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5.5. Limitations and future research

However, a number of important limitations need to be considered. Our research was conducted in only one university in China. Consequently, the quantity of the research sample may not be persuasive enough to illustrate the general rule of trust factors on social media sites. In addition, all of the interviews were conducted in Chinese, and the interview transcripts were translated into English during the process of data analysis, which may result in the research data being inaccurate. Further investigations will need to be conducted with various WeChat users of different age groups and occupations to test whether these results are context-specific and sample-specific. It would also be interesting to perform similar studies on other social media applications see the generalized role of trust factors in social media communication.

Moreover, the research analysis is merely based on qualitative interview data. Though we have looked through the official statistical report on WeChat, the amount of such archival material may not be adequate enough for the purposes of triangulation validation, despite our effort. For future research, we would like to develop a confirmatory survey study where we will sample a wider range of users on the factors that were identified in this study, using quantitative methodologies to help fully cement the observations of the qualitative findings as general patterns.

Lastly, even though the participants were all social media users, and embrace WeChat as a daily communication tool, future research can build on our study and conduct research from the overall perspectives that may provide more practical solutions that companies can use to improve. For example, we just investigated the feelings of individuals in group discussions. Group performances and outcomes were not something we looked at in this research. More comprehensive results may result from taking all these variables into account. In addition, the difference between online group discussions and face-to-face discussions is also an interesting topic to investigate. From comparison, the unique features of social media communication may become more salient.

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tion. Our research contributes to better understandings of the traffic light model proposed by Cheng & Macaulay (2014), and the cognitive mapping model proposed by Larsen et al. (2009). In particular, an onion cognitive mapping model helped provide a richer explanation of the cognitive results and the corresponding relationships. The results help us understand the general role of trust types and the uniqueness of social media communication. The model proposed in our research can be applied in other similar research contexts to exhibit theoretical results.

Moreover, this research has extended the research context of trust in online communication (Jarvenpaa et al., 2004; Trifunovic, Legendre, & Anastasiades, 2010). Unlike previous studies that often investigated trust in electronic commerce communication and online collaboration communication, we investigated general trust types and the corresponding antecedents in social media communication. Specifically, we focused on three communication modes. Through comparison, trust influencing mechanisms were also identified. This aspect also contributes to improving our understanding of the overall online communication behaviour and intention.

5.4. Implications for practice

In general, our proposed onion cognitive model can be prescriptive to users and designers with respect to how to intuitively utilize the trust influencing factors in three modes of online communication. The interplay of trust factors indicates that peer-to-peer interpersonal communication is not isolated from group communication and mass communication. Working towards one certain factor may facilitate other modes of social media communication. Specifically, there are a number of practical implications derived from this study for designers in general and social media users in particular. First, the trust factors offer clues for how to better social media communication and improve platform functionalities. For example, convenience is found to be a salient factor with respect to group communication, through calculative considerations. Convenience suggests the tool is cheap, easy to use, and quick in action. Accordingly, if social media operators put forward solutions to make group chats more effective and improve the ease of use, social media communication will be much more efficient and reach an even larger audience. This understanding is also beneficial for most social media sites, allowing them to incorporate various functionalities and to make the tools more convenient, as well as reducing the costs of accessing and using the platform.

For mass communication, like subscription accounts and service accounts, information quality has proved to be a very strong factor with respect to the improvement of the quantity of followers and the amount of people who read the articles. This communication mode provides a new form for online mass media. For most of the participants, valuable information was the primary motivation for following official accounts. Practitioners could take corresponding measures regarding information quality. For example, official account operators could recruit talented writers who are specialized in writing attractive articles and collect interesting information from various sources.

However, perceived privacy concerns are a major factor when it comes to interpersonal and group communication. Designers should persistently improve the quality of the infrastructure and provide more detailed and in-depth measures with respect to online privacy and security issues. Given that unfamiliar friends may lead to potential risks, the friend access permission mechanism should be further improved.

5.2. Key findings

This research is based on three types of WeChat communication: peer-to-peer interpersonal communication, communication in discussion group, and mass communication with official accounts. For each general communication mode, several interesting results were found.

tion for these findings may be the following. Unlike peer-to-peer communication, group communication involves large numbers of team members. They cluster together for the same purposes or because of a shared interest. Prior knowledge of a person's reputation is not that important compared with a suitable chatting topic. Furthermore, both interpersonal communication and group communication encompass frequent interactions of each other. This is also a reason why these two modes are alike.

Thirdly, our study further indicates that personality based trust is not a salient trust type influencing WeChat communication. Personality-based trust suggests the trust disposition. A person's competence is more important when deciding whether to cooperate or whether to become friends. Communication in WeChat is a casual chat that does not require personal traits like having some impressive ability. In other words, disposition based trust factor is just an external motivation that leads to the communication intention, and happens at the beginning of a relationship, intrinsic motivation like valuable high quality information is what really makes WeChat popular.

5.3. Contributions and theoretical implications

This paper makes several contributions to the existing literatures. First, prior studies have summarized several trust types and validated these types in various research settings – for example, trust in electronic commerce transactions (Gefen et al., 2003), initial trust formation in the online environment (Li et al., 2008), etc. This study corroborates the theoretical foundation of trust types in the context of social media communication. Through the explanation of three communication modes, a thorough picture of the cognitive relationships was proposed. This paper contributes to the understanding of interpersonal relationship, group communication and mass media broadcast in the context of social media communication.

