



Behavioral Characteristics and Driving Factors of Social Media Users' Impression Management: A Case Study of the "Curated" WeChat Moments

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Abstract. In today's era when social media platforms are highly prevalent, it has become a common phenomenon for users to engage in self-presentation through carefully selected and edited images along with meticulously crafted captions. While users engage in idealized self-presentation by packaging themselves, it brings psychological anxiety or identity anxiety to many users. This, in turn, prompts a large number of users to develop a herd mentality, exaggerate the packaging of their personal images, and even become lost in the world of false packaging. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the behavioral characteristics and driving factors of impression management among social media users through the phenomenon of "curated" WeChat Moments, so as to better guide users to present themselves in a healthy manner. This research is based on the theory of "Impression Management" and conducts an empirical study through questionnaire surveys, collecting data for analysis. Research shows that social media users manage their impressions by posting refined content on social platforms. Their willingness to post such content is influenced by three factors: curation level, self-disclosure motivation, and anticipated audience approval. In this behavioral pattern, users generally demonstrate a willingness to invest time and effort in curating a polished social media presence. They are inclined, mostly, to a style of presentation which is associated with low levels of editing and refinement- after the image has been edited, they are still in close contact with objective reality.

Keywords: Social Media, Impression Management, "Curated" WeChat Moments.

1 Introduction

Social media, as a platform for linking social relationships, has gradually become the "stage" where users conduct impression management. WeChat is one of the most influential social software platforms in China, with a huge user base. WeChat Moments constitutes a virtual community built upon social networks, providing users with designated spaces for self-presentation and social interaction [1].

In recent years, numerous users have cultivated meticulously curated social media profiles by sharing carefully selected images and thoughtfully crafted captions, thereby

constructing an idealized self-image for impression management. This practice involves showcasing their most polished and attractive aspects to friends, with the expectation of receiving positive feedback such as likes, affirming comments, and praise. Most researchers tend to agree that "curated" WeChat Moments can be identified as the active orchestration, editing, and refinements of shared content, as well as the process of intentional and purposeful choice of captions to be shared by the user. Even if this idealized self-image deviates significantly from reality, people still strive to shape a perfect self-image to present to others. Creation of a "curated" moment is a tactical application of the more sophisticated technologies to carefully pack even the most basic daily life and social events so as to create an idealized self-portrait [2].

American sociologist Erving Goffman introduced the concept of dramaturgical theory in his seminal work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* [3]. According to him, every individual assumes the role of an actor in daily life, wherein each performer is required to enact their respective roles on a designated stage. These performers strategically present curated aspects of themselves to guide audience perceptions, endeavoring to convince observers that their manifested personas are authentic and innate [3]. While the actors' performances on stage may be compelling, they often diverge substantially from reality. Leaving the stage, the front stage, and returning to the backstage, it is there that the true self is revealed. However, actors relish the attention and feedback from the audience towards their performances [4]. Thus, on the stage of WeChat Moments, users—as performers—are inclined to present their unpolished and even challenging "Roughcast Life" as exquisitely "Curated Moments" to their friends, who serve as the audience [5].

In his book, Goffman mentioned that "in the interaction where an individual presents the outcome of some activity to others, he usually only shows the final product to them, and the audience will evaluate him based on this already completed, flawless and carefully packaged product." [3]. From this, it can be seen that "curated" WeChat Moments is no longer merely a self-portrayal presented to all viewers, but rather a purposeful effort to guide a specific and ideal audience to identify with the particular image the user has crafted for different scenarios, thereby gaining their approval and assisting the user in building and maintaining interpersonal relationships in the virtual social sphere.

