Research on the Connection between Social Scene Construction of Strangers in Little Red Book and User Relationship from the Perspective of Weak Relationship Theory

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Abstract: This paper uses the method of in-depth interview,combined with weak ties and situation theory of media to analyze the construction of social scenes and user relationship connection phenomenon of strangers in Little Red Book.It is found that the weak relationship society promotes the social development of strangers,and the media situation is an important reason which affects the construction and development of social relationships on the online media platform.

Keywords: Social theory of strangers,Weak ties,Situation theory of media

1 Introduction

With the continuous innovation of media technology,people's communication behavior has also been reshaped by social media,and the digital media has made online social communication become the mainstream.The number of mobile social users in China reached 924 million in 2020,which is expected to exceed 1 billion in 2022.Among them,the number of strangers social users is about 648 million,and there could soon be a big increase with the expansion of mobile social scale.Stranger socialization usually refers to the interaction and contact between two people who have never met.Anonymous social media such as TikTok and Weibo constantly reconstruct the connotation and boundary of strangers'social interaction,especially in the post-epidemic era,the characteristics of shrinking acquaintance society and expanding stranger society are more obvious.Compared with Momo,Soul and other mobile platforms that focus on strangers'socialization,has the characteristics of e-commerce communities.Why do people choose Little Red Book to establish interpersonal relationships with strangers?What is the underlying motivation behind it?What characteristics of the establishment mechanism of social relationships connected by weak relationships?This paper will take Little Red Book as the research object and analyze the related phenomena of strangers'social interaction based on weak ties and situation theory of media.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Weak ties

The theory of the strength-weak ties was first put forward by Mark Granovetter,an American sociologist,in The Strength of Weakness.He pointed that interpersonal relationship can be divided into strong ties and weak ties.The former refers to interpersonal relationship with strong connection and frequent emotional interaction,which is usually expressed as the relationship between friends and relatives with factual contact in real world.While the latter signifies superficial interpersonal relationships,few emotional fetters,and can easily start or end (Mark Granovetter,1973).

Moreover,Social characteristics of weak relationships have changed with the rapid rise of the Internet. In Getting a Job:A Study of Contracts And Careers,Mark Granovetter pointed the bridge built by weak ties involves a wider range of people and promotes information transmission.Weak ties have strong heterogeneity,especially in social networking (Mark Granovetter,1995).Castells mentioned in his book , The Rise of The Network Society, that the Internet is particularly suitable for the development of multiple overlapping weak ties,which can promote the interaction of people with different characteristics and expand the social scope (Castells, 2001).

The significance of weak ties in social networking is also concerned by domestic scholars. Professor Yu Guoming introduced the concept of "Specific Heat Hapacity" in Research on Weak Relationship in Internet Communication:Control Mode and Path Effectiveness,describing the process of weak relationship networking on the Internet.He noted that the "Specific Heat Capacity" of interpersonal relationships in strangers' social interaction is smaller compared with real social life.That is,the relationship between the two parties is warming and cooling quickly.It can efficiently match and establish contacts with more choices but less trial and error costs.The theory of weak ties is significance to the study of strangers'social interaction based on internet.

2.2 Situation theory of media

In the 1980s,Joshua Meyrowitz,an American communication scholar,put forward the concept of situation theory of media in his book No Sense of Place:The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior.

Based on Ervin Goffman's "dramaturgical theory" and Marshall McLuhan's "Theory of media technology",this paper uses the concept of situation theory of media to connect media,situation and behavior.It means that from the broad field of communication,media is a special environment,not just a tool for information acquisition and sharing.Merowitz believes that media and social environment are a pair of variables that affect each other.Media can construct media scenes,the change of media leads to the change of media scenes,and the change

of media scenes leads to the generation of new behaviors,which to a certain extent affects people's communication activities.

The main viewpoints of situation theory of media include that each unique behavior needs a unique situation,that electronic media facilitates the merger of many old situations,and that new situations promote the emergence of new behaviors.

Although Meyrowitz took television media as the main research object and combined with the social and cultural phenomenon of the United States in the late 1960s to put forward the concept of situation theory of media.However,from the perspective of theoretical value,this theory still has important reference value and significance for the study of social behavior in the current Internet media era.