Second, the research findings provide theoretical insights into the factors that influence trust in the context of social media communication. The cognition based trust factor, shared preferences, the calculative trust factor, information quality and convenience, knowledge based trust, familiarity, institution based trust, and privacy were frequently proposed as important trust factors in this research. The results are generally in line with previous studies regarding trust factors (Pentina et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2008; Wilson et al., 2006; Butler, Lee, Kuan, & Kim, 2012). Other trust factors, such as benevolence, ability, honesty (Cheng, Nolan, & Macaulay, 2013; Mayer et al., 1995) were not salient factors in social media communication.

Furthermore, while previous research mostly investigated trust factors through quantitative studies (Hayashi et al., 2013; Stoel & Muhanna, 2012; Cheng & Macaulay, 2014), our research analysis was conducted drawing on in-depth interview data. For the data analysis, we followed the iterative ways of conceptualization and categorization (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). Furthermore, the trust traffic light model and the trust cognitive onion model served to provide clear summaries of the research findings. According to the work of Hughes et al. (2010), the way of presenting results using red-yellow-green traffic light was advanced in the context of social media communica-

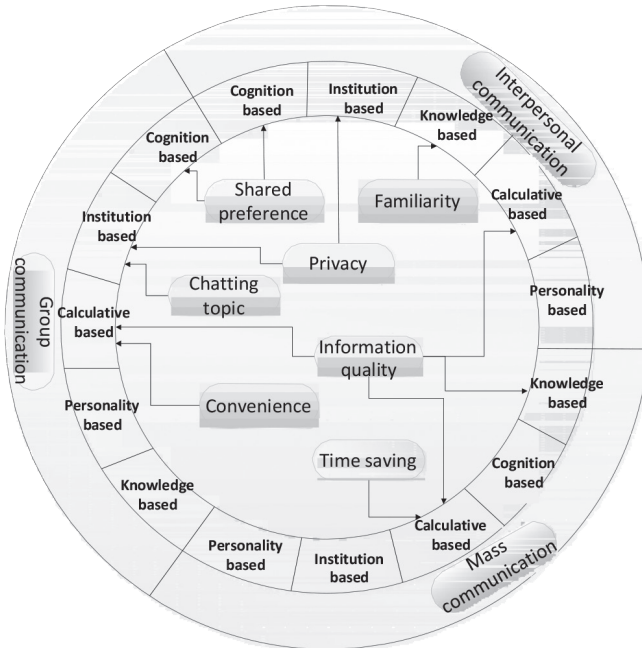


Fig. 5. Trust cognitive onion model in social media communication.

5. Discussion

5.1.Trust cognitive onion model

The cognitive mapping model was originally proposed by Eden (1988) to expand the use in social and behavioural context. Based on Eden's work, Larsen et al. (2009) adopted a causal model to the analysis of the role of Unified Modeling Language (UML). Larsen et al.'s model provides a vast array of data to the model without losing the complexity; the interrelationships in the data are also clarified through the model, especially the causal relationship of two constructs. It is a suitable model to illustrate cognitive causal relationship of trust factors in WeChat communication.

Unlike the traditional cognitive mapping model, our research involves three communication modes, so we came up with a new model to compare the relationship of trust factors based on an onion architecture. Onion architecture serves as circled layer architecture in software design. In our new cognitive mapping model, the outermost layer is the general communication modes in WeChat. Then we divided the next layer into several parts that contains five trust types for each communication mode, while the corresponding trust factors lay in the inner layer. Please see the trust cognitive onion model in Fig. 5 below.

Generally, we find seven salient trust factors in WeChat communication. They are: information quality, shared preferences, familiarity, privacy, chatting topic, convenience and time-saving. These factors represent the important keywords that were mentioned by the informants with high frequency. Some factors belong to one particular communication mode, while others influence many types of trust in various online communication modes. We will discuss our research findings in detail in the next section.

they just deliver advertisements. Uninteresting chatting topic makes me lose interest in group communication, let alone to trust.”(I113)

4.2.2. Convenience

Convenience was considered an indicator of system usability and contributed to the level of perceived ease of use. The participants, on the whole, demonstrated that WeChat is a very convenient tool for connecting individuals. Similar to peer-to-peer interpersonal communication, group communication also supported hold-to-talk voice messages that facilitate instant messages. In addition, in group discussions, anyone can easily deliver notifications to a wide array of people at the same time. It saves time and effort. As someone put it:

“Our class has established a discussion group, monitor can easily inform us of the news in school. What’s more, WeChat group discussion can even help hold an online meeting. In our electronic class, our teacher encourages us to discuss cases through WeChat after class. It’s a successful teaching practice in information supported collaborative learning. WeChat is really a convenient chat tool. I’m interested in the instant information from discussion group and I benefit a lot from group communication through WeChat.”(I29)

4.3. Mass communication

4.3.1. Information quality

Information quality is a shared important trust factor with respect to each mode of WeChat communication. While in the first two forms of peer-to-peer communication and group communication, the participants are exchanging ideas with each other, everyone is the text messenger as well as information receiver. But within official accounts communication, individuals are just the receivers. The official accounts serve as the mass media, which pushes notifications and valuable information to the followers. In this sense, information quality turns out to be more important in the context of this communication mode. Other participants echoed this sentiment; a senior student majoring in economics said:

