

From Front Stage to Middle District: An Analysis of the “Momo” Phenomenon on the Little Red Book Platform

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Abstract:

In the context of communication practices on social media, Little Red Book, as an emerging Chinese social media platform, has attracted a large number of young users and has become a significant space for the development of anonymous communities. The rise of the “momo” group can be viewed as a social practice of active anonymity among netizens under public pseudonyms, existing in a loosely defined collective identity on a weak-tie network platform. This study analyzes the anonymous identity choices and self-presentation behaviors of the “momo” group within the frameworks of Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical theory and Neil Merowitz’s “middle district” theory. The findings indicate that the decline in user privacy has led to excessive exposure of users’ private information in the public domain, resulting in a surge in the demand for anonymous social interaction. Furthermore, the phenomenon of scene mixing is evident, as users switch roles among the front stage, middle district, and backstage, utilizing anonymous identities to evade social pressures stemming from strong ties. As algorithms evolve, the contradiction between anonymity and privacy risks intensifies, making the dispersion of group accountability and the emergence of malicious online violence an inevitable challenge for platform management.

Keywords: Anonymous Social Interaction; Dramaturgical Theory; Weak-tie Networks; Privacy and Anonymity Contradiction

1. Introduction

With the frequent updates and continuous evolution of media technologies, the Internet, leveraging its powerful technical potential, has increasingly occupied a prominent position in the landscape of communication, becoming the primary medium for

social interaction. According to the 54th “Statistical Report on the Development of the Internet in China,” released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) in August 2024, the number of Internet users in China is approximately 1.1 billion, with an internet penetration rate of 78.0% [1]. These

figures not only illustrate the super-scale of internet users in China but also reflect the increasingly significant social status of online communication, which intertwines with the everyday lives of contemporary Chinese society, forming a new cultural habit shaped by emerging technologies. In the current era of information technology, the use of social media has become the primary means of communication for a large number of users. Social media can serve as a tool for enacting social roles and influencing the social identities that emerge within cyberspace. A key characteristic of social media is the establishment of a network of friends, which can be formed among users already known in the real world or can connect individuals with strangers to create new friendships in the online space. However, the increasing penetration of internet technology into individual lives has led many to feel that their personal privacy is being exposed, highlighting group pressure and compressing the space for self-expression. Consequently, an increasing number of users are choosing to create anonymous accounts on social media, using the concealment of their identities as a means of self-presentation.

As a form of affordance, anonymity serves as a regulatory mechanism for social media users in their self-presentation efforts [2, 3]. Previous research has found that higher levels of anonymity on social media can lead users to feel less constrained in their self-presentation [4]. Hollenbaugh posits that anonymous identities on social media moderate the relationship between the motivations for self-presentation and the content shared, suggesting that anonymity allows users to express controversial viewpoints, thereby indicating that social media platforms provide users with protective anonymity [3]. Some studies argue that anonymity helps social media users create a space for self-expression, allowing for greater flexibility and freedom in self-presentation [5]. However, other research has shown that in anonymous environments, social media users can become more uncivil or polarized.

While much has been written about the opportunities and challenges of early internet anonymity, we still know little about the recent wave of anonymous social interaction in new online environments [6]. Furthermore, past studies on anonymous social interactions have predominantly focused on anonymous social apps, such as YikYak, Jodel [7], and Secret [6], with few investigations addressing the increasingly proactive anonymous behaviors of users in new social media contexts. Therefore, this paper focuses on the mechanisms, behavioral motivations, and cultural aspects of individuals choosing anonymous social platforms to explore the “complex relationship” between anonymity and authenticity [3].

This study focuses on Little Red Book (Xiaohongshu), a Chinese social media platform primarily featuring short

videos and image-text content. Users of Little Red Book can share lifestyle and consumer experiences, fostering interest-based social interactions, which makes it particularly popular among young users in China. Since 2020, a group of users known as “momo,” characterized by their use of “pink dinosaur” avatars, has emerged on social platforms like Little Red Book. These young users opt to protect their personal identities by adopting uniform pseudonyms or aliases, allowing them to express their views more freely through a collective identity while avoiding the exposure of their true identities. This research targets these “momo” users, employing semi-structured interviews and participatory observation methods to investigate their reasons and methods for using anonymous applications, as well as their perspectives on anonymity and interactions within the platform.