2.3 Social theory of strangers

Through keyword search,it is found that the current domestic research on "Strangers socialize" mainly focuses on two areas:stranger social relationship and stranger social application use.

As for the social relationship between strangers,Zhang Na found a new form of online interpersonal relationship among young people based on qualitative research on BBS of a liberal arts university in Beijing, namely "familiar strangers".The familiar stranger has three characteristics:It constructs the sense of existence in cyberspace;Weak interaction with others in the network;The relationship has the characteristic of open selection in time and space.In the process of forming such a relationship,the online login realizes the building of spatial identity of strangers, online chatting realizes the construction of group sense of belonging among strangers,and the privacy sharing realizes the construction of intimacy among strangers.

On the basis of the "second disengagement theory",Xu Tongwen pointed out that in the new stranger society,atomized individuals get rid of the shackles of their preconceived identity and self-created identity in the process of unreal anonymous social interaction,and construct a social space of de-custom-type trust and de-contract-type trust before taking self-defined identity as role interaction.

About the use of social application for strangers,Chen Shaofen,Luo Yan and Chen Beiru found by investigating the use behavior and motivation of young users of stranger social application,that stranger social application can improve the self-actualization needs of young users to a certain extent and provide users with a place to vent their emotions,but there are also problems such as low frequency of use and low user stickiness.

To sum up,at present,the research on "stranger socialization" in China is not in-depth,and there is no in-depth and specific research on the emergence of new stranger social apps based on geographic location matching,such as Little Red Book in the past two years.Therefore,this paper takes Little Red Book as the object platform and analyzes the related phenomena of strangers' social interaction from the perspectives of weak relation and media situation theory.

3 Method:In-depth interview method

3.1 Production of interview outline

The interview is mainly divided into three parts.

The first part mainly involve the basic information of the interviewees, including age,occupation,education level and location.In the second part,the dimension of the research questions is reduced to interview questions,including the experience of using Little Red Book,the situation of weak ties socializing in Little Red Book,the motivation of choosing Little Red Book for socializing,and the characteristics of interactive social activities in Little Red Book.The third part is to prepare the questions that may be involved that require in-depth exploration.

If the interviewee has any dissatisfaction or is unwilling to answer questions during the interview,he or she can choose to remain silent or withdraw from the interview.The interview materials that the interviewees declared that they did not want to be made public were not included or quoted in this study.

3.2 Interviewee selection

According to the 2022 Active User Profile Trend Report (Little Red Book) released by Qiangua Data,Little Red Book currently has over 200 million monthly active users,72 percent of whom are born in the 1990s,and 50 percent are distributed in first-tier and second-tier cities.Therefore,according to the trend of user portrait,this paper selected and contacted 11 users of Little Red Book aged between 20 and 40 for a 30-minute semi-structured in-depth interview.The interviews began on September 27 and ended on October 12,2022.We used online and offline methods to conduct conversation interviews and collected many effective research samples.According to the maximum sampling principle of qualitative research method,when the 11th interviewee was collected,all the interview contents had completely covered the research question,and the sample collection was closed.Respondents are different in age,occupation,education level and region,and the degree of homogenization is low.

The interview was conducted in three forms:offline face-to-face interview,online voice interview and online wechat text interview.The interview results were sorted into a verbatim transcript,with a total of 6,500 words.The content process of the interview was completed by two authors.The basic information of the respondents is shown in the table 1 below.

Table 1 Interviewee Information table

Name	Age	Occupation	Education	Place of residence
M	20	Student	Bachelor's degree	Zhejiang
L	26	Architect	Bachelor's degree	Shaanxi
P	24	Writer	Master's degree	Guangdong

Z	31	Beauty shop owner	Associate degree	Jilin
J	32	Teacher	Doctor's degree	Shanxi
Y	22	Student	Bachelor's degree	Hainan
F	26	Realtor	Associate degree	Jiangxi
X	25	Planning of advertising company	Master's degree	Guangdong
B	28	Pet shop owner	Bachelor's degree	Shanxi
C	23	Student	Master's degree	Guangdong
H	29	Waiter	Associate degree	Anhui

4 Results

We conducted further interviews and analysis on whether weak ties social interaction would be carried out in Little Red Book,the weak ties social situation of Little Red Book platform and the difference between weak ties and strong ties social interaction.The results show that under the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic restriction and the development of online media technology,users tend to engage in weak ties social interaction,and use the media scenes such as e-commerce and interest connection provided by Little Red Book to build strangers' social relationships.However,these are also quite different from social relationships with strong ties.