“I am in the process of preparing for the entrance examination of graduate. Some official accounts usually put valuable information related to the exam, I think it’s useful to me. I acquire a lot through communication with official accounts, information in high quality serves as benefit to me and may transferred into utility value. I’m interested in WeChat because of these official accounts.”(I34)

4.3.2. Time saving

For calculative based trust, the perceived costs and benefits are thought by the individuals as salient determinants of whether to trust. In mass media communication with official accounts, the time spent searching for useful information is considered to be a measurement that influences trust. The official accounts play the role of writing and finding interesting theme related articles. For the receivers – i.e. ordinary WeChat users –it is up to them whether to read the notifications, on their own time and according to their interests. So it is the time-saving that improves the level of trust in mass communication. According to one participant:

“I just read the messages in pieces of time that requires little effort and energy for me. No matter traditional media or new media like WeChat, we all should spare some time to find the one with most valuable information to us. But reading articles online certainly saves my time because it’s easy to find the topic I want through information technology.” (I85)

the high quality information they give to me.” (I19)

“I add a lot of the specialists in my friend list who always broaden my insights remain within doors. Just communicating these valuable friends in WeChat, we can share insights with each other. I enjoy chatting through WeChat!”(I103)

4.1.4. Shared preferences

According to social identity theory and social response theory (Festinger, 1954; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), similar attitude, personality traits, shared interest and perception about life lead to categorizing people into social “in-groups”. Individuals in the same group tend to trust more and communicate more in turn. Some studies about trust are based on these theories, and proposed research models regarding to interest and similarity (Pentina et al., 2013; Park & Lee, 2014). While making a decision to trust, social media users will take shared preference and similarity into accounts.

People tend to communicate with similar individuals. Shared preferences in interpersonal relationships indicate a high level of similarity. When shared preferences are not present, individuals’ interrelate less. Like communicating with familiar friends, people with shared preferences show a higher tendency to communicate together. Shared topics and similar interests are easily found in order to maintain mutual relationships and operate to improve mutual trust. Approximately half of those interviewed commented on this point of view. As one participant reported:

“Personally speaking, I prefer communicate with similar guys. But sometimes I am exposed to all sorts of people with difference values and preferences. Compared with these two kinds of people, it’s no wonder I will choose the first one. WeChat is just a communication tool, no matter in what forms of communication, I think we all embrace the one with same value with us.” (I42)

4.2. Group communication

With respect to group communication, the most frequently mentioned trust factors were perceived privacy concerns, chatting topic, information quality, convenience, and shared preferences. Other factors were mentioned at a lower frequency rate. Consequently, we didn’t regard them as generalized factors in this research setting. Among the most salient five trust factors, as three of them were in line with the result seen with respect to interpersonal communication, we will not discuss them in detail in this section as they mean the same in the context of these two communication modes.

4.2.1. Chatting topic

The chatting topic should cater to the theme of the group discussion when a group of people get together and talk. The chatting topic is an indicator of the communication appropriateness, and in the end contributes to the overall communication quality that influences mutual relationships. Positive topics that bring forward knowledge and inspire the group members were generally accepted by the participants, while frequent small talk like gossip may influence the trust level and lower the interest and the group members’ participation in the group communication. One participant commented:

“Nowadays, WeChat discussion group has many branches. When I was an internship, I was asked to join in a group communication to report daily works. We communicate nothing except for work in the discussion group. Besides, there are also discussion group specialized in a certain area, like an online club for dance party, book recommendation, technical sharing, etc. Sometimes I’m bothered because the timely message isn’t related to the theme of the group,

WeChat supports various ways to add friends, telephone numbers, Tencent QQ numbers (widely used instant messaging tool). WeChat numbers are all linked to one's WeChat account. So WeChat is a commonly used platform to connect with known friends. In addition, strangers can also become friends through searching the associated accounts and other additional functionalities. Accordingly, based on previous good experience with other individuals, familiarity emerges. Familiarity contributes to favourable ideas about future communication experience of the two sides. On the other side, being unfamiliar with the person they are communicating with may give rise to a perceived risk, to some degree. As some interviewees put it:

"I prefer to communicate with people I already know. I'm familiar with them and we're used to each other's chatting style. It's a pleasant experience communicating with familiar guys. Besides, people I am familiar with must have a lot in common with me, we have shared interest, the same growth environment. I enjoy communicating with these guys in WeChat." (I87)

"Sometimes I just add the guy at first glimpse, I don't remember his appearance, let alone the characteristics. Some friends are even net friend. I think communicate with some unknown people makes me feel embarrassed. I felt uncomfortable and thought topic bend over backwards. I didn't know the personality of the one I was talking with, I felt a potential risk, and feared the leakage of my personal information." (I31)

4.1.2. Perceived privacy concerns

In the context of social media communication privacy concerns are commonly perceived by online users. The relationships between perceived privacy concerns and trust have been proposed in online settings in past research (Fogel & Nehmad, 2009). The communication functionality entails that users transfer all kinds of information. Users can send their immediate location, a friend's name card, images, and videos through the WeChat communication interface. Concerns about privacy may at times inhibit smooth WeChat interactions. Talking about this issue an interviewee said:

"I think my personal information may be revealed to unknown sources that may result in identity theft. I'm worried about the leakage of my chat records, several months ago, my mom booked a ticket for me, and send me the electronic receipt through WeChat, harassing calls bothered me, someone knew all the information of my ticket, and pretended to blackmail."

