao Ya would never have known what happened to their friends. Using Goffman's notion of dramaturgy, we can regard the interactions between the participants and

their friends as performance. In real life, their interactions happened in the "front stage" when their friends act in a way to lead Dominique and Xiao Ya to think they are perceived as best friends. However, in the "back stage" when Dominique and Xiao Ya were absent, their friends may act in another way. Nonetheless, as Goffman argues, a performance might have some disruptions that discredit one's performance. For instance, if the audience that was supposed to watch the performance on the "front stage" happened to enter the "back stage", it may affect the efficacy of the performance:

> When an outsider accidentally enters a region in which performance is being given, or when a member of the audience inadvertently enters the backstage, the intruder is likely to catch those present flagrante delicto. Through no one's intention, the persons present in the region may find that they have patently been witnessed in activity that is quite incompatible with the impression that they are, for wider social reasons, under obligation to maintain to the intruder. We deal here with what are sometimes called "inopportune intrusions". (Goffman, 1959, p. 209)

In the venue of Social Networking Sites, the "inopportune intrusions" may happen more often than the real-life world, as it is easy to forget who the audience is. Take Wechat Friendship Circle as an example. The participants may forget how many online friends they have. Especially for those online friends who seldom post things on SNS, they may be forgotten or ignored when an individual thinks about the imagined audience on his/her SNS. As such, the audience who is not considered by the performer can enter into the performer's "back stage" more easily on SNS than in real life. In Dominique's case, her friend might have forgotten that Dominique could see the content of her post, so that her friend unconsciously disrupted her performance and impression left on Dominique in real life.

In addition, as Kernaghan and Elwood (2013) argued, the boundary of "back stage" and "front stage" is blurred in the venue of social media. As for the performer, he or she may find it difficult to "define the situation" on SNS, as the audiences are various and unpredictable to some extent. Besides, the "front stage" to some audiences may be the "back stage" to the other, which results in tensions between friends. If we reconsider Xiao Ya's case, the three friends of hers showed their pictures on their SNS to show their friendships to the audience. In this sense, SNS is the "front stage" for them to present themselves as popular and active. However, those posts were not supposed to be read by Xiao Ya. Thus, in this sense, SNS is the backstage for Xiao Ya.

As we can see from the analysis, others' presentation makes the friendship between the performer and his/her on and offline friends complicated. The use of SNS adds more "front stage" and "back stage" for people to perform, while at the same time, it increases the possibility of disrupting the performance through "inopportune intrusions".

5.4.3   Friendship control and management

Seeing others' presentation, in turn, influences participants to consciously manage their friends. Besides, the design of Weibo and Wechat Friendship Circle allows users to give different access to the different friends. As Mengyu mentioned:

> 朋友圈只有我的好友才能看到。我发的东西只有我的好友能看到，而且我的好友留言的话，别人也不一定能看到。除非我的那个好友跟她也是好友。（濛雨）

> In my Wechat, only my friends can see (what I posted). And others can't see my friends' feedbacks under my posts unless they friended each other on Wechat. (Mengyu)

As Mengyu elaborated, the WeChat's function enabled her to present herself differently to different groups of friends on SNS. Similarly, Mike gave different permission of his posts to different friendship group:

Mike:　　　就是说自己在这个现在所交往的人群当中，就不想谈及以前的事情。然后把以前的东西发出来，就不让他们看。
Researcher：你会设置？
Mike:　　　就说小时候说，比如说高中聚会，我把聚会的图片发上去，我就会设置其他人不让看，就让我高中的同学看。
Researcher：为什么不想让大学的同学看？
Mike:　　　因为有时候，不想让他们知道自己私人的东西。
Researcher：但是你会分享跟你高中在一起的这个群体当中。
Mike:　　　因为我很高兴，是很值得回忆的。而且我想让我高中同学看，还有评论。

Mike: In the friend circle I am socializing, I don't want to talk about the previous things. Then I will not let them access my previous posts.
Researcher: Do you set permission?
Mike: For example, if I have a get-together dinner with my high school classmates, I will post the pictures on SNS and only my high school classmates can have access to it.
Researcher: Why don't you let your undergraduate classmates see it?
Mike: Because, sometimes I don't want them to know about my private things.
Researcher: But you want to share it with your high school classmates.
Mike: Because my high school is in my hometown, where classmates know each other deeply.
Researcher: But you could choose not to post if it is too personal.
Mike: Because I was happy, and it was a memory. And I also wanted my high school classmates to look at it and comment on it.

