

The Motivation of Emotional Sharing on Social Media: An Analysis on Wechat Moments

Huang Liying¹, Zhao Xiuling², Luo Xiaoqing²

¹ Guangzhou College of Commerce, Guangzhou, 511363, Guangdong, China

² South China Normal University, Guangzhou, 510006, Guangdong, China

Abstract: In recent years, social network has gradually become an important platform for people to share emotions. This study takes Wechat users, the social media group with the largest number of users in China, as the research object. Questionnaire survey was used. The author explores the influence of social network structure on emotional sharing behavior, and analyzes the intermediary role of psychological motivation in this process. It is found that the closeness of social networks has a significant positive impact on both positive and negative emotional sharing. Emotional expression plays a mediator role in this process. The scale of social networks has a significant positive impact on positive emotional sharing. Impression management plays a mediator role in this process. This study enriches the related theories of social network and emotional sharing, and provides inspiration and reference for social media marketing practice.

Keywords: social network, network structure, emotional sharing, emotional expression, impression management

1. Introduction

Social network services mainly include social software and social media such as social sites, such as instant messaging software such as Wechat and QQ, and social media such as Weibo and Facebook . With the rapid development of Internet technology, SNS not only provides users with a wide range of channels for interpersonal interaction and information sharing, but also gradually becomes an important platform for people to share emotions with others ^[1]. In social networks, emotional sharing behavior is often affected by network environment factors and network communication motivation. Taking Wechat as an example, users create a close network environment in the form of group visibility of Wechat moments. They are more likely to have emotional expression needs when they are in it and share their emotions in Wechat moments. Their friends interact emotionally by praising and commenting on the content ^[2]. Some users with a large number of friends tend to share positive emotions in Wechat moments for the sake of building a good image. For example, college students pay more attention to controlling negative emotions in Wechat moments. By showing their excellent side, college students can achieve the goal of broadening interpersonal relationships ^[3]. It can be seen that emotional sharing behavior will be affected by the structure of social networks and related to emotional sharing motivation.

This study takes Wechat users, the social media group with the largest number of users in China, as the research object. Questionnaire survey was used. The author discusses the influence of social network structure on emotional sharing behavior, and analyzes the intermediary role of psychological motivation in this process. This study will enrich the theory of social network and emotional sharing, and provide inspiration and reference for social media marketing practice.

2. Literature review and hypotheses

2.1 Social network structure

Social network refers to the relatively stable interactive relationship between social members in a fixed group. It is an established social structure among social members . Its essence is a relational virtual community. The relationship connection reflects the social interpersonal structure in reality.

Social network structure mainly includes relationship scale, interaction frequency and connection intensity^[4]. First of all, the relationship scale is the network scale, which can be understood as the total number of network members, such as the number of friends in the Wechat address book. It reflects the number of relationship connections. The larger the network scale, the wider the spread of user influence^[5]. Secondly, the frequency and intensity of interaction reflect the closeness of social network members. It is closely related to the frequency and degree of interaction between network members. Similar to real society, the closeness of relationships in social networks can be divided into strong ties and weak ties. Strong ties refer to the stable social contact formed by frequent daily contact, with limited scope, such as relatives, classmates, friends, colleagues, etc. Weak ties refer to the social connections with weak feelings and less interaction, which covers a wide range^[6].

2.2 Social sharing of emotion

Social sharing of emotion refers to that in social life, people who experience emotional events tend to tell others about the emotional events and talk about their feelings^[7]. According to different emotion types and valence, emotional sharing can be divided into positive sharing and negative sharing. Positive emotional sharing includes happiness and interest; negative emotional sharing includes fear, anger and sadness. These sharing behaviors are universal and communicable. It is not affected by age, gender, culture, emotional type and emotional valence^[8,9]. Whether emotional events are positive or negative, people tend to share with others.

With the rapid pace of social life, people spend less and less time on interpersonal interaction in real life. Therefore, more and more people choose social media as a platform for emotional sharing. Social media can increase users' willingness to share emotions^[7]. Moreover, emotional expression in social media is richer than that in real life^[10]. It is based on the real interpersonal relationship, but also has its own characteristics. In terms of the scale of emotional sharing, social networks can expand the scale of sharing objects. Users can not only share emotions with the familiar people, but also share emotions with the familiar objects on the network that are less likely to contact in reality. From the valence of emotional sharing, emotional sharing often includes both positive and negative emotions. In these two emotions, positive emotions are mainly expressed as happiness, pride and interest; negative emotions are mainly expressed as anger, resentment, weakness, opposition and anxiety.