4.1.3. Information quality

Information quality has been argued to relate to trust in supply chain management (Li & Lin, 2006) and electronic data exchanges (Nicolaou, Ibrahim, & Van Heck, 2013). In our research on social media communication, the interview data highlights the importance of information quality. The participants were all willing to receive valuable information from others. Annoying information like advertisement and false news typically weaken the motivation to continue communicating, thus influences the level of trust. High value information was commonly regarded as a determinant perceived benefit; some of the information acquired from others through WeChat communication can be immediately put into practical use. Participant described their feelings about receiving benefits through high value information:

"I very like securities in this industry, oneself also fry for years since I was a freshmen. I frequently communicate with friends who also investing in stocks. They always inform me of valuable information. I trust them and trust

Table 1
Abbreviation table of trust factors (Constructs).

Abbreviations	Constructs	Abbreviations	Constructs	Abbreviations	Constructs
PR	Privacyconcerns	PP	Perceived pleasure	IQ	Information quality
SA	Safety	CO	Convenience	MU	Multifunction
CT	Chatting topic	SP	Sharedpreference	PA	Perceived ability
ET	Time saving	CG	Common goals	CP	Cheap
FR	Friendship	FA	Familiarity	PI	Peer influence

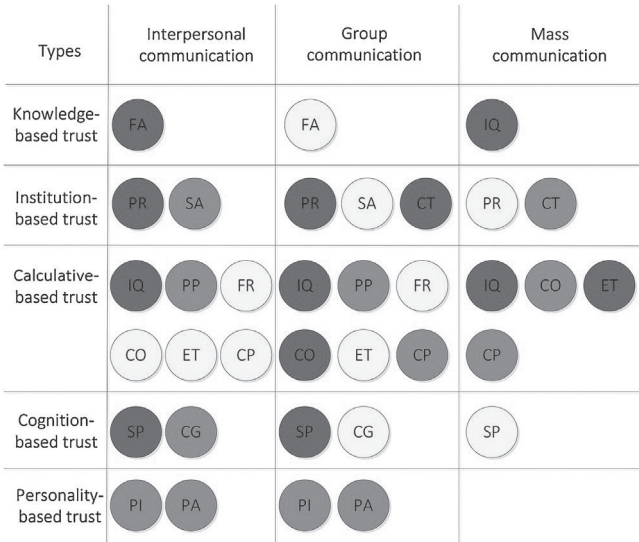


Fig. 4. Trust traffic light model of trust factors.

4. Results

In this section, we describe the data analysis results with respect to trust factors that drive or inhibit social media communication in term of three modes of communication. For each communication mode, the most frequently mentioned trust factors are discussed below. We only present the important factors (red keywords) in this section, with respect to each communication form.

4.1. Interpersonal communication

Within peer-to-peer interpersonal communication, the research findings highlight four salient trust factors: familiarity, perceived privacy concerns, information quality and shared preference. In terms of the five trust types, each trust factor has various focuses. Other keywords – friendship, perceived pleasure, cheap, peer influence, etc. – did not significantly influence trust in WeChat communication; hence, they are not discussed in this section.

4.1.1.Familiarity

In electronic environment, consumers’ familiarity was defined as the degree of acquaintance with the other entity (Kim et al., 2008). Familiarity leads to an understanding of an entity’s current situation while trust deals with beliefs on an entity’s future actions (Gefen et al., 2003).

ners were used to identify and cluster the reoccurring keywords of each trust factor. When the iterative analysis results showed the incremental learning to be minimal, we considered it a sign that we had reached the saturation point and ended up recruiting more interviewees. So, 115 participants were enough to reach comprehensive results in terms of sampling principle. Moreover, in order to make the coding process persuasive, two co-authors analysed the interview transcripts separately.

For each piece of interview data, we coded the transcripts with uniformed sequential numbers. The interviewee ID ranges from I1 to I115.

Nvivo assisted in organizing and mining the textual data. Once the data had been coded by two authors we adopted the confusion matrix proposed by Marques and McCall (2005) to ensure inter-rater reliability. In the matrix, a represents the number of keywords both authors agree about; d is the number both authors disagree about; and b represents the number of keywords where second author agrees but the first author disagrees; while c represent the number of keywords with which the first author agrees but the second author disagrees. We calculated the accuracy rate (AC). $AC = (a + d) / (a + b + c + d)$. The final result is 82.7%. The inter-rater reliability of this research is acceptable (Marques & McCall; 2005). The authors discussed the discrepancies and came to consensus. Finally; to ensure construct validity; we compared our results with the official descriptive analysis regarding to user's behaviour; luckily; many of our findings are in line with the WeChat official statistics.

3.4. Data analysis

Based on the coding principle and our research questions, we first refined the keywords from the interview data. There were hundreds of initial concepts; some of the keywords overlap to some extent. Keywords that stand for the same meanings were clustered together and a corresponding construct was formed (Neuman, 2005). For example, constructs like junk information, useful information, annoying advertisements, defined in the first round, were merged into the construct information quality. Fig. 3 presents some examples of the process of conceptualization and categorization with respect to peer-to-peer interpersonal communication.