It is precisely for this reason that users present an idealized self to their audience through a meticulously curated WeChat Moments, and they expect the audience to evaluate them based on the favorable personal image they have crafted in this "curated" WeChat Moments space. This paper is aimed at examining the phenomenon of "curated" WeChat Moments. It is through this phenomenon that the ultimate research should examine the behavioral characteristics and driving factors of impression management by the social media users. Findings are expected to lead users to healthier ways of self-presentation, thus ensuring that they do not overpackage or follow the trends blindly and that they do not lose their authenticity in a world that has created fictional identities online. This paper focuses on three aspects, including curation level, self-disclosure motivation, and anticipated audience approval. In order to fulfill the research goals, the questionnaire survey technique was used to gather primary data, and the literature analysis technique was used to read and evaluate pertinent materials and journals. The advantage of this approach lies in its ability to effectively analyze existing

research findings and enhance the reliability of the current study by addressing previous research limitations and recommendations, thereby facilitating the progression of the research.

2 Research Hypotheses and Research Model

2.1 Research Hypotheses

Curation Level. The majority of current literature predominantly focuses on WeChat Moments, yet there exists neither a precise definition nor in-depth research regarding "curated" WeChat Moments. Furthermore, there is a lack of established criteria for determining the extent of curation. The literature on "curated" WeChat Moments primarily conducts a comparative analysis with the concept of "Roughcast Life." [6]. Fewer studies have conducted in-depth analysis on the phenomenon of "curated" WeChat Moments. Therefore, this research measures the curation level of WeChat Moments from two aspects: effort investment and degree of deviation from actual situation. The following hypotheses are made:

H1a: The energy users consumed in posting a "curated" WeChat Moments is positively correlated with their willingness to publish content.

H1b: The degree of deviation from actual situation of users posting "curated" WeChat Moments is positively correlated with their willingness to publish content.

Self-Disclosure Motivation. Social media users' impression management behaviors are intrinsically linked to their self-disclosure motivations, as individuals may determine their willingness to publish content intentions based on these underlying motivational factors [7]. According to the two dimensions presented in the Self-Presentation Motivation Dimension Scale, one is the other-oriented motivation dimension, which includes three aspects: public self-awareness, social openness, and self-image management; the other is the self-oriented motivation dimension, which includes three aspects: self-reference and supervision, entertainment and recreation, and value reinforcement [8]. For instance, WeChat users engage in impression management through their "curated" Moments. Users with a self-centered orientation to select and publish content based on personal preferences, whereas those with an other-centered orientation are more likely to post content that aligns with their friends' interests or stimulates interaction. Based on this observation, the present study proposes the following hypotheses:

H2a: Self-centered orientation motivation significantly influences user's willingness to publish content that is "curated" on their WeChat Moments.

H2b: Other-centered orientation motivation significantly influences user's willingness to publish content that is "curated" on their WeChat Moments.

Anticipated Audience Approval. The concept of anticipated audience approval is derived from the recognition expectation proposed in other studies and combined with the background of this research. It refers to the positive feedback, such as likes and com-

mentary comments, that users of social circles anticipate receiving from their audience [9]. These positive feedback mechanisms may further enhance users' willingness to publish content. Based on the concepts of social recognition needs, recognition expectation, and attention-seeking behavior, the following hypotheses are pro-posed:

H3: Anticipated audience approval exerts a positive influence on users' willingness to publish content that is "curated" on their WeChat Moments.

2.2 Research Model

This study uses "impression management" as its theoretical orientation to explore the behavioral characteristics and driving forces of the phenomenon of "curated" WeChat Moments. This study examines users' behaviors before impression management, people's psychological characteristics when they engage in impression management, and their expectations of the results of impression management. These behaviors directly affect users' willingness to publish content and, indirectly, the entire process of impression management.