Social network structure has an impact on emotional sharing behavior. In closely connected social networks, people tend to share emotions in order to enhance their relationships^[11]. In particular, the sharing of negative emotions reflects the trust of the participants in the listeners, which can strengthen the intimate relationship between the two sides^[12]. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: The closeness of social networks has a positive impact on positive emotional sharing.

H2: The closeness of social networks has a positive effect on negative emotional sharing.

In large-scale social networks, people want to get social recognition. In addition, the general public prefers positive emotions to negative ones. Therefore, users tend to share positive emotions through impression management strategies to create a good image^[13,14]. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H3: The scale of social networks has a positive impact on positive emotional sharing.

H4: The scale of social networks has a negative impact on negative emotional sharing.

2.3 Motivation of emotional sharing

There are two main psychological motivations for emotional sharing in social media. One is the need for emotional expression^[7], and the other is to create a self-image that meets your expectations through impression management^[15].

Nowadays, more and more people choose to express their emotions in social networks. On the one hand, the fast pace and high pressure in the real society limit people's time for interpersonal communication, and also reduce people's enthusiasm for interaction and sharing. In reality, those emotions that have no place to tell can only be released in social networks. On the other hand, emotional sharing in social networks doesn't feel too oppressive. The functions of social network such as comment and praise also provide a convenient social interaction channel for people. People can break through the limitation of time and space to express their emotions, and enhance the interaction of

friends to maintain and improve interpersonal relationships^[16]. The size of emotional expression needs is affected by the closeness of network members. The closer the network structure is, the more likely the individual is to reveal his true feelings to others. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H5: Emotional expression has a mediator effect on the relationship between closeness and positive emotional sharing.

H6: Emotional expression has a mediator effect on the relationship between closeness and negative emotional sharing.

Because of the anonymity and convenience of social networks, it makes it easier for individuals to present themselves. Social media has gradually become a platform to show personal image. People manage their impressions through this platform. In social media, users can create their desired self-image by showing their good side to others through various means^[13,17,18], so as to gain others' value recognition and successful social interaction^[14]. The demand of impression management is affected by the size of network. With the expansion of social circles, managing self-presentation among diverse groups becomes more challenging, causing individuals to self-censor their posts^[13]. The larger the scale of the network structure, the more people the individual faces. Therefore, the more users need to convey positive emotions to build a good public image; and vice versa. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H7: Impression management has a mediator effect on the relationship between network scale and positive emotional sharing.

H8: Impression management has a mediator effect on the relationship between network scale and negative emotional sharing.

3. Data analysis

This study uses the questionnaire method to conduct empirical research. The questionnaire is divided into five parts: personal basic information, social network structure, emotional sharing behavior, emotional expression needs and impression management needs. The measurement of personal emotion is based on the Panas scale of David Watson et al. (1988)^[19]. The measurement of emotional expression needs is based on Kring et al. (1994)^[20]. The measurement of impression management needs is based on the scale of Rioux and Penner (2001)^[21]. In this study, 260 questionnaires were sent out and 223 were recovered. There are 208 valid questionnaires.

This study conducted regression analysis to analyze the influence of social network structure on emotional sharing behavior, and to verify whether psychological motivation plays a mediating role. A variable X affects a variable Y through another variable M, where M is the mediation variable. The regression model to be verified is:

$$Y = cX + e_1$$

$$M = aX + e_2$$

$$Y = c'X + bM + e_3$$

The regression analysis of this study is divided into the following three steps:

3.1 The influence of social network structure on emotional sharing

The positive emotional sharing (Y_1) and negative emotional sharing (Y_2) were used as the dependent variables, and the compactness (X_1) was used as the independent variable for regression analysis. The results showed that the degree of closeness had significant effect on both positive and negative emotional sharing ($c_1 = 0.943$, $c_2 = 0.424$, $p < 0.05$). R^2 were 0.193 and 0.033, respectively. So, H1 and H2 are supported.

Positive emotional sharing (Y_1) and negative emotional sharing (Y_2) were used as dependent variables and network size (X_2) as independent variables for regression analysis. The results showed that network scale had no significant effect on negative emotional sharing, but had significant effect on positive emotional sharing ($R^2 = 0.093$, $c_3 = 0.630$, $p < 0.05$). So, H3 is supported.

3.2 The influence of social network structure on psychological motivation

The regression analysis was carried out with emotion expression (M_1) as the dependent variable and compactness (X_1) as the independent variable. The results showed that the degree of closeness had a significant effect on emotional expression ($R^2 = 0.139$, $a_1 = 0.213$, $p < 0.05$).