In order to have an intuitive understanding of these constructs, we used a trust traffic light model to compare the importance of these factors (Cheng & Macaulay, 2014; Hughes et al., 2010). In the trust traffic light model, red represents keywords with high frequency, yellow stands for the medium frequency ones, and green represents the keywords with low frequency. Among 115 interview transcripts, the highest possible frequency for a particular keyword is 115. That is to say, we were not over counting the frequency of keywords in each communication mode of a single interviewee. Table 1 below shows the abbreviations of each trust factor for the convenience of in-depth analysis.

In this trust traffic light model (Fig. 4), there are four columns. The last three columns represent the three communication modes respectively. As our interview protocols are in line with the classification of the five trust types, we analysed the interview data in terms of each trust type. There are many closed boxes in the figure below. In the figure, each box has several balls on behalf of the corresponding trust factors. For example, in row 2, column 2, FA stands for familiarity; the red background colour means this factor is related to knowledge-based trust, which is frequently proposed by informants under the circumstance of interpersonal communication.

3.2.Data collection

In this research, we included 115 undergraduate students, with a balanced ratio of men to women, from a Chinese university as our research sample. Theoretical sampling was used to recruit participants. Financial feedbacks were given for every participant. The participants shared diverse professions and had different attitudes toward information technology. The ages ranged from 19 to 25. However, all the participants used WeChat as a way of communication on a daily basis. WeChat discussion groups and official accounts were also frequently used by these students. Considering that most youngsters often regard their social network as an essential part of their social life and school-related activities, the student sample was relatively appropriate for our research about trust in WeChat online communication.

Large-scale semi-structured interviews were conducted in April, 2013 by a team of four trained graduate students. Each interview lasted over 20 min. These interviews were tape-recorded and fully transcribed into text form soon afterwards.

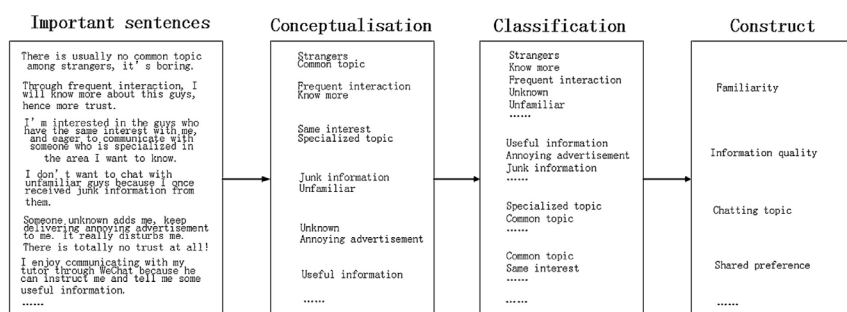


Fig. 3. Examples of conceptualization and categorization.

All the participants were given additional awarded marks for taking part. With respect to the interview, the interviewer was trained professionally to avoid yes/no and leading questions, and personal charisma was also required to keep interviewees comfortable enough to state their views freely and to express what was on their minds. All interviews were successful in terms of the perceived effort that participants made to answer our questions thoughtfully. Thus, a total of 115 interviews were completed and included in the analysis.

Before the formal interview every participant introduced himself or herself. Three types of WeChat communication were generally used by those students. For every single question, the participants were encouraged to talk about their personal opinions from three aspects of WeChat communication, relatively are interpersonal communication, group communication, and mass communication. The interview protocol was mainly based on the five types of trust discussed in the section two. At the end of each interview, the students were asked to offer general views about trust in WeChat communication, together with the merits and problems of WeChat communication.

3.3. Measurements

A coding system was created to categorize the answers of the different interviewees according to each interview question, based on three aspects of WeChat communication. Taking a number of rounds of analysis, iterative man-

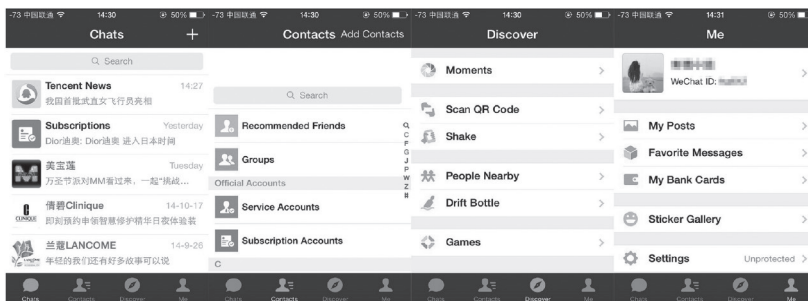


Fig. 1. The screenshot of WeChat.

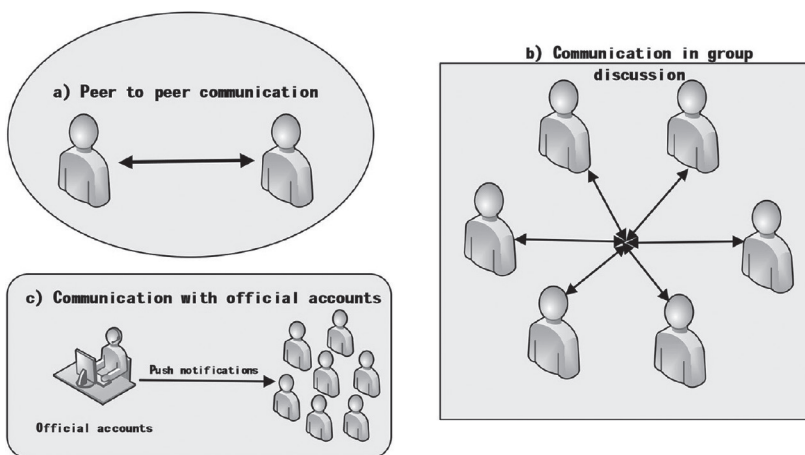


Fig. 2. Three types of WeChat communication.