Based on the above hypotheses, the research model is shown in Figure 1:

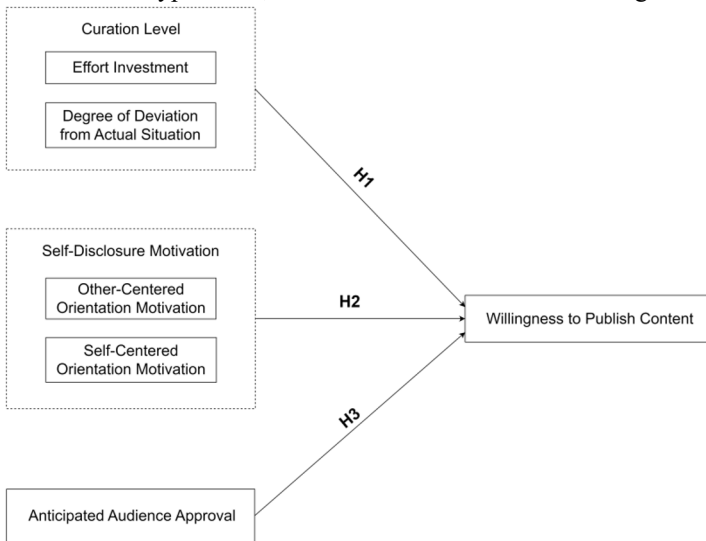


Fig. 1. Social media user impression management behavioral research model.

3 Research Method

3.1 Questionnaire Design

This study adopts a cross-sectional survey experimental design method, using an online questionnaire method to collect data, and then, based on the reliability and validity analysis, tests the hypothesized relationships. The survey questionnaire is divided into

two parts. The first part is used to obtain basic information of WeChat users and evaluate users' participation in Moments, including gender, age, occupation, number of posts, amount of Moments per week, and how long they prepared before sending information on Moments. The second part is used to measure the relevant variables of the theoretical model. The questionnaire items were developed using a Likert scale with five response options from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This research took advantage of previous research scales and made some adjustments according to the research context of this study, that is, the characteristics of the "curated" WeChat Moments, so as to make the scale more applicable to this study. It encompasses the initial scale for selfie editing behaviors among university students, dimension-specific items related to self-disclosure motivation, scales for social networking behaviors on Weibo/WeChat platforms, as well as items addressing impression motivation and impression construction [9-12].

3.2 Data Collection

A total of 393 questionnaires were collected in this study. To ensure the authenticity and validity of the data, questionnaires with single-choice responses, completion times of less than 40 seconds, and those that failed the attentiveness test were excluded. Consequently, 314 valid questionnaires were obtained, yielding a validity rate of 79.9%, which meets the requirement of 10-15 times the number of items.

The study sample comprised 170 males, accounting for 54.1% of the total, and 144 females, representing 45.9%, indicating a slightly higher proportion of male participants compared to female participants. The age distribution is predominantly concentrated in two groups: those under 18 years old and those aged 19-25, accounting for 30.3% and 29.3% respectively. In terms of occupation, the majority are students and full-time workers, representing 44.6% and 34.1% respectively. Regarding the frequency and volume of posts in social media circles, 50.6% of users post 0-1 times per week, indicating that the majority of users post between 0-1 times weekly. Furthermore, the majority of users post between 0-2 social media updates per week, constituting 54.8% of the total sample. In addition, 57.3% of users spend less than half an hour preparing before posting on WeChat Moments, constituting the majority of the total. This indicates that nearly half of the users post two or more WeChat Moments per week, with preparation time exceeding half an hour prior to posting.

4 Research Results

4.1 Reliability and Validity Assessment

In a move to establish the scientific validity and reliability of the survey data to be utilized in the empirical research, this study performed reliability and validity tests on the scale using SPSS 23.0 [13]. At the initial stages, three items with Cronbach 0.5 or below as the composing part were deemed invalid and thus eliminated. Analysis was again repeated with the aim of establishing the reliability of the remaining items. As shown in Table 1, after the deletion of invalid items, the analysis of reliability revealed

that the overall Cronbach's 0.960 coefficient of the scale was above 0.7 [14]. The coefficient of Cronbach as applied to the whole dimensions of the scale was 0.799 to 0.871, above the limit of 0.7. It means that the latent variables are very reliable, and the results of the questionnaire are consistent and reliable.