Using Goffman’s dramaturgical theory as a framework, this study diverges from previous research on the relationship between self-presentation and anonymity by incorporating Neil Merowitz’s concept of the “middle district.” Merowitz argues that the preconditions of the “backstage” lead to the emergence of the “middle district,” defining the new behaviors that arise from scene mixing as “middle district behaviors” to explain the compromise styles of interaction following scene convergence. This study posits that the phenomenon of anonymity among “momo” users is driven by the excessive exposure of user privacy from the “backstage” to the public eye, resulting in a surge in anonymous social interactions. Based on this analysis, this paper aims to explore the behavioral motivations and performative mechanisms of users choosing collective identities for anonymous social interaction on Little Red Book, while also explaining the changes in individual behaviors in the context of transformations in online social scenarios and the underlying logic behind these changes.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Anonymity in Social Interactions

Anonymity refers to a state in which a person’s identity is obscured or lost. Etymologically, the term “anonymity” comes from the Greek word anonymous, meaning nameless or without identity. The widespread phenomenon on social media today involves the use of anonymous accounts. In the context of online anonymity, Pavliček explains that the easier it is to trace an account’s identity, the lower the level of anonymity. Jaidka et al. argue that social media users may indicate their social identity through personal profile cues such as tags, images, emojis, and colors, which signal to their audience that they belong to a particular group [8]. Through this group membership,

they derive part of their self-concept while remaining anonymous. Since this paper investigates the issue of self-presentation, we define anonymity here as the degree to which a user's personal identity is unrecognizable (or recognizable).

The anonymity of cyberspace allows individuals to express themselves more freely than in the real world, and the false anonymous identities provide users with greater imaginative space. In online social interactions, anonymous participants engage in more anonymous imaginings, allowing them to perceive each other as "someone" rather than as an unknown "anyone" [6]. These different social imaginations form the collective identity of the group. Similarly, within a group, the consensus of those who have already gained social interaction qualifications determines who is eligible to participate in their group interactions. While users conceal themselves behind anonymous identities, they also construct a collective identity for the anonymous group. In the development of the era of the semi-real-name internet, although the enforcement of identity anonymity cannot violate the rules of internet communication, visual anonymity in social participation already provides participants with a strong sense of security. Essentially, the pursuit of pleasure or benefit while avoiding pain (such as risk) is a fundamental human nature [9]. This represents the most genuine motivation behind anonymous social participation.

The evolution of internet-based anonymous social interaction has undergone multiple stages, from an initial space for free expression to the construction of virtual identities, and now to the challenges and issues it faces today. In the early stages, anonymous social platforms provided users with a free and open environment for expression, encouraging individuals to explore and share in virtual spaces [5]. However, with the widespread use of social media, anonymity has gradually evolved into a mechanism for constructing virtual identities. Users utilize anonymity to hide their real identities, presenting more diverse, and sometimes even deceptive, versions of themselves. Some online daters take advantage of the synchronicity and reduced nonverbal cues of social media to share deceptive information about themselves [10]. Scholars found that Grindr users employed linguistic strategies to avoid the potential stigma associated with casual sex, using specific terms or reducing personal identifiers to hide their offline identities, demonstrating that the purpose of anonymity is to minimize personal information disclosure [11]. Other studies suggest that in anonymous conditions, online communicators are likely to disclose more information and present themselves in idealized or preferred ways. One study on online dating sites found that users who expected to meet in person were more likely to be honest in their

profiles (i.e., reducing anonymity) [12].

In summary, previous research has largely focused on the relationship between anonymity and self-presentation, without delving into the fundamental motivations, psychological mindsets, and platform logic driving social media users to use anonymity as a "regulator" of self-presentation. In other words, these studies have not fully explained the relationships between users themselves, and between users and the platform.

To explore the internal mindset and behavioral motivations behind social media users' adoption of anonymity as a "regulator" of self-presentation, the following research question is raised:

RQ 1: What are the individual motivations for users adopting the anonymous identity "momo"?