Fig. 2 shows three major types of WeChat communication. a) Interpersonal communication is a relatively private type of communication, which includes two individuals, just like the traditional mobile messaging service. b) Group communication occurs when a group of people chat together because of a joint topic or shared interests. c) Official accounts are often managed by an organization and are divided into two parts: service accounts and subscription accounts. These official accounts regularly push notifications and information to every single user who follows them. In addition, for some official accounts, especially service accounts, users can interact with official platforms by writing comments to the notifications.

The reasons we chose WeChat are as followed. Firstly, social plug-ins like Shake, Drift Bottle entail users to interact with unknown friends that finally lead to security issues, trust investigations helps deal with the security issues. Secondly, WeChat support three forms of communication that correspond to the general classification of communication mode. Thirdly, compared with Facebook and Weibo, WeChat support daily casual communication, business cooperation communication, mass media broadcast communication and mobile commerce communication, the multi-function of WeChat communication make it an interesting case in investigate.

theme (McWilliam, 2012) are all determinants in this sense. Another category, structural institution based trust generally involves transference trust and self-perception basing. The antecedents of this kind of trust include the perceived importance of a positive referral, perceived security, perceived privacy concerns (Pentina, Zhang, & Basmanova, 2013), system reliability, etc. Last but not least, knowledge based trust exists when the two parties are familiar with each other; it is also called experience based trust (Kim et al., 2008). Through disclosed ability, personal trait and habit based on familiarity, individual will have an intuitive understanding of others (Gulati & Sytch, 2008). And this intuitive understanding can be a source of trust or distrust. So familiarity is an antecedent of trust in this respect (Komiak & Benbasat, 2006).

3. Case introduction and data collection

3.1. Overview of WeChat

We conducted a qualitative study of WeChat communications. Qualitative research has long been used in analyzing typical cases on the basis of personal feelings and exploring possible solution spaces of problems. It frequently used in the context of the case study approach (Hayashi et al., 2013; Cheng & Macaulay, 2014). Our research questions (“What are the influencing trust factors in Wechat communication” and “How could trust factors affect different types of WeChat communications”) are suitable for qualitative research (Yin, 2003). Moreover, although many studies have been published on trust antecedents, the research context is different in our research, since three different communication modes are part of our context. The existing trust constructs may not be suitable to fully describe our research context. Thus we decided to perform a qualitative investigation on trust and WeChat. Among numerous and complicated social media sites, WeChat is one of the most valuable Internet products in China and is becoming a widely used mobile application in Chinese daily life (Lien & Cao, 2014). Similar to WhatsApp and Line, WeChat is an instant mobile messaging software, launched by Tencent on the 21st of January 2011, through which hold-to-talk voice messages, texts, videos, and photos can be sent freely at no cost (Zhou & Wang, 2014). Users can add unknown friends and acquaintances based on social plug-ins like Shake, Drift Bottle and PeopleNearby. In only four years, WeChat realized a momentous leap and gained 900 million registered users, among which 260 million are outside China. According to a survey, around 25% of the users open WeChat over 30 times per day; the percentage of the users who use WeChat over 10 times per day is 55.2% (I Research, 2016).

As a popular social media platform, WeChat supports various types of online communication. Included below is a set of screenshots of WeChat (Fig. 1). The first picture shows the chat lists, where users can easily get informed about their recent communication history. The second picture shows the contact lists of individuals, groups, and official accounts. The third screen shows additional functions of WeChat apart from communication. The final screen shows the personal information and related settings about WeChat.

Up to now, apart from basic peer-to-peer interpersonal online communication, WeChat also supports group communication, and message broadcast of mass communication. Official account is mass communication form based on WeChat. Official accounts in WeChat include service accounts and subscription accounts.

2.3. Types and the antecedents of trust

Mayer et al. (1995) defined trust as “a willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that party.” In simple terms, trust reflects an uncertainty and an expectation among various parties. As McKnight and Chervany (1996) put it, trust can be displayed in a variety of forms and have a different focus under different circumstances.

Generally speaking, there are five types of trust: knowledge based trust, institution based trust, calculative based trust, cognition based trust, and personality based trust (Gefen et al., 2003; McKnight, Cummings, & Chervany, 1998; Kim, Ferrin, & Rao, 2008).

Cognition based trust and personality based trust stand out in the initial trust formation stage. Cognition based trust is also known as similarity based trust. For cognition based trust, reputation is a crucial determinant of trust propensity (Xu, 2014). Second-hand experience related to an individual's ability, personal characteristics, and credibility all contribute to a person's reputation (Zinko, Ferris, Humphrey, Meyer, & Aime, 2012). In addition, subcomponents of cognitive based trust also include unit grouping and stereotyping (McNab, Basoglu, Sarker, & Yu, 2012). People with shared values, the same personal characteristics, and common goals are generally considered to be part of the same group, which enables the members to easily form trusting bonds with the others (Ziegler & Golbeck, 2007). Stereotyping can be applied to gender, occupation, physical appearance, etc.

