

# An Analysis of User Behavior in the Context of Social Media Migration Phenomenon

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## Abstract

As information technology continues to evolve, social media is rapidly developing and emerging. With WeChat Moments becoming the most popular social media platform, users have started exhibiting self-presentation alienation behavior, eventually leading to social fatigue. In order to seek more private and ideal social “habitats”, a large number of WeChat Moments users migrated to Weibo. There are differences in self-presentation between WeChat Moments and Weibo, making the two platforms the “frontstage” and “backstage” of user self-presentation. However, the migration phenomenon did not stop at Weibo, and users have generated media fatigue, attempting to resist through behaviors such as blocking and controlling boundaries, and ultimately seeking the next “habitat” for a detour. It is worth considering the relationship between an individual’s social needs and self-presentation motives on social media, as well as whether there are favorable conditions in today’s environment to provide individuals with a true and ideal self-presentation world.

**Keywords:** media situation theory, social media, self-presentation, WeChat, Weibo

## 1. Presentation of the Problem

In *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior*, the research highlights the role of electronic media, mainly television, in studying media, context, and behavioral patterns. McLuhan further pointed out that media application will bring about changes in social scenes, and humans must adopt new behavior patterns to respond to these changes. With the advent of the internet era, information technology has evolved, and social media has emerged. WeChat has become the main platform for audiences to interact with each other in the mobile internet era, transforming traditional

face-to-face communication into unconstrained scenarios across time and space.

As an important feature of WeChat, Moments provides users with a crucial venue to share their lives and present themselves to the public. Due to factors such as age and social environment, WeChat has become the primary tool for social interaction, and users intentionally or unintentionally accept many weak relationships, blurring social boundaries. However, with familiar social circles being broken, WeChat users face problems such as information overload and social burnout, as the media environment has created a “windowed”

life. Scholars of identity theory, such as Goffman, propose that the self is not a single, unified entity but instead exists as a decentralized self-identity in a windowed life, wherein each situation is like a window, and the self exists in different windows, playing multiple roles simultaneously.

Against this backdrop, users, especially young people, are attempting to escape from WeChat and migrate to Weibo in large numbers. The 43rd report on China's Internet development by CNNIC reveals that as of December 2018, the usage rate of WeChat Moments was 83.4%, a decrease of 3.9 percentage points from the end of 2017, whereas the usage rate of Weibo has increased by 1.4 percentage points. However, this migration does not entail completely abandoning one platform. Instead, it indicates differences in self-presentation in various media contexts, with Weibo serving as the "backstage" for self-presentation.

As a more public social media platform, why has Sina Weibo become the "new habitat" for users who are bored with WeChat Moments, and what kind of user self-presentation behaviors and usage patterns are demonstrated? Additionally, the migration and coexistence of these social media platforms, with WeChat Moments as the "frontstage" and Weibo as the "backstage," exemplify the evolution of user psychology and self-presentation behavior in the era of mobile internet.

## **2. Media Context Migration Process: From WeChat Moments to Weibo**

### *2.1 The Transformation of Roles in the Use of WeChat Media*

In the Web 2.0 era, the widespread use of the WeChat app on mobile phones has almost monopolized the channel for domestic information exchange and communication. As a social platform for acquaintances, WeChat has become an integral and contemporary lifestyle. (Leng Ruobing, 2020) The traditional exchange of name cards has transformed into sharing WeChat QR codes, and reading newspapers has evolved into browsing WeChat Official Accounts. People show great enthusiasm for this familiar social platform that is both immediate, concise, and anti-social. Catering to the emotional need for expression through social interaction, WeChat Moments has become a primary space for users to actively present themselves.