Table 1. The results of the reliability test.

Dimensions		Number of Items	Cronbach's α Coefficient
Curation Level	Effort Investment	3	0.816
	Degree of Deviation from Actual Situation	3	0.799
Self-Disclosure Motivation	Other-Centered Orientation Motivation	4	0.827
	Self-Centered Orientation Motivation	5	0.866
Anticipated Audience Approval		4	0.871
Willingness to Publish Content		3	0.848
Total		22	0.960

Validity testing is employed to assess whether the latent variables are adequately measured, thereby reflecting the discrepancies between the measurement outcomes and the anticipated results [9]. After excluding invalid items, validity analysis was conducted. As shown in Table 2, the KMO measure of sampling adequacy yielded a value of 0.962, which, according to Kaiser's criterion, indicates a high level of adequacy. Additionally, Bartlett's test of sphericity produced a value of 4873.602 with a significance level of 0.000, which is less than 0.001, demonstrating that the data collected from this survey questionnaire are highly suitable for factor analysis [15].

Table 2. The test results of the KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

The KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.962
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx.Chi-Square	4873.602
	df	231
	Sig.	0.000

4.2 Behavioral Characteristic Analysis

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistical results of the dimensions within the independent variables. The mean values of all dimensions exceed 3, with the analysis indicating that the means of all constructs range from 3.06 to 3.44, all surpassing the theoretical median. This suggests that the majority of users generally agree with the behavioral descriptions related to the "curated" WeChat Moments.

In the dimension of "effort investment" the mean score of "degree of deviation from actual situation" (M = 3.44) is significantly higher than that of "degree of deviation from reality" (M = 3.06). This indicates that while users are generally willing to invest a certain amount of time and effort in editing photos or carefully considering text, their overall strategy in self-presentation tends to be conservative, with limited embellishment of the actual situation.

In the dimension of "self-disclosure motivation," the mean score of "self-centered orientation motivation" (M = 3.34) is slightly higher than that of "other-centered orientation motivation" (M = 3.24), suggesting that the intrinsic self-construction needs driving user behavior may be marginally stronger than the extrinsic social interaction needs. Users tend to adopt a self-centered orientation when publishing content. Meanwhile, the mean score of "anticipated audience approval" is 3.31, indicating a relatively high level of importance placed on social feedback by users.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistical Results Across Multiple Dimensions

Dimensions		Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Curation Level	Effort Investment	3.44	1.0605
	Degree of Deviation from Actual Situation	3.06	1.0758
Self-Disclosure Motivation	Other-Centered Orientation Motivation	3.24	1.0126
	Self-centered orientation motivation	3.34	0.9724
Anticipated Audience Approval		3.31	0.9668

4.3 Analysis of Data

Correlation Analysis. In accordance with Cohen's guidelines, a correlation coefficient with an absolute value exceeding 0.50 can be classified as a strong correlation [16]. As illustrated in Table 4, all correlation coefficients in this study exceed 0.63 and are positive, indicating a robust positive association among the variables. The correlation strength between each variable and the willingness to publish content, ranked in descending order, is as follows: anticipated audience approval > other-centered orientation motivation > self-centered orientation motivation > degree of deviation from actual situation > effort investment. Furthermore, all Pearson correlation coefficients exceeded 0.63, indicating a statistically significant positive correlation ($p < 0.001$) between users' willingness to publish content on their "curated" WeChat Moments and both their invested effort and actual deviation. Consequently, hypotheses H1a and H1b are both substantiated.

Table 4. Pearson Correlation Analysis Among Variables.