Personality based trust implies the general propensity to trust, and is also called basic trust and dispositional trust. Generally, personality based trust is independent in any context (Gefen et al., 2003). The disposition to trust is based on an individual's faith in humanity and having trusting stance, and is the baseline from which trust or distrust can be built (Xu et al., 2012). This tendency is based on the result of on-going and lifelong experiences and process of socialization. Personality types, cultural difference and general hearsay are all the antecedents of personality based trust (Welter & Kautonen, 2005).

Calculative based trust relies on a logical and rational calculation of the likely behaviour of another party. It places the emphasis on rational thinking, the trustor calculates the costs and benefits associated with trusting the trustee, so the perceived benefits, costs and effort are the antecedents of calculative based trust – such as valuable information, convenience, perceived friendship (Chang et al., 2013; Wilson, Straus, & McEvily, 2006; Henderson & Gilding, 2004). Calculative based trust is derived from the concept of deterrence based trust (Doney, Cannon, & Mullen, 1998), which is related to the credible threat or coercive power that can influence others, and normally happens in relationships between superiors and subordinates.

Institution trust, also called impersonal trust or system trust, can be divided into two parts: situational normality and structural assurances (Pavlou, 2002). Both of the components can be explained via the organization level and the technical level. In cases where it is situational, trust is related to a certain context and is situation-specific (Dibben, Morris, & Lean, 2000). Situational trust is established through social or organizational structures, not through individuals or personal traits (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). In different settings trust behaves differently, so the atmosphere, purpose, topic, and

2.2.Communication in social media

In a satisfying social media communication, users are motivated to join social media platforms, keep strong ties with friends and strengthen their relationships with new acquaintances (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007), and search for peer identification and a group sense of belongings in an online community (O'Leary, Wilson, & Metiu, 2014). Considering the fact that social media communication is a relatively new context for social interaction that is in need of research, we aim to investigate social media from the perspective of social media communication.

According to literature, there are three modes of communication: interpersonal communication (Greenberg, 1964), group communication (Chockler, Keidar, & Vitenberg, 2001) and mass communication (Griffin & McClish, 2011).

The first mode is interpersonal communication, which happens between two separate individuals when information is transmitted through point-to-point interaction (Hewes, 2013). Human sociality suggests that individuals have the desire to self-disclosure, to acquire peer identification (Hollenbaugh & Ferris, 2014). Interpersonal communication provides the chance for individuals to meet these needs. What is more, sociological scholars have suggested that the relationships between people can be divided into those that are based on strong connections and those that are based on weak connections. Frequent online interpersonal communication transforms weak connections into strong connections (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011).

The second mode is group communication. Group communication on social media sites refers to the communication behaviour of groups. It combines common goals and the willingness to collaborate together (Butler, 2001). Group consciousness develops in the process of information transmission and interaction, which leads to a sense of belongings to the group (Wirtz, den Ambtman, & Bloemer, 2013). Group norms regulate the behaviour of the group members, and in turn lead to a similarity of the individuals in the same group (Biron & Bamberger, 2012). In group communication, the perceived communication quality (Burgoon et al., 2002), communication richness (Ngwenyama & Lee, 1997), communication openness (Zimbardo, Haney, Banks, & Jaffe, 1973), and communication appropriateness (Garner, 2012) are all determinants of effective group communication.

With respect to the third mode, social media sites provide opportunities for mass communication (Zolkepli & Kamarulzaman, 2015). Through redefining human relationships, Internet based mass communication focuses more on media relationship instead of organizational interaction. An increasing number of social media users regard themselves as being receivers of mass communication (Haridakis & Hanson, 2009). Compared with traditional interpersonal peer-to-peer communication, mass communication transmits more information and reaches a larger audience at the same time (Lingel & Naaman, 2012). Receiving information from social media sites is time-saving and effortless.

Compared with other computer mediated communication, social media sites normally support all those three communication modes simultaneously. No matter in what kinds of communication modes, social media communication contributes to the improvement of social relationships. Trust is an indicator of the relationships and a high level of trust can facilitate online communication. So, a detailed understanding of trust is needed.

vides the background for this study, including a summary of the relevant studies that have been done on this topic. Then we present our research method and data collection approach. Next, we present and discuss the results of our study. We conclude this paper with a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of our findings, the study's limitations, and directions for future research.

2. Research background

2.1. Trust and communication in online communities

Trust in online communities serves as a moderator that facilitates mutual communication and further leads to improved relationships (Jarvenpaa, Shaw, & Staples, 2004; Shankar et al., 2002). In current studies, numerous researchers have attempted to investigate trust in various virtual communities. Generally speaking, studies have focused on three types of online communication.

The majority of studies are about trust in electronic commerce (E-commerce) transactions (Lim, Tan, Cyr, Pan, & Xiao, 2012), such as how to build customer trust when communicating with consumers (Gefen, Karahanna, & Straub, 2003; Kim & Park, 2013; Pavlou, 2002), and how to maintain relationships of trust through online communication (Daim, Ha, & Reutiman, 2012; Kasper-Fuehrer & Ashkanasy, 2001). Generally, communications in e-commerce site consist of two parties, the buyer and the seller. The sellers provide e-service to the buyers through online communication, the role of communication is to enable smooth online transaction, and thus utilitarian value was required in e-commerce communication. Although interpersonal trust among the two parties was widely investigated (Palvia, 2009; Gefen et al., 2003), the emphasis is more about business levels that help with marketing and customer retention issues.

