

The Media Logic and Cultural Impact of WeChat

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Abstract

Through its media logic, which is defined by programmability, pervasiveness, connectivity, and datafication, WeChat establishes a non-linear, interactive, and user-dominated media environment. This media logic enhances the influence of each user within WeChat's narrative landscape and revolutionises traditional media narration methods by enabling them to generate and distribute content. In such an environment, users are able to edit, receive, and send information without constraints of time or distance, which enables delayed interactions that broaden the potential for human communication and dissemination. Additionally, WeChat partially replaces social behaviours and institutions, thereby modifying their original structures and characteristics. As individuals become more accustomed to this media environment, they progressively adjust to the forms that are appropriate for media representation on WeChat, thereby completing the mediatization of culture and society. In this process, individuals are becoming more dependent on media and media logic, with WeChat's influence permeating social and cultural activities through its media logic. This interaction has a substantial impact on society and culture, thereby aiding in their reconstruction.

Keywords

Social Media, Media Logic, Non-Linear Narratives, User Engagement, Mediatization

1. Introduction

WeChat, a social media platform for the creation, sharing, and consumption of content based on user relationships, has merged with more digital technologies and applications in the digital era, giving users access to a digital environment with constant connectivity, all-encompassing digital networks, and increasingly fragmented and user-determined forms of media use for content creation. The platform's extensive functionalities have made it a crucial tool for social connec-

tion, especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, where it helped maintain social bonds and emotional well-being for Hong Kong region expatriates [1].

The WeChat narrative has evolved under the influence of such a media environment from a traditional textual narrative dominated by media organisations to a non-linear dynamic narrative dominated by users, and this has had an impact on how users communicate and interact in various contexts (work and life, organisations and individuals), as well as society and culture. On the one hand, WeChat encourages the mediatization of society and culture; on the other hand, this process forces WeChat to constantly evolve and update, heightening the complexity of the media landscape.

2. WeChat's Media Logic

WeChat, one of the most popular social media platforms in China, has impacted every facet of its users' personal and professional lives. WeChat must therefore define its media logic in order to create its own methods for foreseeing and reusing consumer demands as well as for cultivating its own "real time" [2].

Media logic is a means of "viewing" and "interpreting" social situations and is the "grammar" of how information is presented in the media [3]. Social media logic has evolved in an era of media settings that are becoming more complex, going beyond the traditional limitations of mass media and, to some extent, enriching and changing the idea of mass media logic in the classic sense.

WeChat's media logic can be understood in terms of the four fundamental social media principles proposed by Van Dijck and Poell: programmability, pervasiveness, connectivity, and datafication [2]. Based on datafication, programmability is used to manipulate content, and pervasiveness-based content is presented in a visual format to connected users to enhance the communication effect and user stickiness. The ability of platforms to manipulate and present content based on algorithms. For example, WeChat's timeline and feed algorithms determine which content is shown to users, influencing their interactions and engagement. The term "datafication" refers to a web platform's capacity to quantify all types of information into data, including smart device metadata, various types of content (music, video, text), social connections (friends, likes, trends), and even user usage histories [4]. Furthermore, the platform's role in educational settings has demonstrated its ability to promote learner autonomy and personalized learning experiences, showcasing its programmability and connectivity [5].

WeChat's Datafication feature is an effective tool for gathering, tracking, and analysing user data, predicting user preferences, improving user experience, and delivering ads. It also lays the groundwork for the other three components. WeChat uses programmability to offer users a coding environment for communication and content creation. WeChat developers can modify interfaces and algorithms in this process to affect the flow of material, but user behaviour also affects the media's selection of content, implying that users are also actively in-

volved in content control [2]. WeChat is a unique type of social media because it serves as both a mass media outlet and a social communication platform.

Connectivity means WeChat use algorithms to link users to content, users to other users, platforms to platforms, users to advertisers, and users to other platforms. Users of WeChat are in a connected group environment in addition to their own personal space. The content of varied experiences produced by individuals and society in such a media environment must be compatible with the reading and appreciating preferences of various groups of people in order to be recorded and shared.

As a result, WeChat becomes a widely distributed media platform. Various communities have diverse interpretations of what is universal. For instance, “emoji” has replaced “text” in young communities, and “emoji packs” and “short videos” have replaced “text” as the primary means of information gathering, emotional expression, thought expression, and wish expression; in communities dominated by the elderly, the primary contents to be forwarded are articles promoting health advice and videos promoting health care products. WeChat’s integration into daily life in China, from messaging to payments, explains Pervasiveness.