2.2 Self-Presentation on Social Media

American sociologist Erving Goffman, from a micro-perspective, constructively proposed the dramaturgical theory to explain human social interaction behavior. According to Goffman, everyday life resembles a stage on which individuals perform various roles, engaging in social interactions and constructing social imaginations through role-based performances.

The primary task of human socialization is to understand and recognize one's identity, regulating oneself by the rules of "what I should do." Identity, however, changes according to different contexts. In Goffman's dramaturgical theory, all social identities and role behaviors are essentially performances: "When we enter a social environment, we need to know the roles played by others, and what role we ourselves play in that scenario." Each scenario is akin to a theatrical stage. In front-stage behavior, people follow rules and selectively present their self-image, while exiting a formal scenario signifies the closing of the stage curtain, and the mask of the role is removed. When backstage behavior is exposed to the front-stage environment, it often damages the "perfect performance." The curtain, which separates different social scenarios, represents the material factor that distinguishes different modes of behavior. Thus, front-stage and backstage behaviors are divided into "frontstage behavior" and "backstage behavior."

To explore how social media users, from a dramaturgical perspective, use anonymous identities as a social strategy for self-presentation, we posed the following research question:

RQ 2: How do users under the pseudonym "momo" on Little Red Book differentiate between frontstage and backstage behavior in their online social interactions through anonymous identities?

2.3 “Middle Region” Theory Based on Situationism

Due to the diversity of social settings, human roles are constantly shifting. From this perspective, Goffman’s theory appears dynamic. However, in a macro sense, this dynamism is limited by the assumption that social order, mainstream media, and social roles and settings remain relatively stable. As electronic media permeate everyday life and take on greater importance, Joshua Meyrowitz integrates Goffman’s and McLuhan’s theories by discussing behaviors within “scenes,” introducing media as a variable that transcends physical geography into dramaturgical theory. Electronic media overcome the limitations of time and space in interpersonal communication, merging previously distant settings and social roles, thereby redefining the internal logic of behavior. Consequently, behaviors from multiple scenes may simultaneously appear within a new, singular scene.

Building on Goffman’s concepts of “frontstage” and “backstage,” Meyrowitz defines the new behaviors that emerge in this mixed setting as “middle region” or “side-stage behaviors.” These behaviors represent a compromise style of interaction after scene fusion. As a result, Goffman’s dramaturgical theory is expanded into a framework that encompasses “front-frontstage—middle region/side-stage—deep backstage.”

Rather than considering “scene” as a variable triggered by media, it is more appropriate to regard “scene” itself as a method of studying communication media and behavior. “We need to abandon the idea that social scenes are merely face-to-face interactions occurring in fixed times and places. Instead, we should focus on a broader and more inclusive concept of ‘information-access patterns.’” Consequently, the “scene” or “situation” has been redefined as a communication setting shaped by media, involving participants in the communication process and certain role behaviors. The frontstage performance, activities awaiting performance, and modes of information circulation are the primary dimensions through which Meyrowitz analyzes scenes. Thus, by elevating specific behavior styles to universal interaction patterns, social interaction is transformed, leading to new social information dissemination ecosystems and social environments. This forms Meyrowitz’s unique exploration chain of “media—scene—behav-

ior—society.”

Electronic media have created a broader, more generalized stage for us, where internet users of different identities traverse space and experience simultaneous presence. Media behavior and interaction patterns are continuously evolving in this virtual setting. Based on the analysis above, it is evident that, according to Meyrowitz’s middle-region theory, changes in scenes brought about by electronic media are the main factors altering people’s ways of life and thinking. Therefore, we posed the following research questions:

RQ 3: How do the Little Red Book platform (including algorithms, privacy settings, etc.), user behavior, and community culture collectively shape the social media scene?

RQ 4: How does the unique social media scene on Little Red Book foster the emergence of an anonymous culture like “momo”?

3. Methodology

This study focuses on young users of the Little Red Book platform, using in-depth interviews to examine their representations and the significance of anonymous self-presentation in social interactions. To objectively reflect the research issues, the researchers conducted online interviews with randomly selected Little Red Book users, who go by the pseudonym “momo,” from March to May 2024. Open-ended questions were used, and in-depth conversations were conducted naturally through voice calls and text-based communication. With the participants’ consent, the researchers recorded the entire conversation, providing essential data for subsequent research analysis.