Another type related to online communication occurs in the context of virtual collaboration. With the emergence of virtual collaboration, Jarvenpaa and Leidner (1998) looked at the relationship between communication and interpersonal trust in global virtual teams, and proposed that communication behaviours facilitate trust early on, communication behaviours maintain trust later on, and member actions facilitate trust later on. Based on the theory of virtual teams presented by Jarvenpaa et al. (1998), Walther and Bunz (2005) came up with six communication rules for virtual groups in computer mediated communication (Ou, Pavlou, & Davison, 2014); the results of rule measurements reveal correlations between trust and communication, and indicate that the problems virtual teams face could be ameliorated through communication rules.

However, trust is also an essential element of social media sites (Kim & Ahmad, 2013). Based on earlier studies, Trifunovic, Legendre, and Anastasiades, 2010 proposed that trust formation in social networks can be studied from the social context, in which friendship relies on explicit trust whereas contact relies on implicit trust, but in this study the emphasis is on social trust. What is more, studies regarding trust in social media isolate the relationship between trust and communication, ignoring the fact that a detailed understanding of trust contributes to smooth communication on social media platforms. Therefore, we aim to highlight the interrelationship of trust and communication, and to further investigate the facets that influence trust and lead to pleasant communication.

the participatory nature of social media entails that users get to know more acquaintances and get closer to the friends they already had through online interactions (Dewan & Ramaprasad, 2014). Valuable information can spread rapidly through social media platforms, allowing users to expand and sustain their social networks. Moreover, the popularity of social media communication can be seen as viral dissemination of information, social media can reach more popularity compared with traditional media (Hunt, Atkin, & Krishnan, 2012; Wang, Yu, & Wei, 2012).

The main function of a social media platform is to develop and maintain mutual relationships through effective online communication. Online communication in social media may be affected by a variety of social factors impacting the development of mutual relationships (Pinjani & Palvia, 2013). For example, in online communication, the facial expressions of each person may be indiscernible and people may become distracted by other issues when communicating. A key indicator of human interactions is trust. Regardless of the problems with virtual communication, people still need to use it, and in order for their communication to be useful, they need to establish minimum levels of trust (Chien, Chen, & Wu, 2013). In addition, many of the traditional ways through which people establish bonds through physical contact and socializing are absent or at best limited in virtual interactions (Li, Hess, & Valacich, 2008). Trust may prevent the geographical distances of individuals from becoming psychological distances (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1998). Thus, building trust is of critical importance. For this reason we aim to focus on trust in our research on social media communication.

Previous studies have found that trust antecedents and factors vary based on the type of communication community (Cheng, Yin, Azadegan, & Kolfshoten, 2016; Chang, Cheung, & Tang, 2013; Gefen & Pavlou, 2012). Compared with traditional computer mediated communication, social media communication focused on the social ties and relationships, thus trust building is slightly different with other contexts (Westerman, Spence, & Van Der Heide, 2014; Kimmel & Kitchen, 2014). Consequently, current research needs to be further refined. Moreover, current scientific knowledge on trust is largely based on empirical studies that investigate trust from an organizational and team perspective (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Nevertheless, trust is scarcely investigated from the individual perspective. Individual trust is the representation of conflicting priorities of an individual (Cheng & Macaulay, 2014). Organizational trust factors may not be suitable in the context of social media communication, which is composed of interpersonal interactions. Besides, despite the importance of trust in social media communication, there is little research on the cognitive mechanisms that influence trust. What factors eventually influence trust and in what way this influence unfolds is largely unknown. In view of these gaps, this paper contributes to the literature on trust factors in the online community (Kim & Ahmad, 2013; Luo, Li, Zhang, & Shim, 2010), and aims to explore trust influencing factors in social media social media communication. Our research questions are as follows:

RQ1: What are the individual trust influencing factors in social media communication?

RQ2: How could trust factors affect communications among various communication modes on social media sites?

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The next section pro-

Understanding trust influencing factors in social media communication: A qualitative study

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abstract

Based on five types of trust, this research explores trust influencing factors in peer-to-peer interpersonal communication, group communication and mass communication. Previous research has mainly focused on trust and the corresponding antecedents in electronic commerce communication and online collaboration. This study extends the literature on trust influencing factors in social media communication. A trust traffic light model is used to illustrate the importance of keywords, drawn from interviews with 115 participants who use WeChat frequently. Salient trust factors were found and further elaborated through qualitative analysis. Furthermore, we developed a trust cognitive onion model to illustrate the interactions of trust factors.

Keywords

Trust factors, WeChat, Social media, Communication, Cognitive mapping

1. Introduction

Virtual communication has become universal due to the wide use of social media allowing cyber citizens more freedom to share their opinions (Sarker, Ahuja, Sarker, & Kirkeby, 2011). Social media use has been defined as a particular consumption of digital media that provides a mechanism for users to connect, communicate, and interact with each other through social networking sites and instant messages (Correa, Hinsley, & De Zuniga, 2010). Many social media sites are primarily designed to facilitate communication among individuals and groups – for example, twitter, LinkedIn, Microblogs, WhatsApp, Line and WeChat, etc.

Compared with regular online communication – such as computer mediated communication (Jonassen, Davidson, Collins, Campbell, & Haag, 1995) –

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