3. A User-Driven Narrative

WeChat’s media environment is dominated by users who create, share, and interact with content in a dynamic and non-linear manner. Unlike traditional media, WeChat enables users to be active participants in the narrative, as seen in the educational domain where learners use WeChat to control their learning processes and collaborate interactively [5]. For information sharing and emotional communication, traditional interpersonal contact typically takes place face-to-face with both participants in the same room. WeChat has emerged as the best method of communication thanks to information technology advancement, bringing about an unheard-of revolution in communication [6]. In this spatial scene, users are the information’s primary source, and everyone participates as a labelled user, acting as an information producer, publisher, consumer, and disseminator. In the narrative network, every individual is a node or information unit [7]. Users can lead, intervene in, or take part in the narrative anytime, anywhere, in the WeChat narrative environment. It causes the “narrative subject” of a tale, an event, or information content to change and grow over time. Anyone can do this without breaking any applicable rules or regulations, and they are also free to remark on the “story” and the “event” in question. Anyone can evaluate the “story,” “event,” or “information content” and share their ideas, beliefs, and suggestions without breaking any applicable laws or regulations. Even more so than the actual “narrative,” “event,” or “information content,” the influence of these judgments is substantial.

The narrative of traditional media is constrained by the properties of the medium and is a one-way transmission of information; users cannot interact with

or take part in the creation and manufacture of information. WeChat offers an infinite amount of media content and a limitless amount of information flow [7]. The qualities of equal and open narratives and collaborative sharing on WeChat are determined by this infinite. Users can freely mix and match information elements like text, photographs, or videos and organise them in non-linear, associative ways anytime, anyplace, thanks to the change in narrative space and subject that also frees narrative approaches and procedures from linear expression. According to this narrative approach, the information expression transcends the linear track and is no longer constrained by the linear thinking expression of time or any sort of sequential logic, but is instead ordered and represented in accordance with the user's thought process.

On WeChat, users can communicate information via "replying," "commenting," "forwarding," or "sharing," as well as publish and subscribe to content at any time and from any location. Users can also interact with their friends and followers through "reply," "comment," "forwards," and "share," among other features, to help spread information in multiple directions. Users can also add, modify, or delete previously published information whenever and wherever they need to, ensuring that it is constantly updated and disseminated. Users can record their life, express their emotions, and share their opinions in the WeChat "moments", which also serves as a collaborative storytelling space for users. People anticipate that "a tale," "an event," or "an information item" will resonate if more people who share their values and interests join them as companions. In order to broaden the definition of engagement through shared interests, they discover a resonance, organise themselves into "moments" or "groups," and work together on tales through "sharing." WeChat's narrative structure is thus defined by a collaborative, non-linear, and dynamic narrative that is guided by users.

4. Mediatization, Culture, and Society

WeChat acts as a mediating institution that influences social and cultural practices. The integration of media into various aspects of life transforms how society operates and interacts. For example, during the pandemic, WeChat played a critical role in maintaining social connections and emotional support among Hong Kong expatriates [1]. Additionally, the impact of public opinion on WeChat significantly shapes the value orientations of college students, highlighting the platform's influence on societal norms and attitudes [8]. Mediated research must take into account social and cultural factors rather than being oriented on the media [3]. The prevalence of the Internet and online media influences people's communication habits in both their personal and professional life, but it also changes, transforms, and advances the media environment as a whole as a result of its appropriation in various social and cultural settings.

WeChat functions as a mediating institution that deeply influences how other social institutions function and shapes society and culture through its commu-

nicative actions. As a result, it participates in the process of social and cultural mediatization, which takes into account both the evolution of WeChat as a medium and tool for communication as well as the evolution of culture and society. Society, culture, media, and politics are no more autonomous subsystems but rather interdependent systems that interact with one another as a result of the ongoing renewal of media technologies and their penetration in a variety of disciplines.

In addition, Schultz processes and concretizes mediatization as an extension, substitution, integration, and acceptance process that transforms society and communication media [9]. WeChat's instant messaging feature, which enables users to edit, receive, and transmit messages without being constrained by time or distance and create time-delayed interactions, first expands the possibilities of human communication and dissemination. Second, social behaviours and institutions have been somewhat displaced by WeChat, which has altered their initial makeup and characteristics. To aggressively push information to netizens, an increasing number of government departments and institutions have launched public government WeChat numbers and government service mini-programs on WeChat. These media activities have widened the avenues for citizens to engage in politics and to contact and communicate with them more effectively.