To ensure sample diversity and avoid homogeneity in terms of age, occupation, gender, and other factors, the study successfully obtained 20 interviewees, including 10 females and 10 males. For privacy reasons, the participants were anonymized and assigned a unique identifier (Table 1). The interviewees ranged in age from 19 to 32, aligning with the Chinese State Council’s definition of youth (ages 14–35). Additionally, the participants represented a wide range of professions, including students, engineers, salespeople, teachers, civil servants, and job seekers, ensuring diversity among the sample.

Table 1. In-depth interview subject information

| ID | Age | Gender | Frequency of use | Position |
|----|-----|--------|----------------------|----------------|
| A1 | 19 | male | multiple times a day | sophomore |
| A2 | 20 | female | several times a week | junior student |
| A3 | 20 | male | multiple times a day | junior student |

| | | | | |
|-----|----|--------|----------------------|------------------------|
| A4 | 21 | female | multiple times a day | senior student |
| A5 | 21 | female | multiple times a day | senior student |
| A6 | 22 | male | several times a week | senior student |
| A7 | 23 | female | several times a week | wait for employment |
| A8 | 23 | male | several times a week | delivery man |
| A9 | 25 | male | several times a week | real estate agency |
| A10 | 25 | male | multiple times a day | online celebrity |
| A11 | 26 | female | multiple times a day | Primary school teacher |
| A12 | 27 | male | several times a week | civil servant |
| A13 | 27 | female | several times a week | nurse |
| A14 | 27 | female | multiple times a day | manicurist |
| A15 | 28 | male | several times a week | product manager |
| A16 | 28 | male | several times a week | dentist |
| A17 | 29 | female | several times a week | civil servant |
| A18 | 30 | male | multiple times a day | high school teacher |
| A19 | 31 | male | several times a week | accountancy |
| A20 | 32 | female | several times a week | software engineer |

Furthermore, to better understand the collective identity of the “momo” group and explore the platform logic of Little Red Book’s algorithmic recommendations and social culture, a seven-month online ethnographic study was designed. Beginning in February 2023, the researchers conducted participant observation on Little Red Book, focusing on the “momo” group as the subject of fieldwork. The researchers spent at least two hours daily on the app to engage in this ethnographic investigation.

4. Results & Discussion

4.1 Individual Motivations for “Momo” to Engage in Anonymous Social Interaction

As the anonymity of online identities gradually weakens and increasingly blends with real-world identities in certain contexts, these changes in platform environments compel individuals to reconstruct their sense of self. Little Red Book, as an open platform, exemplifies a “weak-tie—weak-socialization” setting. However, due to developments in algorithms or various incidental factors, the likelihood of users’ real identities being revealed in virtual spaces increases through methods such as IP addresses, geolocation, and familiar contacts. In response, some users choose the “momo” identity as a means of self-concealment to evade the platform’s extraction and surveillance of personal information. This collective anonymity strategy allows users to hide within a group, thereby reducing the risk of being discovered by acquaintances

and effectively safeguarding their privacy. Thus, the long-standing perception of virtual spaces as “games between strangers” is gradually dissolving [13].

In the Internet age, real-name verification has gradually become a standard practice on social networking platforms. Nevertheless, anonymity persists on the fringes of this mainstream trend, displaying diverse characteristics. In this context, the need for users to protect personal privacy and maintain channels for free expression through anonymous social interactions grows stronger. Little Red Book, as a weak-tie social platform, maintains relatively loose connections between users, making it a comparatively anonymous social environment. Within this space, users can freely share personal lives, thoughts, and emotions without fear of being recognized or judged by acquaintances from their real lives.

In interviews, all “momo” users mentioned privacy concerns as the primary reason for adopting this identity. Statements such as “I’m afraid acquaintances will come across my posts, so this way I won’t be recognized by people I know” were common. The anonymous identity gives users a sense of security in virtual spaces, enabling them to express themselves more openly. At the same time, the “momo” identity, with its symbolic elements (such as the unified pink dinosaur avatar and shared username), helps users establish a collective identity on social platforms, providing additional social protection.