In this excerpt, it is clear that some online friends of Mike are close friends to whom he wanted to disclose more than others. However, at the same time he also wanted to have online presence in front of his new friends – classmates in his college – without his previous life intruding. That means he tried to construct two different identities in front of two different kinds of friends in SNS. As a consequence, the "front stage" he performed for his high school classmates in SNS is the "back stage" for his college students. In order to avoid the disruption of his performance in front of the two friendship circles on his SNS, he resolved the problem by giving disparate access to different groups.

5.5   Theme Four: Tension and Constraints

5.5.1   The tension of self-identity online and offline

In the interviews, I asked my participants about the difference of their online identity and their offline identity. According to the notion of subjectivity, individual is positioned differently in various social interactions, and as such present different identities. Likely, it is difficult to compare the offline identity and online identity because both of them are situational and fluid. However, through this question, I can still capture their concerns and constraints of expressing and presenting themselves on SNS. In Mike's case, he admitted that there was a disparity of his online identity in SNS and his offline identity. He disclosed that he was not from a rich family, which made him unhappy in real life. However, when he engaged in SNS, he was more optimistic. In his eyes, when he used SNS and interacted with his friends, he would no longer consider his family issues. Coming from a poor family made him feel inferior; however, online he explained that he forgot how he was positioned in real life and could enjoy a freer self. In this case, I could argue social media gave him an opportunity to create an alternative image in front of his audience, and empowered him to explore more possibilities of self. Like Mike, Mengyu revealed that in real life she was seen as gentle, quiet and calm, while in her inner heart, she had a strong desire to be an outgoing and popular person. She said she had tried many times in real life to find someone who shares the same interests with her; however, she failed. She attributed this failure of finding good friends to her shy personality and lack of opportunity to know more people. However, she had more courage to speak about herself and express her willingness to participate in some social activities. One example she gave me is that she wanted to go to an art gallery; however, she could not find any classmates who were interested in visiting the art gallery. She then posted an invitation in Wechat Friendship Circle, asking for friends to go with

her, and finally got a reply from a friend in another department. She was satisfied that SNS helped her to extend her offline friendship circle and find people who shared the same interests with her. In this case, SNS scaffolds her exploration of a braver self.

Like people's identity may vary due to the different social contexts, their online identities are multiple in different occasions and on SNS stages. Dominique's original motivation of using SNS was to overcome her fear of socializing. She told me that she wanted to create a new identity. She thought she was too shy to socialize with new people she meet while act like a "Dou Bi" in her close friends' eyes. But both identities are not her preference. She aimed to seek a "middle ground", namely an identity that is outgoing, but not silly on the stage of SNS. Unfortunately, the majority of her online friends in Wechat are also her offline friends, and her impression left on their friends had already been solidified, so that she felt it difficult to create a new identity in front of them. Conversely, the majority of her online friends in Weibo are unknown people offline, and thus she was more willing to post and invest in her new identity on Weibo.

Dominique said, "I want people to know more about me and adjust and improve my character a little bit", which indicates that she treated SNS as a place of experimenting and testing an idealized self. A tension between her offline and online identity is also apparent, because the boundary of the virtual world and real-life world becomes blurry, and people interact with each other both from physical contacts and social media. Therefore, young people like Dominique who want to experience a slightly different self on SNS may find it difficult to do so.

5.5.2 The tension between self (presenter) and others (audience) on SNS

Apart from the tension of online and offline identity, there are other constraints that prevent them from expressing and presenting what they wished to present. Many of the

participants thought the biggest concern was their audience. In order to cater to their imagined

audience who might read their posts, they sometimes adjusted the content of their posts, or even

deleted some posts.

In Xing Xing's case, he deleted his previous posts because:

有的时候写的太矫情了。怕别人觉得写的很恶心。就删了。比如说，就有时候发那种鼓励自己的话，就觉得恶心。（星星）

Sometimes I find my posts too sentimental, and people may find it corny. So I deleted them. For example, sometimes I want to post to encourage myself, but reading it made me sick. (Xing Xing)

According to Xing Xing, he thought too much self-disclosure was not appropriate,

because his audience who was not familiar with him might think it was too sentimental.

Similarly, Mengyu told me that during her internship in a hospital, her supervisor in the hospital

mistreated her several times and put too much workload on her, which made her angry. She then

wrote a post to express her feeling in Wechat. Although she did not point out who made her

angry, she still felt that post was not proper and deleted it the same day, because some of her

friends in Wechat might figure out whom the person she meant, which might result in negative

consequences for their relationship. Xiao Ya encountered the same situation. The bureaucracy in

her school made it difficult for her to get things done without connection and relationship. She

was mad and posted what she had experienced on Wechat. After awhile, when she was calm

again, she deleted the post. She thought complaining about bad things that happened to her on

Wechat was not a solution to the problem, and it might leave a bad impression of her on her

audience.