Dimensions		Correlation Metrics	Willingness to Publish Content
Curation Level	Effort Investment	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	.637**
		Significance (Two-tailed)	.000
		N	314
	Degree of Deviation from Actual Situation	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	.689**
		Significance (Two-tailed)	.000
		N	314
Self-Disclosure Motivation	Other-Centered Orientation Motivation	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	.776**
		Significance (Two-tailed)	.000
		N	314
	Self-Centered Orientation Motivation	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	.757**
		Significance (Two-tailed)	.000
		N	314
Anticipated Audience Approval	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	.825**	
	Significance (Two-tailed)	.000	
	N	314	

Note: ** denotes $p < 0.001$

Regression Analysis. As indicated by the data presented in Table 5, both self-centered orientation motivation ($\beta=0.173$, $p<0.01$) and other-centered orientation motivation ($\beta=0.181$, $p<0.01$) demonstrate statistically significant positive effects on willingness to publish content. These findings provide empirical support for hypotheses H2a and H2b, thereby confirming their validity.

Table 5. Regression analysis of various dimensions and content publishing intentions.

Dimensions	Willingness to Publish Content
Curation Level	Effort Investment
	Degree of Deviation from Actual Situation
Self-Disclosure Motivation	Other-Centered Orientation Motivation
	Self-Centered Orientation Motivation
Anticipated Audience Approval	

Note: *** denotes $p < 0.001$, ** denotes $p < 0.005$

It shows a very strong positive effect on willingness to publish content that is of an exceptionally strong and strong positive H3 ($\beta= 0.471$, $p<0.001$). The standardized coefficient (Beta) is significantly greater than that of all other factors, which implies that of all affecting factors, anticipated audience approval is the key driving force of the willingness to publish content based on the "curated" WeChat Moments.

5 Discussion

Social media users engage in impression management through content publication, with the curation level, self-disclosure motivation, and anticipated audience approval serving as key driving factors in this process. While users are generally willing to invest a certain amount of effort and time in editing photos or carefully considering text, their overall self-presentation strategies tend to be conservative, with limited embellishment of actual circumstances.

The curation of content drives users to post materials on social platforms that project their ideal self-image. Social platform users meticulously curate and enhance their social media presence by investing time and effort into editing carefully selected photographs and crafting appropriate captions, thereby achieving a curation level of presentation before sharing these polished posts on their "curated" WeChat Moments. The more this curation process aligns with their desired self-image, the stronger the motivation becomes for users to share content, ultimately projecting their ideal persona to their audience. In this process, it is imperative to maintain a rational perspective. Prolonged indulgence in the contemplation of an entirely idealized self-image may lead to a state of disorientation within a fabricated construct of self-presentation.

Distinct self-disclosure motivations drive users to publish person-centered content on social media platforms. When the "curated" Moments is driven by an other-centered oriented motivation, where content is published based on others' preferences or points that are likely to attract their attention, the aim is to foster social interaction. When the "curated" Moments are driven by self-centered motivation, the content shared predominantly revolves around personal interests or daily life, with the objective of presenting an authentic self-image.

The anticipated audience approval drives users' willingness to publish content, thereby influencing their impression management behaviors. Users expect to gain recognition and attention from others by posting idealized self-presentation content on social platforms. When the audience provides anticipated positive feedback, it significantly enhances the user's willingness to publish "curated" moments on their social media feeds.

6 Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate significant correlations between the curation level, self-disclosure motivation, anticipated audience approval, and the willingness to publish content. Notably, both self-centered orientation motivation and anticipated audience approval exert a significantly positive influence on the willingness to publish content. The research findings further indicate that effort investment by users in crafting "curated" social media posts, the degree of deviation from the actual situation, and the willingness to publish content are positively correlated. Both self-centered orientation and other-centered orientation motivations significantly influence the willingness to publish "curated" social media content. Additionally, the anticipated audience approval positively impacts users' willingness to publish "curated" social media content. This

study provides valuable insights for future research in this domain, primarily influencing the measurement of Curation Level within social media moments, as well as the investigation of the relationships among self-disclosure motivation, anticipated audience approval, with users' willingness to publish content. Future research should focus more on in-depth exploration of the curation level and anticipated audience approval.

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