With the rapid development of social media,

weak relationships have been added to the acquaintance network, leading to blurred social interaction boundaries and ultimately causing the distinctive attribute of WeChat to fade. (Meng Ge, 2022) User behavior in the WeChat Moments scene has undergone two types of mutation: mutation in self-presentation and mutation in social behavior. Work, study, and daily life have melded with virtual space, causing users to alter their self-presentation (Leng Ruobing, 2020) towards portraying more positive and happy images, sharing private content on public social platforms, creating personal image tags, and checking in daily. However, with the increase of unfamiliar relationships, users have become weary of crafting diverse images, leading to a mutation in social behavior. Users exhibit multiple personalities online and use WeChat Moments' crucial features such as "Three-Day Time Limit," "Hide from someone," and "Visible to a specific group" to selectively share different content with different groups, creating distinctly different impressions. The misalignment of online and offline behavior, the alleviation of feelings of loneliness through online self-presentation, and the shift towards group hysteria on social media platforms all contribute to role depletion and emotional insufficiency in offline life.

These mutations lead to users becoming overly-dependent "robots," alienated "lonely people," and rapid "one-sided people" in the virtual environment. Users begin to lose rational judgment, become anxious about others' seemingly perfect lives on WeChat Moments, receive an overload of massive amounts of information, and continuously erode their ability for independent thinking. Although users derive a "virtual sense of fulfillment and happiness," they also fall into a state of spiritual loneliness after leaving WeChat Moments.

### *2.2 WeChat Fatigue Phenomenon Appears*

The academic definition of "social fatigue" tends to focus more on describing the symptoms experienced. The saturation and overload of WeChat Moments limit users' self-expression and lead them to overthink the categorization of various labels, causing indecision about whether to post information and concern that it may result in social alienation. Users also become overly preoccupied with receiving effective feedback. All of these factors compel users to seek a place where they can "breathe" and

escape, leading to decreased activity on WeChat Moments, such as setting the “three-day visibility” or deleting all Moments. As a result, users experience negative emotional responses, including fatigue, resistance, and rejection of WeChat Moments.

As social media updates continue to accelerate, new challenges have arisen. Dong Chenyu and colleagues have employed Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical theory to extract four sets of concepts: self-exhibition and context collapse, manipulation and hidden expression, audience isolation and audience imagination, and exhibition and performance of taste. These concepts have been employed to examine the changes in people’s self-presentation and performance in the context of social media. (Dong Chenyu & Ding Yiran, 2018) Meanwhile, as social networks grow broader, their depth is diluted, and the complexity of social relationships makes it challenging for users to navigate.

The estrangement between self-presentation and social behavior has given rise to social fatigue. Social behavioral alienation has led to a shift from “strong relationship” to “weak relationship” socialization, causing users to become weary of maintaining complex relationships. Privacy boundaries have become blurred, and private information has occasionally been leaked. The estrangement of self-presentation results in the failure of contextual release situations to achieve their intended effect, and the impression management of the “front stage” can cause users to lose their ability to return to their true selves. Furthermore, the pursuit of a perfect self-image among the public can generate negative emotions, such as jealousy, anger, and envy, due to the asymmetry of information exposure, resulting in the formation of a WeChat Moments “hierarchy of disdain.”

In response to the WeChat fatigue phenomenon, users are increasingly turning to Weibo to create and explore unfamiliar relationship fields where they can “breathe.” Because WeChat plays an important role in social relationships, users commonly find it challenging to completely disengage from WeChat Moments. As a result, many users present two distinct types of self-presentation on WeChat Moments and Weibo.

### 2.3 Weibo’s Unfamiliar Weak Connections and

#### *Controllable Boundaries*

Sina Weibo, often considered a typical weak-relationship social media, has undergone a significant transformation in its weak relationship attributes due to the evolution of mobile information technology. From being primarily a platform for stranger socialization, it has become a platform for semi-friends socialization. Weibo users generally fall into two categories: public figures, business accounts, and other fully public accounts, and ordinary users who create accounts, colloquially referred to as “sideaccount”. This article focuses on Weibo accounts created by ordinary users after migrating from WeChat Moments to Weibo.

At its inception, Weibo attracted users with its distinctive attributes of unfamiliar socialization, which minimized the connection between users and reality. (Yao Jingqi, 2022) The near-perfect anonymity of Weibo made it an attractive medium for user migration. Weibo users can freely post emotional content or photographs of their daily lives that may not be appropriate for WeChat Moments or that they do not wish to share with acquaintances. The combination of freedom and anonymity makes Weibo a “tree hole” for users migrating from WeChat Moments.