As for Dominique, she deleted her posts once because in that picture she was the funniest

one among the people, and her audience played jokes on her images. She told me that she was

once fat when she was in high school, and thus she was sensitive when people were making

jokes about her weight.

Concern with audience does not only mean deleting those "inappropriate" pictures.

Sometimes it means posting or adding something that one may not wish to post. Mengyu told me

that she felt forced to post something that she was in fact not interested in:

Mengyu：　　 还有一种情况是比如说一些新闻我不是很关注。但是大家都关注，都
转发。所以我也会转发，但是其实我不关注它。
Researcher：你的想法是什么？为什么觉得被迫要转发？
Mengyu：　　 全被刷屏啦。我就觉得我也应该关注一下。哈哈。就比如说我们学校
换校长的事情，其实我不是特别关心，学校的校长啊，政治方面的东
西，但是因为大家都转发，但是我连内容都没有看就转发了。
Researcher：这个现象还挺有意思的。
Mengyu：　　 我觉得首先作为一个 X 大人，得关心一下吧。但是其实这个人又不是
很关心。我本来觉得我自己可能跟大众不太像，所以我觉得我也不想
不跟随潮流。就觉得应该发一下。

Mengyu:　　 Another situation is that, for example, a piece of popular news that I'm not
really interested in. Since everyone is paying so much attention to it and
reposting it constantly, I have to repost it too, even though I don't care much
about it.
Researcher: What were you thinking or feeling at that time? Why do you feel obligated to
do so?
Mengyu:　　 The posts were flooding my screen, which made me think that it's something
I should care about. Ha-ha. For example, our school principal changed,
something I do not really care about. I am not interested in these issues like
getting a new principal, or any political stuff, but since people around me are
reposting it, I reposted it too without even clicking into the news to read its
content.
Researcher: This is a very interesting phenomenon.
Mengyu:　　 I think being a part of the school community, one should care about these
things. I consider myself a little different from a lot of others, but I don't
want to go against the mainstream. So I felt I needed to repost it.

In Mengyu's case, by saying "flooding" she meant the topic or the piece of news was

circulated by all her fellow students at one time, her mobile phone's screen was totally covered

by the same news. Seeing extensive discussions and reposts among her peers in her university,

she felt that in order to be the part of the university community, she was obligated to repost the current issues. Although she did not even look at what was written specifically in the content, she shared it on her SNS without hesitation. She later mentioned that she did not want to be criticized as ignorant about what happened to her community. In addition, she wanted to keep up with the most recent news happening in her life circle. The fear of exclusion from her academic circle put the pressure on her to post the content that she did not care about. What should be posted is never a personal choice for Mengyu. She had to live in the middle ground to balance her own interest and the public interest on her SNS.

5.5.3   To show or not to show? It is a question

While talking about the tensions and constraints the participants were facing when they presented themselves online, another big issue they constantly mentioned was about showing off. It was interesting to find that many of them contradicted themselves regarding the behavior of showing off. Generally speaking, many of them held a critical view when others showed off in front of SNS, while sometimes they themselves expressed a desire to show off their own happiness.

Specifically, on one hand, they wanted to show the best part of themselves, to present themselves as positive and privileged, such as that they have the time and money to do some activities. Mike described that his friend flaunted their wealth on Wechat Friendship Circle by posting pictures with receiving a new phone as a gift, or knowing rich guys with luxury cars. In Theme 1 I have discussed that the content my participants posted or they observed to be posted by their friends is mainly about food they ate and place they were travelling. It is evident that these contents are what they were consuming at that moment, which constitutes the content they were showing off. The behavior of showing off itself is to practice consumer culture, and thus

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encourage competing the material goods one possesses in order to distinguish the consumer with others (Duan & Dholakia, 2015). It is this competition in SNS among peers that amplified the negative emotion towards others' sharing and showing off.

The consumer culture, and desire of material goods goes hand in hand with individualism, for it promotes individual desire and realization. However, another side of the picture is that the participants also care about collectivistic culture. For instance, Xing Xing expressed his critique towards showing off because it is too high-profile:

> Reseracher：你心中对高调得定义是什么？
> Xing Xing： 高调，（long pause）。喜欢炫耀自己的东西，只把自己好的东西展示给别人。
> Researcher：那你觉得为什么这样讨厌呢？
> Xing Xing： 因为就给别人产生一种假象就是，你的生活只有光鲜的一面。然后让别人觉得为什么自己的生活很那么多昏暗的那一面，给人一种消极的感觉。

> Researcher: How do you define high-profile?
> Xing Xing: High-profile.... (pause). Like to show off their things, and only show the good ones.
> Researcher: So why do you find this annoying?
> Xing Xing: Because it gives other people the illusion that your life is so perfect and fulfilling, and it makes them wonder why their life is so dull and uninteresting, which leaves people with a lot of negative emotions.