The author takes impression management (M_2) as the dependent variable and network size (X_2) as the independent variable to carry out regression analysis. The results showed that the network scale had a significant effect on impression management ($R^2 = 0.119$, $a_2 = 0.151$, $p < 0.05$).

The author used positive emotional sharing (Y_1) as the dependent variable, tightness (X_1) and emotion expression (M_1) as the independent variables for regression analysis. The results showed that closeness and emotional expression had significant effect on positive emotional sharing ($R^2 = 0.247$, $c'_1 = 0.873$, $b_1 = 0.330$, $p < 0.05$). So, H5 is supported.

The author used Y_2 as the dependent variable, X_1 and M_1 as the independent variables for regression analysis. The results showed that closeness and emotional expression had significant effect on negative emotional sharing ($R^2 = 0.240$, $c'_2 = 0.276$, $b_2 = 0.697$, $p < 0.05$). So, H6 is supported.

The author used positive emotional sharing (Y_1) as the dependent variable, network size (X_2) and impression management (M_2) as the independent variables to carry out regression analysis. The results showed that network scale and impression management had significant influence on positive emotional sharing ($R^2 = 0.196$, $c'_3 = 0.630$, $b_3 = 0.333$, $p < 0.05$). So, H7 is supported.

Table 1. Regression analysis results

Regression equation	Coefficients	p	R^2
$Y_1=0.943X_1$	$c_1=0.943$	0.000*	0.193
$Y_2=0.424X_1$	$c_2=0.424$	0.008*	0.033
$Y_1=0.630X_2$	$c_3=0.093$	0.010*	0.093
$M_1=0.213X_1$	$a_1=0.213$	0.045*	0.139
$M_2=0.151X_2$	$a_2=0.151$	0.038*	0.119
$Y_1= 0.873X_1+ 0.330M_1$	$c'_1=0.873, b_1=0.330$	0.000*	0.247
$Y_2= 0.276X_1+ 0.697M_1$	$c'_2=0.276, b_2=0.697$	0.000*	0.240
$Y_1= 0.333X_2+1.930M_2$	$c'_3=0.630, b_3=0.333$	0.000*	0.196

Therefore, the hypothesis test results of this study are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Hypothesis test results

Hypothesis	Results
H1: The closeness of social networks has a positive impact on positive emotional sharing.	Supported
H2: The closeness of social networks has a positive effect on negative emotional sharing.	Supported
H3: The scale of social networks has a positive impact on positive emotional sharing.	Supported
H4: Network scale in social networks has a negative impact on negative emotional sharing.	Unsupported
H5: Emotional expression has a mediator effect on the relationship between closeness and positive emotional sharing.	Supported
H6: Emotional expression has a mediator effect on the relationship between closeness and negative emotional sharing.	Supported
H7: Impression management has a mediator effect on the relationship between network scale and positive emotional sharing.	Supported
H8: Impression management has a mediator effect on the relationship between network scale and negative emotional sharing.	Unsupported

4. Implications

Combined with the research results, this paper puts forward the following suggestions on how to conduct effective marketing through SNS:

(1) Enterprises should change the traditional marketing mode and make full use of SNS to release the latest product and service information to tap potential users. With the help of SNS, enterprises can

establish effective interactive channels and mechanisms between enterprises and customers to improve marketing effect. In addition, enterprises should release more positive information to strengthen positive publicity, which can drive customers' positive emotions and create a good corporate image.

(2) Enterprises should pay more attention to customer feedback and user evaluation. Through social network, enterprises can establish effective customer consultation and feedback mechanism. No matter whether the customer's feedback is positive or negative, the enterprise should specially arrange personnel to respond in time to show the importance of customers. This can improve customer satisfaction and loyalty.

(3) Enterprises can regard social network structure as the standard of user group division. Users with large network scale and close relationship should be focused on. Large scale users have more friends, and their information sharing has a wide range of communication. Moreover, they share more positive emotions and are more likely to share the positive experience of their own consumption. Users with high degree of closeness interact with their friends more frequently. They have high mutual trust and good product recommendation effect. Therefore, enterprises should deeply mine the characteristics and needs of these users. Enterprises should take measures to transform them into loyal customers and encourage them to actively share relevant information.

5. Conclusion

This paper mainly discusses the influence of social network structure on emotional sharing behavior, taking Wechat as the research object. The author studies the influence of Wechat users' social network scale and relationship closeness on positive and negative emotional sharing. The results show that the scale and closeness of Internet will cause different emotional sharing behaviors due to different psychological motivation. Combined with the existing relevant research theories and empirical analysis of this paper, this study draws the following conclusions:

First, the closeness of social networks has a significant positive impact on both positive and negative emotional sharing. For social purposes, users tend to share more personal emotions (both positive and negative) in the more intimate social networks. In large-scale social networks, users tend to share more positive emotions.