Simultaneously, it is noteworthy that the appeal of this approach to users seeking anonymous social interaction is not solely based on the ability to “blend into the crowd,” but also provides ample room for individual expression

within their identity. In the study conducted by Zhang Yu and Tang Tiantian, data were collected from a total of 1,665 “momo” users (defined as those whose usernames contain “momo”), of which approximately 10% opted to personalize their “momo” identity through various means such as emojis, personal status updates, or descriptive terms. Moreover, several “momo” users did not strictly adhere to the iconic “pink dinosaur” avatar; some utilized derivative images of the “pink dinosaur,” while others chose completely different avatars. This indicates that users do not expect to relinquish their individuality entirely when engaging in anonymous social interactions. Instead, they flexibly embellish their digital collective identities. This approach not only preserves their need for privacy but also fulfills their desire for personalized expression.

4.2 The Process of Self-Presentation among “Momo”

In his work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman posits that limiting contact—maintaining social distance—can engender and sustain a sense of awe among the audience, placing them in a state of deep mystery regarding the performer.

In real-world social interactions, users’ frontstage self-presentation is depersonalized, crafted deliberately to project a specific persona. In the virtual realm, however, users can engage in a mystified identity performance in an interaction space where physical presence is absent but emotional connectivity remains. The “momo” community achieves a form of mystified self-performance by employing uniform nicknames and avatars, intentionally blurring the lines of individual real identities. This strategy of secondary anonymity creates a safety barrier between them and ordinary internet users, as well as their social circles in real life.

Users on Little Red Book exhibit a type of “depersonalized” weak-tie social interaction, gradually transitioning their relationships into the public domain. This allows users to significantly conceal their true personal information, protecting themselves from intrusions by acquaintances and enabling freer self-expression. Through the restriction of social distance and the narrowing of frontstage interaction, “momo” members maintain their privacy and facilitate the presentation of their authentic selves, thereby further clarifying the boundaries between their frontstage and backstage identities.

In Goffman’s dramaturgical theory, the backstage is the area that contrasts with the frontstage, serving as a private space where individuals can express their more authentic selves. Within the context of Little Red Book, the “momo” community leverages anonymity to gain a greater degree of freedom for self-expression. Throughout

this process, the “momo” group employs a strategy of “secondary anonymity,” further alleviating the constraints of the frontstage and allowing the backstage to flow into the frontstage, thereby relaxing the boundaries of the backstage space. In this scenario, the “momo” community effectively avoids the “surveillance” of acquaintances and the risk of privacy breaches, enabling them to speak more freely without fear that the façade of their frontstage performance will be exposed under the veil of indiscriminate anonymity.

However, it is important to note that the backstage of these “momo” users does not possess a completely private nature; the gaze and interaction of others must still be taken into account, rendering it a “semi-private” domain that lies between personal performance and private space [14]. While anonymous identities allow “momo” users to express themselves freely in environments with less scrutiny from acquaintances, the centralized, node-based existence within digital media implies that information shared on social media carries unique identity markers. This information is not only traceable but also difficult to forge or alter; thus, even if users remain anonymous or delete their information, traces of their identities may still persist. This indicates that the backstage is perpetually in a “semi-private” state, making it challenging to entirely escape the risks associated with frontstage exposure. Consequently, although the backstage of the “momo” community obscures users’ true identities with a veil, there remains the possibility of exposure, preventing them from fully and openly presenting their authentic selves.

Goffman introduced the concept of a “theatrical troupe,” which can be likened to a secret society where members engage in reciprocal and interdependent relationships, sharing common secrets and agreements. The “momo” community has formed a unique collective performance within this “theatrical troupe” context. By adhering to collective agreements and group norms, the “momo” group presents a unified external image on the platform—characterized by a distinctive pink dinosaur avatar and identical usernames—thus maintaining a highly cohesive group culture that emphasizes high activity levels, cuteness, and humor. The “momo” community functions as a collective entity, employing shared anonymity strategies to shield individual identities from external scrutiny. For instance, the widely circulated “Letter from the Mayor of momo to All momos” on Little Red Book exemplifies how the community commits to upholding order based on mutual agreements and collectively counters disordered behavior exhibited by individual users.