High-profile, as Xing Xing mentioned, is seen as not a well-educated manner within traditional Chinese culture. Confucian culture, which still influences the current Chinese educational system, aims to educate people to be modest and low-key. Thus, under the influence of traditional culture, Xing Xing reflected on his showing off critically.

Interestingly, Xing Xing further told me another story about his showing off:

> Xing Xing： 我记得当时刚去德国的时候，就特别想炫耀一下自己的宿舍。哈哈。
> Researcher：给谁炫耀？
> Xing Xing： 国内的同学们吧。就其实自己看第一眼的时候确实觉得挺恶心的，但

是其实比国内已经好很多个档次了。但是还要发一个全景照片，说，看吧这是我的小破屋子。呵呵。我后来看的时候真想吐了。

Xing Xing: I remember when I first got to Germany, I wanted to show off my dorm room. Ha-Ha.
Researcher: to whom?
Xing Xing: My classmates in China….When I first saw my room, it was pretty disgusting. But compared to the dormitory in China, it's still way better. So I posted the picture of my room, with the caption "Look, this is my poor little crib". Ha-Ha. Looking back, it really was bad.

From the excerpt demonstrated above, it is also apparent that Xing Xing held a contradictive view towards the action of showing off. He once liked to show off what he had but later realized he should not have done so, because, as he said before, he does not want to be high-profile. The contradiction demonstrates the tension between two controversy cultures – individualism and collectivism. It has a two-fold influence on their perceptions and behaviors in SNS: (1) they sometimes want to share what the positive things/goods they experienced/have on social media but hold a negative view towards others' showing off on social media; (2) They are afraid of being seen as high-profile but still try to navigate a better way to hide their intention to show off in an indirect way. The nuanced feeling make their way of presenting more complicated.

From the interviews I found that the participants wanting to show their better self is not unusual. They wanted to be shown as a great, successful person. The desire/pressure to be superior have existed in the Chinese culture for many years (Zhao, 2013); however, for my participants it appears social media has changed how this pressure is experienced and acted upon. Because modesty is another element they have to consider in their day-to-day interactions on and offline, my participants experienced and observed many ways to buffer the tension, no matter whether these worked or not.

For instance, Dominique gave me an example of her classmates who posted her selfie with make-up while posting words such as "it is a beautiful weather", trying to undermine her intention of showing off her physical beauty. Xing Xing gave me another example; his high school classmate showed the employee benefits of the company where she interned. Other participants also recalled the same experience they encountered. However, it does not mean the audience of the individual can be manipulated easily. According to other participants, they can still smell this intention, and thus hold a more negative view towards those behaviors. Mengyu disclosed that she thought the behavior of trying to conceal the intention of showing off was hypocritical. The tension between showing off and being modest still exists, even if they tried to change the captions of their posts to undermine the tone of showing off.

According to my interviewees, it is hard to satisfy everyone in SNS, which leads to a dilemma when they choose what to post and how to phrase their posts. In summary, the participants had a desire to show themselves and be envied by others and to share good things in their lives with their online friends; however, at the same time, they were afraid of being too high-profile and being seen as too self-centered. Moreover, indirect showing off with the intention of mitigating the conflicts between collectivistic culture and individualistic culture as the participants presented was not successful, because the audience can still figure out their original desire to show off.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

6.1   Summary of the Findings to Address the Research Questions

In this research, I explored how college students in China construct, present and express their identity on SNS in relation to their friendships.

At the beginning of this thesis I spoke about concerns expressed by government and some researchers that youth spend too much time on the Internet and social media and can become addicted and lose contact with real-life friends. The participants I spoke with do use the Internet and social media but mainly to build relationships that are both offline and online. None fit the stereotype of an alienated young person who uses the Internet to escape the demands of the world. In some cases the online relationships resulted in greater face-to-face contact with peers.

All participants spoke about posting about topics such as the food they ate and places they had been to on SNS in the form of written text and pictures to present their lives. Some participants spoke about wanting to provoke heated conversation by posting on controversial subjects. At the same time, most of them wanted to present their identity online as positive and optimistic to construct an idealized self in front of others on SNS. Secondly, participants tended to frame their online audience as people who have physical distance from them. The imagined audience not only includes their old contacts in high schools, but those who were in the same university with them but with whom they did not have opportunities to develop a deep face-to-face relationship. The findings also indicate that participants had a desire to be focused and centered on their peers. Their use of SNS helps them to reach more people whom they are not able to contact offline, and to build their desired self to an audience with the aim of either influencing or transforming their impression. Thirdly, they consciously managed the online impression they gave to their audience either by written texts or visual pictures. We see this

through the examples the participants gave during the qualitative interviews. Some participants amplified some aspect of their life online to manipulate how audiences thought about himself or herself; others reported that they present fake activities or events to hide or show their life. However, it is difficult to make these presentations successfully, because some of their offline friends sometimes criticized their performance online as fake.