Second, emotional expression plays a mediator role on the relationship between closeness and emotional sharing. In order to enhance the close relationship with friends, people will share more positive and negative emotions in social networks.

Third, impression management plays a mediator role in the influence of network scale on emotional sharing. People need to maintain their good image through impression management and maintain the relationship with people they are not familiar with. Therefore, impression management will let people share more positive emotions in social networks.

Acknowledgement

This research was supported by the Guangzhou Social Science Foundation (NO. 2024GZGJ29) and Guangzhou Philosophy and Social Sciences Planning Project for the 14th Five-Year Plan Period: (No.: 2025GZGJ292).

References

- [1] Sener B, Akpınar E, Ataman M B. *Unveiling the dynamics of emotions in society through an analysis of online social network conversations[J]. Scientific Reports, 2023, 13(1):14997.*
- [2] He X. *Analysis on the online self-disclosure: from the perspective of WeChat Moments[J]. Journal of Zhenjiang College, 2016.*
- [3] Xin W J, Lai H, Chen X L. *Motivation and strategy of college students' image management in social networks: using WeChat Moments as an example[J]. Journal of Intelligence, 2016, 35(3):190-194.*
- [4] Han Y. *Exploring influence of extraversion on social network structure and relationship[D]. Journal of Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications, 2017.*
- [5] Guo J. *Analysis and mining research on influence propagation in social network[D]. Journal of Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications, 2014.*
- [6] Wu B, Wu Y F. *The formation and diffusion of public opinion based on the four types of*

- interpersonal relationships on social networking*[J]. *Media and Observation*, 2015, (6):29-31.
- [7] Liu H, Jayawardhena C, Osburg V-S, Yoganathan V, Cartwright S. *Social sharing of consumption emotion in electronic word of mouth (eWOM): A cross-media perspective*[J]. *Journal of Business Research*, 2021, 132:208-220.
- [8] López-López I, Ruiz-de-Maya S, Warlop L. *When sharing consumption emotions with strangers is more satisfying than sharing them with friends*[J]. *Journal of Service Research*, 2014, 17(4):475-488.
- [9] Bernard R, Pierre P, Stefano B, et al. *Long-lasting cognitive and social consequences of emotion: social sharing and rumination*[J]. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 1992, 3(1):225-258.
- [10] Long F F, Chen X P. *The motivation of using social networks has an impact on college students' emotion*[J]. *Psychology: Techniques and Applications*, 2016, (7):399-403.
- [11] Huang T L. *Mediation effect research of environment cue for self-disclosure goals and contents*[D]. Guangxi University, 2016.
- [12] Qin K, Zhang M, Liu N, Shi S, Li X. *Pain is more memorable than pleasure? Examining how social sharing of negative emotions constructs memorable dark tourism experiences*[J]. *Tourism Management*, 2026, 113:105289.
- [13] Huang X, Vitak J, Tausczik Y. *You don't have to know my past: how WeChat Moments users manage their evolving self-presentation*[C]. *Proceedings of the 2020 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 2020:1-13.
- [14] Liu Y Y. *The behavior of impression management on WeChat Moments*[J]. *News*, 2015, (3):58-61.
- [15] Chambers D. *Social Media and Personal Relationships: Online Intimacies and Networked Friendship*[M]. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- [16] Chen Y. *The research on the emotion expression of ordinary people in social media: based on the survey to colleges in Wuhan*[J]. *New Media and Society*, 2016, (1):215-229.
- [17] Kramer N C, Winter S. *Impression management 2.0: the relationship of self-esteem, extraversion, self-efficacy, and self-presentation within social networking sites*[J]. *Journal of Media Psychology*, 2008, 20(3):106-116.
- [18] Liam B, Ana C V. *The presentation of self in the online world: Goffman and the study of online identities*[J]. *Journal of Information Science*, 2013, 39(1):101-114.
- [19] Watson D, Clark L A, Tellegen A. *Development and validation of brief measures of positive and negative affect: the PANAS scales*[J]. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1988, 54(6):1063-1070.
- [20] Kring A M, Smith D A, Neale J M. *Individual differences in dispositional expressiveness: development and validation of the Emotional Expressivity Scale*[J]. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1994, 66(5):934-949.
- [21] Rioux S M, Penner L A. *The causes of organizational citizenship behavior: a motivational analysis*[J]. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 2001, 86(6):1306-1314.