Additionally, the lines separating media-related and non-media activities are becoming increasingly hazy [10], and WeChat is permeating an increasing number of niche spheres of daily life. For instance, WeChat users can travel not only by transportation but also through applets for real-time location sharing or taxi hailing thanks to the development and penetration of WeChat applets. People finally embrace and accommodate the media form following a period of constant interaction and influence between WeChat and society and culture.

WeChat has revolutionized traditional media narration methods. For instance, during Chinese festivals, people now send digital greetings via WeChat instead of visiting in person, showcasing a shift in cultural practices [10]. Organizations or individuals in different professional domains must communicate with one another in accordance with how the medium manipulates information as a result of the changes in society brought about by the medium's existence. For instance, in traditional Chinese culture, people would go to each other's homes to send blessings on holidays; however, with the widespread use of WeChat, people have grown more accustomed to sending blessings online. In fact, today, the majority of people's impromptu information-sharing habits on WeChat actually adhere to the WeChat communication norms. WeChat has a significant impact on the mediatization process by gradually transforming numerous mutually disparate societies and cultures into a format suited for media reproduction. This mode of operation involves presenting and interacting with all facets of society using WeChat's media logic.

5. The Influence of Mediation

WeChat as a medium interacts with society and culture, having a significant

impact on both, which in turn helps to reconstruct society and culture, as revealed by mediatization.

WeChat's concentration and volume of information foster information dependence, significantly impacting users' value formation and behavioral norms. The platform's ability to guide public opinion and societal values, particularly among younger demographics, underscores its role in shaping contemporary value systems [8]. Because of the increase in control brought about by the advancement of information processing technology and the increase in information flow caused by the growth of various media, modern society is referred to as an information society. At the same time, the information society is one in which actions for disseminating information are tightly controlled and influenced [11]. WeChat, a tool with information dissemination as its primary function, is becoming more and more relied upon as a result of the rise in social media, which has made information a resource and wealth in the true sense of the word. People are constantly looking for information in order to survive and develop. The more a person depends on media to suit his or her requirements, the more significant a part media plays in their lives and the more influence media has over them [12].

The way the media creates the environment emphasises the impact of mediatization. WeChat continues to improve the information ecosystem it generates and its impact on the real world even as it offers users more, wider, and faster information to fulfill their demands. WeChat is not only a significant tool for developing social information systems, but also a significant force in the creation of the social information environment, based on the medium's technical support and extensive functionalities.

First and foremost, WeChat offers a media platform for interfaith dialogue and serves as a spiritual nexus for the development of a mediated society. Humans' fundamental informational demands are met in a mediated society, and as a result, they start looking for more spiritual dietary supplements. The spiritual significance of human interaction concerns and meanings will be heightened, and people will become more aware of their rights. WeChat greatly broadens the range of people's communication, enabling users to realise the flow of information in private space as well as to participate in the production of public information and the expression of public opinions. Although WeChat cannot truly replace direct human-to-human communication, it can serve as an indirect communication tool and channel.

The media plays a significant part in social construction as an ideological mechanism for constructing values [13]. The rapid emergence of social media has had a tremendous impact on everything from the macro system of politics, economy, and culture to the micro level of families and people. Mediatization has internalised with human social qualities and affected the formation of such social attributes, becoming an essential social subsystem of social life [14]. Human values and behavioural norms, which are significant components of human social qualities, are impacted by mediatization as well. The information envi-

ronment in which we live has been altered and presented to individuals through the selection and processing of information by the communication media, rather than being a mirror image of the real environment. For instance, WeChat's agenda-setting feature allows users to select the materials they want to be delivered to the public, and as a result, the public is subtly impacted by the app's output as they receive information. WeChat will be able to identify and shape mainstream values in this way. Developed communication channels influence conventional values and may even subvert them while creating new values through their own discourse [14]. WeChat influences how individuals build their values and moral standards in contemporary life thanks to its instrumental features, which supports the development of value systems in mediated societies.

6. Conclusion

The development of media formats and viewpoints in other areas of life has led to the development of media logic, which is not innately a part of a systematic social model. WeChat's media logic gives each user the ability to produce and share material, creating a virtual social environment for them. The media grows more powerful and influential as society becomes more and more reliant on it and its logic. People are immersed in the virtual society of WeChat, which increasingly transforms many formerly distinct social and cultural processes into configurations that are conducive to mediated reproduction. Through the logic of the medium, WeChat's influence infiltrates social and cultural activities in this process. It plays a significant part in the development of ideological mechanisms for establishing values.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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