I also looked at visual presentation. I explored how participants used pictures to construct their identity on SNS. From the analysis, participants used either self-portrait pictures taken by others or selfies to construct their identity online. Three features of visual presentation were evident. Firstly, the participants put much emphasis on their physical beauty, which they stated was the most important determiner of whether they post their self-pictures and which ones they select. As participants suggested, "Yan Zhi", which means "the value of the face", became a highly promoted cultural capital in the venue of SNS. Although some participants criticized how superficial it is, they themselves still internalized the norm and practice the norm by editing their photos to look more beautiful, which is the second feature. Thirdly, participants mentioned that they felt more comfortable to post group selfies with their friends instead of individual selfies, because the fear of being too self-centred in a collectivistic context is buffered.

Paying particular attention to one's body in contemporary China is not a new phenomenon. Zhang (2012) interviewed 13 college women in Mainland China and found that body beauty is the central concern in participants' daily practice, and that mass media provide women with the ideals of feminine beauty. Although Zhang discussed mass media in a general sense, it appears that it is also applicable in the venue of social media. The visualized presentation by others on SNS shapes the way in which physical beauty is perceived by the participants. While Zhang (2012) only discusses how media influenced females' perception of

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beauty, this study found that both females and males experienced pressures about their body beauty, for all the male participants expressed caring about their physical beauty.

The third theme--"others' presentation and friendship"--deepened understanding of the interactions between the participants and their friends. First of all, seeing others' online presentation shapes the way in which participants look at themselves. As two participants, Mike and Xing Xing, discussed, others' presentation is a reference for them. They positioned themselves after comparing their own life and their friends' life that is represented on SNS. Second, the disclosure on SNS enabled the participants to have access to their friends' information, which might conflict with what they knew in real life. The inconsistent performance on and offline results from the fact that SNS acted as a "front stage" for some audience members, while "back stage" for the others, which makes it easier for information receivers to intrude on the "back stage" of the presenters. This "inopportune intrusion" (Goffman, 1959), in turn, led participants to control their friendship network online consciously by giving differential access to different friendship circles.

The last theme--"tensions and constraints"--unpacked the issues that hinder participants from constructing and presenting themselves online. There is a tension between self-identity online and offline. In some cases, participants online felt less burdened than offline to explore and create a desired identity. This is because in real life how they are perceived and positioned by their friends is relatively fixed and unchanged, which made it difficult for them to transform the identity in others' eyes. On SNS, however, they said they had more control over which information to disclose and more courage to experiment with the identity that they longed for. In other cases when online friends and offline friends overlapped on a certain SNS, how the participants were positioned offline is projected on SNS. Apart from the online-offline tension,

the audience members are another concern. In order to manage their impressions, some participants deleted their posts to avoid the posts' damaging their impression, while other participants added some posts to cater to their audience's expectations, based on the participant's image. Another concern was the dilemma of whether to show their life on SNS extensively or not. On the one hand, under the influence of collective culture, they were critical about other people's behavior of showing off, which seemed to them to be individualistic and self-centered; on the other hand, under the influence of individualism with materialism and consumer culture, they were willing to present themselves and show off the positive side of life in relation to their consumption. For most participants navigating these two different value systems was difficult.

6.2 Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, my conclusion of this research is as follows:

First of all, participants' identities presented on SNS are multiple, situational, and complex, involving the practice of positioning oneself in relation to others both on and offline. It is clear that SNS provides a space for young people to explore and perform themselves towards what they see as their ideal self. In some cases in the interviews we see participants engage in SNS to achieve what they felt constrained to achieve offline, and thus construct their identities that are slightly different from their offline identities. However, it does not mean young people can construct a brand new identity without the intervention of their offline identity. Through the analysis it is also evident that the primary imagined audience is those they acquainted with offline, and therefore who they are in their friendship circle offline also exerts effects on their online identities. When we look at the larger picture concerning participants' subjectivity in the two discursive worlds, it is nuanced in the way that both reality and SNS impact how young people are socially positioned. The case when Dominique identified and positioned herself as a

"Dou Bi" in relation to her offline friends on SNS demonstrates how offline discourse pushed her to duplicate her identity offline to online sphere, while the case when Mengyu and Xing Xing identified them as not beautiful according to "the face of value" reflects the dominant online discourse also shape the way how young people think who they are in real life. Because young people are deeply involved in their online presence and networked real-life friends online, these two spheres are closely entwined with each other, resulting in the mutual influence in the process of identity formation.