4.1 Weak ties social interaction

From the interview results,it can be seen that the spread of COVID-19 pandemic has exerted a subtle influence on people's social behaviors.

Since the epidemic,offline face-to-face acquaintance socializing has been limited to a certain extent.In the environment of long-term isolation from the outside world,more and more people are shifting from "acquaintance socializing" to "stranger socializing".According to the "weak joint advantage theory",although the communication efficiency,social trust and continuity of strangers with weak ties are less than that of acquaintances with strong ties,the aggregated information also shows differentiation and heterogeneity due to the difference of social media user groups,which is conducive to the flow and update of information.

Interviewee C said, "I often interact or chat with others on these popular social platform like Little Red Book.Because of the push mechanism,many people I meet on these platforms are who have the same hobbies or needs as me.It is very suitable for broadening interpersonal relationships,and makes up for the limitations of WeChat acquaintances' social networking on expanding contacts."

Interviewee J said, "We can communicate even if we are far away from each other or have big differences in status,occupation and education level.I can also learn some unfamiliar knowledge or fields from them,which is also very helpful for enriching my experience.And the social relationships built on platforms like Little Red Book don't require a lot of time to

maintain,and the topics of communication are mainly sharing and recommend products which is more relaxed and pleasant."

With the development of the medium of the Internet technology and the diversification of online social networking APP function,people in the post-epidemic era,out of the need of promoting information exchange and broadening social scope,engage in weak ties social activities based on "interest connection" through social media on the network platform,and the phenomenon of strangers' social interaction shows an expanding trend.

4.2 Multiple Situations: Establishment mechanism of social relations

With the progress of social media technology and the expansion of strangers' social market,the social networking app for strangers showed blowout growth.As a content sharing platform with the nature of e-commerce,Little Red Book also plays the role of "virtual community"for the users interaction.While changing users' consumption practice through graphic and short video works,it exerts a subtle influence on consumers' social field.

Rohloff pointed out that interpersonal communication exists as a way of social exchange. The purpose of building relationship among users is to get the corresponding reward. The primary orientation of Little Red Book is "e-commerce community",where bloggers take marketing as their goal or persuade users to actively spread and consume goods out of emotional and psychological needs.Through this purposeful altruistic behavior,the sender and the receiver build a special interactive relationship.The previous commodity sharing content is the starting point of user communication,but not the end point.Both parties may continue this social relationship because of the same aesthetic preference or product demand.

In addition to the e-commerce scene,Little Red Book has also built a wide range of social situations linked by interest.Qu Fang, the founder of Little Red Book,once said that the ideal state of Little Red Book should be the Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival in modern life. At present,the content of Little Red Book covers all life categories such as beauty and skin care,fashion, food,fitness, travel,etc. Users build a community of interests on the platform according to their preferences,and find value and sense of belonging in the "small world network".The social scene atmosphere weakens the role of LBS positioning and face value,and highlights the role of hobbies and personality in user interaction and relationship connection. Respondent Z said, "It's easy to find like-minded people in Little Red Book."

The media situation set up by Little Red Book is more focused on graphic and deep expression than other social applications.Fast-paced and fragmented information habits have accelerated the popularity of short videos,and users have adapted to the video narration of social media like Tik Tok and Aauto Quicker.Although the graphics context of Little Red Book have been impacted partly by short videos,they have always been the content foundation of the platform,and also precipitated a group of in-depth users with the same text preferences. In May,2022,there were about 8.54 million notes published in Xiaohong Bookstore,including about 3.7 million video notes and 4.84 million graphic notes,the latter accounted for 56.67%.