However, the inherent diversity of individual expressions and the personal differences lurking behind anonymous identities inevitably lead to some level of dissonance with-

in the troupe. Although the group presents a consistent external image, the absence of “opinion leaders” within the community can result in behavioral inconsistencies among members, potentially impacting the overall external perception of the “momo” group and leading to confusion and misinterpretation among outside observers. As Goffman pointed out, the tacit understanding and cooperation among “theatrical troupe” members often fall short of complete uniformity, creating tension and contradictions in the “momo” community’s anonymous performances as they navigate the balance between collective identity and individual expression.

4.3 The Anonymous Social Network Scene of “Momo”

Anonymity is not merely a matter of individual choice; it is also a product of social culture. The emergence and proliferation of collective anonymity within Little Red Book point to a transformation in the environments in which users interact. The decision of individual users to participate in collective anonymity often reflects a response to their surroundings. Therefore, it is essential to examine the context in which the “momo” phenomenon arises, treating the environment as a variable for analysis.

The core objective of anonymization technologies and security encryption developments is to protect users’ identity privacy. Little Red Book employs these technologies to safeguard user anonymity, allowing individuals to conceal their true identities on the platform and ensuring that their interactions remain free from external interference. This enables users who adopt anonymous identities to share their thoughts, experiences, and emotions more freely without the fear of identity exposure. However, as anonymization technologies evolve, big data algorithms also undergo continuous updates and iterations, categorizing users and assigning labels that facilitate precise identity recognition. This trend leads to a gradual transparency of anonymous users’ identities, placing them in a homogeneous collective.

In other words, the refinement of user management evolves alongside advancements in algorithmic capabilities, resulting in a situation where users who wish to express their genuine thoughts may feel inhibited by the potential risks of identity exposure. This reveals a conflict between the objectives of anonymity technologies—aimed at concealing identities—and the revealing nature of algorithmic recommendations.

The contradictions between platform technologies imply that users on weak social platforms are not only more susceptible to being captured by strong relational networks but also face heightened risks of being “tracked.” The

community culture of Little Red Book is shaped by both the platform’s characteristics and user behaviors, with its anonymity facilitating open and diverse discussions among users. In an anonymous platform, individuals can freely choose to present different aspects of themselves without the constraints of social identities, providing a safe and liberating environment that encourages active participation in social interactions.

Moreover, the development of security encryption technologies has played a crucial role in the evolution of anonymous social platforms. By enhancing data encryption processes, these platforms effectively mitigate potential risks of information leakage and privacy violations. This enables users to share sensitive information and engage in controversial topics with greater peace of mind, offering them a space to explore diverse identities. However, as push algorithms become more precise and privacy permissions more complex, anonymous social platforms blur the lines between digital and real-world identities. Personalized nicknames have become a form of “identity documentation,” significantly increasing users’ visibility, while traceable identities raise the risk of sustained online harassment.

As one “momo” user articulated(A5), “His fans are so clueless... Just the other day, I defended him to my friends, but I can only express my opinions in places where my acquaintances can’t see them.”

The community culture of Little Red Book is profoundly influenced by its push algorithms and privacy policies. In a context where anonymity is compromised by algorithms, user experience has been significantly affected, resulting in constrained and hesitant expressions. Users face increased limitations in their pursuit of both anonymity and personalized expression. Initially, users could freely share content in a relatively open environment, which facilitated the free flow of information on the platform. However, as more acquaintances infiltrate users’ personal networks, the “masks” are “lifted,” and the feedback mechanism for user engagement is subtly disrupted, leading to decreased interactivity within the community platform. Users can no longer express opinions and critique others as freely as before without fear of identity exposure, placing their social privacy needs and the platform’s community culture under dual challenges.

Consequently, the collision between algorithms and anonymity technologies makes users more susceptible to being exposed within strong relational networks, increasing the likelihood of being tracked, which directly impacts their social needs and the platform’s activity levels. While push algorithms enhance personalized experiences, they also constrain the diversity of information available. Moreover, although the strengthening of privacy permis-

sions protects users' identities, it may also result in a decline in the freedom of expression.