Secondly, as boyd (2008) and Kernaghan and Elwood (2013) suggested, Goffman's dramaturgy theory is still applicable in the venue of the social media. The participants deliberately presented themselves to manage the impression they gave to others. Participants regarded SNS as a "front stage" for their performance to present what they perceived as an idealized self that privileges wealth, leisure and physical beauty. As one of the participants suggested, traveling and eating food like Sushi and Western-styled food is either time-consuming or money-consuming. Goffman (1959) proposes that individuals use the technique of idealization to present themselves as privileged based on shared values. Thus, the commonly practiced behavior to show these types of content is the "sign" for the audience to think they are in a higher position on the pyramid of social stratification. So it is with the construction of online identity. Both written texts and visualized pictures afford young people to "give" or "give off" their performance to their online audience (Goffman, 1959, p. 3).

It is evident that the boundary between "front stage" and "back stage" is blurred, and thus it is easy for the audience to intrude in the "back stage" and see what they are not supposed to see. Although SNS is viewed as giving more room and possibility for people to manage their impression and construct their identity, this research proves that SNS brings the complexity of

performance to the forefront. Compared with real-life interactions that audience is always known

by the performer, participants found the online audience in social media is unknown and

uncontrolled, so that it is difficult to keep track of different online and offline connections and,

based on this, what to post. To avoid disruptions of performance, they had to manage the access

they gave to different people to maintain consistency both on and offline.

Thirdly, participants spoke about the tensions in trying to balance collectivistic culture

and individualistic culture, which influenced participants' sense of self and the way they

presented themselves on SNS. Participants' willingness to invest time to manage their self-

impression and their motivation of attracting others demonstrate their recognition and celebration

of social media. And it is also evident that materialism and consumerism culture is amplified on

social media. However, participants stated that being raised in a collectivistic culture, where

modesty and group benefits are highlighted, made them feel restricted and influenced their

feelings of audience when they posted. Most of the female participants said they felt more

comfortable posting group selfies to seek the safety as a group member rather than an individual.

6.3   Implications

6.3.1   Implications for theory

With the influence of globalization, common patterns in terms of youth's engagement of

social media are witnessed across countries and cultures. However, the formation and

presentation of identity are deeply rooted in the cultural context that youth are experiencing,

because how youth are positioned both in the virtual world and in the real world is aligned with

the social norms and values in that context. I echo Stern's (2008) argument that "although youth

authors may see themselves as unique and their works as original, the choices they make about

how they present themselves online are still informed by a society that relies heavily on

acceptance and 'fitting in' " (p. 107). Cultural context shapes the relationship between youth and their peers/friends, and influences how they interact with each other on and offline, which further affects how they position self and other. For example, work done by Shapka and Law (2013) examines adolescents' online behavior through the lens of cultural variations. By analyzing Canadian adolescents' online behaviors regarding cyberbullying, Shapka and Law (2013) found, among other things, that East Asian adolescents engaged less in cyberbullying as compared with adolescents of European descent; they discussed their findings in "terms of cultural differences based on the doctrines of Confucianism and Taoism" (p. 723). In addition, within the cultural context, different gender, social class, and minority groups such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender and queer youth (LGBTQ) may have different experience and perception on how they present and construct their identity on SNS. Therefore, researchers in social media and youth engagement should bear in mind not only the national context but the specific contexts when looking at how youth explore and invest in the digital world.

Methodologically, the study also sheds light on the decisions on how to translate. Living in the globalized world where educational studies expanded the national boundaries, translation of texts and interview data become necessary when analyzing data in languages other than English. This exploratory study indicates that in order to capture the meaning in the specific context, literal translation is not sufficient because the underlying discursive meaning that is entwined with their political and cultural structures might be lost. When it comes to the special words or idioms that only makes sense in that particular context in their native languages, researcher can describe the meaning of the word in that discursive context rather than merely translate it into English literally.

As I argued in 6.1, framing young people's usage of SNS as addiction and alienation does not fully capture the youth's engagement of media. Instead of attributing social media to alienation, researchers could look deeper into their exploration of digital world and examine societal factors that influence their use of social media.