As Weibo’s functionality continues to evolve, its role as a medium is also changing, and real-life scenarios are gradually becoming prevalent in virtual space. Consequently, user security is reduced, and the expansion of information networks and technical conditions for voyeuristic behavior of others can lead to higher possibilities of Weibo user identity exposure. However, in comparison to WeChat Moments, Weibo still falls under the category of weak-relationship connections with a controllable privacy boundary. For instance, if users have privacy concerns, they can use the Chinese character “镇魂” before their personal profiles to control Weibo’s visibility, and their user ID cannot be actively searched for. Furthermore, Weibo has features similar to WeChat Moments, such as “visible to followers only” or “visible for the past six months only”.

When examining the usage of media, Weibo remains distinct from WeChat. Users have the ability to control whether they are followed or not, while WeChat is constrained by real-life interpersonal relationships and cannot block, blacklist, or delete friends without generating

notifications. Thus, Weibo's privacy boundaries remain controllable and provide a greater sense of security than WeChat Moments. This is why it has become the preferred "habitat" for users after migrating from other media platforms.

### **3. Variations in Forms and Contents of Self-Presentation**

Erving Goffman introduced the concept of "self-presentation" in his book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. He argued that individuals often present different versions of themselves to different individuals or in public settings in order to leave the best possible impression. As a result, the individual user's demands for different social media platforms are significantly distinct, leading to them presenting different "selves" on various platforms.

When users migrate from WeChat Moments to Weibo, they tend to present themselves differently as well. WeChat Moments can be compared to a "frontstage" where users typically present a positive, and often perfect, version of themselves. In contrast, self-presentation on Weibo is considered more realistic and immediate, and can also include negative aspects.

#### *3.1 WeChat Moments: Frontstage Presentation of a Positive and Active Self*

The positive, active, and pristine self-presentation on WeChat Moments is an "idealized self" that has been heightened. Initially, the management of frontstage self-presentation is influenced by WeChat's acquaintances socialization. Users tend to establish a positive impression to ease interpersonal communication. Consequently, self-presentation on WeChat Moments is marked by strict selection and processing of WeChat avatars, Moments covers, and personal tags that reflect users' styles, recent status, or personal preferences at first glance.

Secondly, there is a deliberate performance strategy for self-presentation. Users primarily publish content on their daily work, study, American culture, tourist attractions, selfies, and emotion-related topics in their Moments. Only a small proportion of content is work-related. As a whole, Moments content is highly personal and carefully selected. A single post may have been thoroughly considered at length, consequently, losing its original real-time value.

Thirdly, intrinsic motivation for self-presentation leads users to publish content mainly for three reasons. Firstly, to document their lives, secondly, to present a positive and vibrant lifestyle through check-ins and comparable posts, and thirdly, to meet their social needs by gaining recognition through likes and comments from others or to gain a sense of belonging through emotional posts, seeking comfort or validation from the community.

#### *3.2 Weibo: Backstage Self-Presentation that Tends to Be Real and Negative*

Users primarily use Weibo not only to keep themselves updated with current events or to follow their favorite celebrities but also to share their everyday life experiences, including their emotions and venting. As a result, Weibo's self-presentation tends to be unfiltered, authentic, and more real. The presentation of the "backstage" self does not require the same management or performative strategies as WeChat Moments. The inner motivation for Weibo's self-presentation mainly focuses on emotional needs, and users often share personal experiences for emotional catharsis.

Weibo's content mainly consists of two types: life record fragments consisting of a stack of images and immediate textual content. The former is less decorated and organized when posted on Weibo. In comparison to Moments, Weibo allows the publication of more than nine images without any restrictions, and iOS system users can upload real-time images. Users are more concerned about the storage function of their images rather than the display when posting them.

When users publish textual content on Weibo, it tends to be a real-time record of their current mood, in contrast to Moments. If users are emotionally triggered, they tend to post disorganized or agitated text directly on Weibo. Conversely, Moments have a blurry privacy boundary, and users are concerned that inappropriate comments may negatively impact their social relationships. As a result, they tend to avoid posting immediate emotional content on Moments.