4.4 The "Middle Zone Behavior" of the "Momo" Group in Little Red Book

In contemporary media studies, the concept of "scene" is viewed not merely as a variable induced by media but also as an essential method for examining the interplay between communication media and behavior. Merowitz further developed this concept, redefining "scene" as a communicative context created by media, participants in communication, and their role behaviors. This redefinition opens new perspectives for media research in the modern era. He emphasized the importance of the environment in shaping lifestyles and modes of thinking, arguing that individual interaction patterns can be influenced by specific behavioral styles. As a result, a unique exploration chain has formed between media, scene, behavior, and society, giving rise to a new ecology of social information dissemination.

From Merowitz's theoretical framework of "media—scene—behavior—society," Little Red Book emerges as a new medium that creates a distinct virtual social scene. This virtual setting transcends temporal and spatial constraints, encouraging users from diverse backgrounds and identities to gather and interact across physical spaces. Merowitz posits that electronic media can generate new communicative scenes in which the boundaries of user identity become blurred, allowing for more liberated interaction among participants. This implies that users on Little Red Book are no longer confined by the physical distances and fixed identities characteristic of traditional social interactions; rather, they can exhibit varied behavioral styles within a broader virtual context. It is this "scene blending" that forms a crucial foundation for the growth and sustenance of the "momo" group.

This anonymous interactive environment breaks away from the traditional front-stage interactions based on real identities, creating the possibility for users to switch between the "front stage" and "back stage." This results in more inclusive "side stage/middle zone" behaviors—compromise social behaviors—that allow users who wish to conceal their internet traces to freely transition between identities in social contexts. The "momo" group, which has swept through Little Red Book, exemplifies this "middle zone behavior," as they neither fully expose themselves in the traditional "front stage" role nor completely hide in the "back stage." Instead, they present themselves in a compromise position within a "side stage/middle zone." By boldly expressing their opinions from behind an anonymous group, the "momo" community continues

to engage socially while avoiding the pressures of fully public self-presentation.

5. Conclusion

Overall, the "momo" identity provides a "middle zone" comfort space for users who are troubled by the increasing overlap between their front-stage and back-stage identities. The voluntary anonymity of users facilitates decentralization, alleviates discourse pressure, and protects freedom of expression and personal privacy—advantages that are particularly significant when discussing sensitive topics. Within Little Red Book, the phenomenon of secondary anonymity among users joining the "momo" community has become a trend, allowing highly active users to express their individuality while safeguarding their privacy.

The "momo" identity creates an unrestricted space for expression, enabling users to avoid the social awkwardness that comes from being caught in a strong relational network within virtual settings. This allows them to freely share thoughts that they might otherwise suppress due to the potential risks of identity exposure, thereby reducing the influence of real-life discourse factors (such as gender, age, etc.) on discussions. In this way, the "momo" group not only fosters a vibrant culture of open dialogue but also offers users a unique way to navigate the complexities of modern social interactions in an increasingly interconnected digital world.

However, the continuous updates and iterations of technology may further undermine users' effective anonymity. The algorithms of major social media platforms serve as their core "ace," primarily tasked with analyzing user habits and accurately pushing information and other users of interest, thereby fulfilling both "social" and "media" objectives. If algorithms can predict user behavior patterns more precisely, combined with IP location capabilities, users' real identities can still be discerned through complex data analysis even in an anonymous state, making it impossible to achieve "absolute anonymity" in virtual settings.

From interviews, many "momo" users expressed frustration with the platform's "restrict certain users from browsing" feature, deeming it ineffective. This indicates that Little Red Book's management of the tension between algorithm recommendations and user privacy settings requires further optimization. It is essential to ensure that users can have a more practical grasp of their personal privacy, whether they are in the front stage or the middle zone of interaction.

Moreover, group-based anonymity raises concerns about diffused responsibility and online violence. The low bar-

rier to entry for the “momo” group, coupled with the absence of opinion leaders within the group, results in a lack of unity in the individuality, behavior, and quality of each member. The phenomenon of “one momo acts, and all momo are responsible” somewhat undermines the public order and morals of Little Red Book, infringing upon the normal social experiences of other users.

Therefore, optimizing natural language processing (NLP) technology presents a pathway to ensure that high-anonymity social interactions do not become breeding grounds for negative social behaviors. Implementing real-time monitoring and review of the speech within the “momo” group can help identify potential malicious content, such as statements containing aggressive language or personal attacks. The system could automatically recognize and delete such content or issue warnings and restrictions to offending users.

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