6.3.2   Implications for practice

SNS is becoming a part of everyday life for college students. Educators, scholars and parents who work with these young people in China should consider the importance of SNS regarding the function of forming and becoming who they are, instead of framing the extensive use of SNS as wasting time and addiction. In addition, educators and leaders in higher educational institutions should offer curriculum, courses, or workshops on social media literacy/education to assist college students to understand the nature and features of social media, which might help them resolve (or, at least, navigate) the tensions when presenting themselves in the digital world. I echo Kelly and Arnold's (2015) argument that a protectionist approach that focuses on the risks and harm of social media is not a productive way to educate young people. Instead, they suggest young people participate and engage in the media production and Internet critically. Kelly and Arnold were focusing on high-school students in North America; however, their arguments are applicable to what educators should do in college students in China. In this case, educators in China should open up the discussion among college students, and prepare them to be adequate to manage their presence on social media. For example, some universities provided elective courses on media literacy. In these courses, besides the discussion and analysis of traditional media such as newspaper, radio and TV, social media should be also included in the course syllabus. Instructors can bring up discussions, for instance, social media and culture,

social media and globalization, or social networking sites in the consumerism culture. These topics aim to equip college students with a global view at a macro level, which may help them navigate social media in their life. In addition, as discussions around social media open up, college students can bring their questions, thoughts and experiences in the classroom, and support each other in terms of dealing with constrains and tensions when using social media.

6.4   Future Research Possibilities

There are several research possibilities that can flow from this exploratory study. The participants I recruited are only located in one geographic area in China, and most of them lived in urban areas where Internet access and mobile devices are commonly used. In a larger research project, I could examine how people with different socio-economic status, gender, region engage in SNS differently.

Another issue emerging from the study is that physical beauty became a very important criterion for forming and positioning the college students' identities. It is not new that physical beauty is seen as important, but now anyone with a smartphone can edit their selfies. There is room to recreate self, but it is not endless. Participants spoke about the tension of wanting to appear beautiful but not to show off. It appears participants edited their selfies in ways that amplified beauty industry norms. How are the norms of physical beauty mediated and transmitted among college students on SNS? These questions remained unanswered in this research; however, in the future they might be explored and analyzed through the lens of gender studies. Some feminist scholars, such as Shade (2008), tackle the issue of the possibilities of SNS in creating alternative images of young women that is against mainstream discourse. Further studies may build on her work to explore social media and female sexuality in different cultural contexts. In addition, as my study indicates that physical beauty is a concern to both males and

females, future studies can also explore specifically how beauty industry norms are expanded from women to men in the social media platforms.

The third possible research area derived from this study is around identity construction on SNS across national boundaries. There are many young people in China who pursue higher education in Western countries. And the number of college students in urban China who have experienced exchange programs outside of China is increasing. As such, these young people may engage in both Westernized SNS, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and localized SNS in China, including Wechat Friendship Circle, Weibo, and Ren Ren. How do these college students construct and present their identity in different SNS? How are their online identities and presentations constructed, taking account of the influence of the different groups of peers in Chinese culture? Future research could focus on this special population to unpack the issue of managing identities and presentations in different SNS that are popularized in a different cultural contexts.

The fourth possible research area is to look into young people's presentation and identity construction through other theoretical lenses. In my research, I draw on Goffman's theory to interpret social interaction in the venue of social media. However, later theorists' idea, such as Foucault's theory of governmentality and technologies of the self, can be applied to understand how young people discipline themselves when presenting on SNS.

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Appendices

Appendix A   Interview Guide (English Version)

1. Tell the participants about the background and the main idea of this research, and provide a brief background of myself.
2. Collect the signed consent form.

Rapport building questions:

- Do you like social networking sites?
- How often do you use it?
- Which social network site do you use most? Why do you like it?
- What do you usually do on the SNS?

(1) Self-expression/presentation

- What kinds of things do you like to post and express in your SNS? An example? (Probe more on their performances on SNS)
- How do you decide what kinds of information you want to share and what not?
- When you express yourself on SNS, what are the potential readers in your mind? How do you think what you see as your potential readers influences your expressions on SNS?
- Can you think of a something you wanted to say about yourself online but felt unable to? (Prompt: do you have a story?) Have you ever delete something after posting?
- How do your online friends influence the way that you express and present yourself? Could you please give me an example on how their expressions and behaviors on SNS changed what you want to show and post and how you show yourself on SNS?
- What kind of feedback or responses do you want to receive after you posted something on SNS? Can you give me an example?
- What kind of impression do you want to leave in SNS? Could you please give me an example?
- From your observation of you and your friends' SNS, do people with different genders behave differently? Can you give me example of similar or different behaviors?

(2) Visual presentation

- Do you usually post your self-portrait on SNS? What motivates you to post them?
- Mostly who took the picture? Is it your selfie or not? Why?
- What criteria for you to decide which self-portrait pictures to be shown in you SNS?
- Could you describe one self-portrait photo you posted online. What is included in the photo? What do you care most of your self-portrait picture? (Probe: appearance; dresses; cosmetics; body beauty; personality; environment around the participants in the photo)
- How do you think about editing self-portrait photos before posting? Do you and your friends usually do so? What do you want to change by editing the photo? May I know the reason?
- If you reflect on your online friends' self-portraits on social network sites, what do you think of their self-portrait? What kind of self-portraits do they usually post?
- How, if any, do your friends on SNS influence what kinds of self-portraits/selfie you take and post?