In our interview,we found that most interviewees think that "the Little red Book blog post has a relatively large amount of text,which is more suitable for understanding pictures, expressing feelings and conveying some profound views."The above characteristics make it easier for users who are related by interests with weak relationship through Little Red Book to develop socially with strong relationship through potential similarity.Respondent Y said, "I saw the notes related to the postgraduate entrance examination in Little Red Book,and after a period of communication with the other party,I felt very congenial.Considering the further communication in the future anyway, we exchanged WeChat through Little Red Book."

4.3 Little Red Book user relationship connection

4.3.1 Compared with the WeChat platform with strong relationship

According to Mark Granovetter's theory of strength-weak ties,wechat,as an "acquaintance social networking" APP that focuses on building strong relationships,has a higher value in the four indicators ofn"interaction frequency", "emotional intensity", "intimate relationship" and "reciprocal exchange" than Little Red Book,which focuses on weak relationships.

Under the influence of strong homogeneity among friends in wechat,a relatively fixed social circle is often formed,which is not conducive to the update and circulation of information,and it is difficult to effectively broaden the scope of social interaction.Since wechat users are more closely related in real interpersonal communication,people tend to have in-depth communication on wechat,but this also leads to the phenomenon that some users are reluctant to show their true self on WeChat platform.

Respondent M said, "Sometimes I want to express some fierce and critical opinions in WeChat Moments,but there are elders and teachers in WeChat friends,and it is troublesome to classify and block,I prefer to express my true thoughts on anonymous social platforms. Also,being recognized by strangers or unfamiliar people makes me feel more satisfied and express my desire."

As an anonymous network social platform with weak ties,Little Red Book has prominent heterogeneity,and the relationship between users is characterized by randomness,generalization and shallow level.

The extensive social scene constructed by Little Red Book enable users of Little Red Book to engage in diversified open social interaction through the social platform of weak ties .

Respondent X said, "It's easier to establish social relationships with others in Little Red Book,and I don't need to deliberately manage and maintain this relationship.According to the different social needs of each time,I can meet many people with different personalities.It is more casual to start and end at any time."

From the above analysis and the narratives of the two interviewees,it can be seen that the strong social relationship represented by WeChat has the characteristics of "deep friendship",while the weak ties social platform such as Little Red Book is more conducive to

"wide friendship".

4.3.2 Compared with stranger social application such as Momo,soul and Tantan

Stranger social application such as Momo,soul and Tantan have strong social purpose.They rely on appearance social methods and take heterosexual friends as the core content,which belong to matching stranger social application.

However,Little Red Book is still focused on sharing and commerce,and social interaction is extensive based on interest and region.Although its socialization is universal and shallow,it can often develop weak ties into strong ones and migrate to acquaintance social platforms such as WeChat.

5 Conclusion

With the development of mobile technology and the social needs of strangers,stranger socialization is becoming a new social trend.This paper takes Little Red Book as the research object to analyze strangers' socialization and its social mechanism in the social media era through literature retrieval and in-depth interview research,we try to answer some questions such as the motivation of users to establish strangers' socialization in Little Red Book and the characteristics of the mechanism of establishing strangers' social relationships.

It is found that weak ties are the main reason for strangers' social expansion.The scale of social links is no longer limited because of the anonymity of social media platforms and the universality of users,and the differentiated user groups and the diversified information tied with weak connections facilitates social expansion and information exchange.At the same time,the low social cost of weak relationships makes it easy for users to establish or end contact efficiently through online social platforms.In addition,Little Red Book has constructed a diverse situational system based on e-commerce scenes,interesting recommendation and graphic content. With the help of situation theory of media,this paper explains how the diverse media situations constructed by Little Red Book affect strangers' social behavior and the development direction of user relations.Finally, through comparative study,we found that the social relationship of Little Red Book based on common interests and needs is tend to migrate to acquaintance social platforms such as WeChat,realizing the transformation from weak relationship to strong relationship.

There are still a series of shortcomings in this study.In the application of weak relations and media situation theory to the social research of strangers in Little Red Book,predecessors rarely dabbled in it.In the analysis process of this paper,there will be some problems such as incomplete discussion and insufficient understanding.In-depth interviews,there are also some defects such as insufficient interview due to lack of experience.In the future research,it is necessary to combine questionnaire survey,data analysis and other methods to enhance the depth of research,compare

various types of social media,and improve the accuracy of argumentation.

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