Generally, compared to WeChat Moments, the content that users post on Weibo is more diverse and private. Weibo's self-presentation falls under the expressive stage, where users can voice their opinions freely. Therefore, the self-presentation on Weibo is similar to the



“backstage” and tends to portray a negative, but more authentic self.

#### **4. Conclusion: The Fatigue, Resistance, and Detours Behind the Migration of Social Media**

With Weibo’s constant enhancement of various features, it appears to be following the development trend of WeChat Moments. However, many users feel that their privacy is compromised since their activity on Weibo can be monitored by acquaintances outside of their fan list- a behavior known as “viewing rape” in the online world. In response, users have created more secretive accounts, exercise strict control over their fan and follow lists, and even prevent their account IDs from appearing on other social media platforms beyond Weibo. Despite these measures, the situation on Weibo is gradually becoming similar to that of WeChat Moments, causing users to experience media fatigue. Some even opt to hide or cancel their accounts while others solely use Weibo for viewing content and refrain from posting any. The emergence of these situations is mainly influenced by the following factors:

##### *4.1 Behavior of Non-Fans Monitoring Users on Weibo*

In certain instances, Weibo and WeChat Moments scenes seem to merge, making it challenging for users to ensure that their Weibo social accounts remain undiscoverable to acquaintances. Additionally, Weibo posts that are liked by fans can also be seen by second-degree fans, allowing them to monitor the user’s account behavior anytime and anywhere. From a psychological standpoint, non-fan monitoring is disgust-inducing for users. They are unable to prevent others from monitoring them and cannot even confirm whether they are being monitored, eventually resulting in media fatigue.

##### *4.2 The Escalation of Public Opinion Control*

In recent years, due to the increasing requirements and standards for online rhetoric control, users are now unaware of the language corpus being screened on Weibo. Consequently, Weibo accounts are often closed or canceled without the user’s knowledge, and the duration of their account suspension is unknown. Furthermore, if Weibo posts contain topics or locations, they can appear in the real-time Weibo area. As a result, individual content becomes public, and users may unexpectedly receive malicious comments, harassment, and reports

from strangers.

All of these factors have led users to carefully select, modify, and filter their Weibo posts, resulting in a loss of spontaneity, authenticity, and enthusiasm for self-presentation. This phenomenon has caused users to feel alienated from their self-presentation.

##### *4.3 The Confusion in Public Communication and Weakened Social Functions*

In addition to posting content, Weibo’s news and celebrity functions have resulted in a chaotic public domain, with a vast amount of negative and malicious content, such as “fans fighting” and “regional discrimination,” infiltrating users’ viewing areas. This has caused psychological distress and disgust among users. Consequently, some users have uninstalled Weibo, cancelled their accounts, and taken other measures to avoid the negative confusion and information present on Weibo.

##### *4.4 Conclusion*

As a result, migrating from WeChat Moments to Weibo does not guarantee that users will enter a safe and reliable online world. With more users accessing media scenes and the related upgrades and added functions, the boundaries between unfamiliar and familiar, privacy, and non-privacy continue to blur. Consequently, users become fatigued by the media and begin seeking out an ideal “habitat.”

This cycle is not unique to the migration from WeChat Moments to Weibo. Currently, there is also a trend of Weibo users migrating to Xiaohongshu. However, Xiaohongshu faces similar issues of chaotic comments and negative feeds.

In the age of social media, users often experience media fatigue and seek to resist it by controlling borders or blocking it altogether. Ultimately, they may seek a new “habitat” that allows them to navigate the social media landscape with greater ease. This raises questions about the relationship between individual social needs and self-presentation motivation on social media. It is essential to explore whether it is possible to provide users with a real and ideal self-presentation world under the current environment.

However, taking a step back, Foucault argued in *Surveiller et punir* that society itself is a “full view prison,” where the right to visibility is unequal. Nevertheless, designers, governments, and

society can still research and upgrade the control of public and private domain boundaries, as well as user privacy control, among other things. Despite the challenges, it is still possible for a true and ideal self-presentation world to emerge as the user's next desirable "habitat."

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