（3）Construction of identity on and offline

- If you reflect on your behaviors offline, what kind of person do you want to show to others? How do you say about your personality your friends perceive? What do you usually wear? What kind of language you usually speak to your friends?
- If you reflect on your behaviors on SNSs, what kind of person do you want to show to others on SNS? Or what kind of person you want your online friends know about through your written posts, images, and other online behaviors on the SNS?
- Could you please compare what you share about yourself online and offline?
- When you reflect one of online and offline friends, can you compare his or her online and offline behaviors and personality?
- What do you care most when you are showing yourself to others? Could you please give me an example? (Probe on characteristics they want to present and values they are identifying)
- From your observation and reflection, how likely do you find yourself or your friends post the products they bought with brand? What do you feel about this online behavior?

- Have you ever changed your ways of showing yourself after you looked others' posts and presentation online? Could you please give me an example?
- What if any constraints or tensions you feel when you are posting online and reading post of others?

Closing:

What do you want to ask me about now?

Do you have anything else to say about this topic?

Appendix B Interview Guide (Chinese Version)

1. 告知被采访者这项研究的背景和主要内容，并且简单介绍一下我自己的背景。
2. 收集已经签好字的采访同意书。

<u>开场热身问题：</u>

● 你喜欢社交网络吗？
● 多久你使用一次社交网络？
● 哪一个社交网络你最喜欢？为什么喜欢？
● 你经常怎样使用社交网络？

（1） 自我表达／自我呈现
● 在社交网络上，你愿意发表什么样的东西？能给个例子不？（询问他们在网上的表现）
● 你怎么决定什么信息想发表，什么信息不想？
● 当你在社交网站上表达自己时，你脑海中的潜在读者是什么样的？这些潜在的读者对你表达自我有着怎样的影响？
● 你是否曾经觉得想在社交网络中表达自我，但是却觉得不能够？你有这样的故事吗？
● 你觉得你的线上朋友怎么影响你在社交网络上表现自己？你能给我一个例子说明你的朋友在社交网络上的表达和行为影响了你发表关于你的信息吗？
● 当你发表了你的状态或者照片等，你期待别人怎么样的回馈？你能给我一个例子吗？
● 你愿意给社交网络的其他朋友留下什么样的印象？你能给我一个例子吗？
● 通过你的观察，你发现不同性别的人在社交网络中有不同的表现吗？你能给我一些关于不能性别表现的相同点和不同点的例子吗？

（2） 视觉呈现
● 你经常在社交网络上发表你自己的照片吗？什么驱使你发表它们呢？
● 你大部分的照片是自拍照还是别人拍的？为什么？
● 当你发自己的照片的时候，你考虑哪些因素来决定发哪张呢？
● 你能不能描述以下你的一张发表在网上的照片。这照片里面包括了什么？你最关注照片的哪些元素？（探究：外表，衣着，化妆品，身体的美，性格，背景环境）
● 你对于在发表照片前修照片的做法怎么看？你和你的朋友经常这么做吗？你通过修照片，想改变什么？我能知道原因吗？
● 当你反思你线上朋友们的个人照片，你怎么看待它们的照片？他们一般发表什么样的照片？

- 如果有的话，你的社交网络的朋友的照片／自拍照怎么影响你自己照和发照片？

（3）线上线下的自我构建
- 当你回忆自己在线下的行为，你想在别人面前表现自己是个什么样的人？你觉得你的朋友认为你的性格是什么样的？你平时怎么穿着打扮？你对朋友一般用什么样的语言表达？
- 当你回忆自己在社交网络上的行为，你觉得你想给其他人呈现你是什么样的人？或者你想通过你的文字，照片，或者其他的行为让你的线上朋友认为你是什么样的人？
- 你能对比一下你在现实生活中和社交网络中怎样展现你自己的吗？
- 当你回忆一个你线上和线下都认识的朋友，你能对比出她／他的行为和呈现的性格的区别吗？
- 当你向别人表现呈现你自己的时候，你最在乎的是什么？能给我一个例子吗？（探究关于他们想呈现的性格，认同的价值观）
- 通过你的反思和观察，你觉得你自己或者你的朋友在社交网络上发一些有品牌的产品吗？你对这样的行为有什么感想？
- 你是否曾经有这样的经历：看过别人发表在社交网络上的东西后，改变了自己原先想发表的文字，照片等？你能给我一个例子吗？
- 如果有的话，当你阅读别人的社交网络上发表的东西，或者自己发一些图片文字时，你觉得有哪些限制因素，压力等情绪出现？

最后的问题：

你有什么问题想问我？

你还有其他关于此话题想和我分享的内容吗？