

Globalize or Chinanize

A Comparison of Facebook and Kaixin001

by

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ABSTRACT

Although the social network site (SNS) Facebook achieved great success around the world, in China, it was over taken by the local website Kaixin001. Using comparative analysis and interviews, this thesis compared the architecture of the two websites and Chinese users' attitude towards them. From one side, the result indicates that they are almost the same, but not quite. Kaixin001 is a copycat which adapts to local cultures and political regulations. From the other side, the research also highlights that people associate Kaixin001 with a game platform rather than a social tool. It suggests that there are two layers of digital divide: access and utilization. Chinese users can not get equal access because of the Great Firewall. At the same time, unlike western users, they are fond of playing games, listening music and other functions, rather than creating original content or building social capital. Therefore, the SNS utilization is not equal. Because of regulations and self-surveillance, their SNS use is enjoying the apolitical does not challenge the Chinese state.

At the end of the thesis, the author points out the limitations of this research. As Internet-mediated qualitative research, this study lacks extended time and samples to explore the SNSs in global context. Further research is needed to collect extended samples. Moreover, the users' dependence on social network websites may be addressed to seek more comprehensive and deeper understanding of SNS.

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Preface

This thesis is a result of my master's degree studies at Arizona State University. The entire work was conducted through the Communication Studies Program in the Division of Social and Behavioral Sciences.

This study is motivated by the desire of figuring out the future of media. Before my study at Arizona State University, I worked as an editor and reporter in Beijing for four years, and witnessed the newspapers' decline. At present, the traditional paper media is attacked by internet, mobile telephone and other rising media forms. Many transnational enterprises, such as Facebook, My Space, Twitter and YouTube, are trying to enter the global markets. All of these indicate that new media's time is arriving.

In particular, the amazing development of social network sites gave me a great shock. In 2010, Facebook's CEO, Mark Zuckerberg was named Time magazine's "Person of the Year." At the same time, many of my friends are fond of Chinese "Facebook" Kaixin001. Therefore, I planned to conduct a comparison of Facebook and Kaixin001 to understand new media under global context.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of purpose

In the era of globalization and Net-volution, many multinational giants have their local counterparts in China, such as Google with Baidu, eBay with Taobao, and Amazon with Dangdang. In *Harvard Business Review*, Ghemawat and Hout (2008) note that “Google and eBay were early leaders in search and auction in China but have been overtaken by local sites Baidu and Taobao.” Local-based Dangdang exceeded Amazon because it “adapted to China’s poor credit-card payment infrastructure by developing the best cash-settlement system” (Ghemawat and Hout, 2008). Similarly, the most popular social network site (SNS), Facebook, has its Chinese competitor, Kaixin001. “Kaixin” means “happiness” in Chinese.

In February 2004, Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg created a SNS named, The Facebook. Facebook has functions and services like sharing photographs, on-line chat, music sharing, blogs, and interactive small games. In the beginning, Facebook’s membership was limited to Harvard students, then opened to different universities, and then to everyone. Gradually, the US-based Facebook attracted a lot of active users across the world. On Facebook’s main page, it describes its mission as “to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected” (see Facebook.com). According to a new survey by Nielsen, social networking is more popular than playing Online games, messaging,

viewing portals and other traditional Internet activities (*Computerworld*, 2010). Nielsen finds that American Internet users spend nearly a quarter of their online time on SNSs like Facebook.

In January 2009, a study from Compete.com showed that Facebook surpassed MySpace and became the most used social network by worldwide monthly unique visitors (Andy, 2009). On July 21, 2010, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg announced in his blog: “500 million people all around the world are actively using Facebook to stay connected with their friends and the people around them” (<http://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=409753352130>).

Although Facebook achieved great success around the world, in China, it was over taken by the local website Kaixin001 (Figure 1). Kaixin001, the biggest and the most popular SNS in China, was founded in March 2008. Just a couple of months after its startup, Kaixin001 received a sharp rise in members and exceeded its local competitor Xiaonei.com in the Alexa Traffic Rank. Most users are students and white collar workers. Until December 2009, registered users were almost 70 million with 20 million daily sign-in users, and over 2 billion page views. In December 2009, the Alexa global internet site standing (<http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/kaixin001.com>) ranked Kaixin001 as the No.1 of Chinese SNSs, and No. 8 of all Chinese Internet sites.

According to Alexa’s database, in December 2009, 96.7% of Kaixin001 users come from China, 0.8% from United States, and 2.5%

from other countries (see <http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/kaixin001.com>). On the other hand, 1.2% Facebook users come from Taiwan, 0.8% from Hong Kong, only less 0.5% from Mainland China (see <http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/facebook.com>). Obviously, world-famous Facebook lost its leading position in Mainland China, though its Chinese edition (zh-cn.facebook.com) was launched in 2008 (Figure 2). China Daily (2008) also points out that “Facebook is widely used by ex-pats and Chinese who befriend ex-pats, but has not caught on with ordinary Chinese”.

Based on a review of the literature, most research on SNS only addresses a single website or a narrow issue. Quite a number of works focus on users’ motivations (Urista, Dong & Day, 2009; Bumgarner, 2007; Zywica & Danowski, 2008), the effects of SNS usage (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007; Erikson, 2008; Wellman, Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001; Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009), and privacy issues (Tyma, 2007; Cohen, 2008).

However, not so many scholars pay attention to the comparative research of social network websites based in different countries, and they often focus on the difference between Korean Cyworld and Western SNSs. For example, Lewis and George (2008) examine user’s deceptive behaviors on US-based MySpace and Korea-based Cyworld, and Seong (2010) conducts research on different SNSs (Cyworld and Facebook) users’ self-presentation.

There is a research gap in the field of China's SNSs, especially the comparison of China-based SNSs and U.S.-based sites. The United States is the biggest developed country in the world, while China is the biggest developing country. Both of them represent different major ideologies and cultural orientations. At the same time, the two countries have the largest population of Internet users in the world. Therefore, more work in this comparison is necessary.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore different social network websites under the global background. In particular, it focuses on the comparison of US-based website Facebook and China-based Kaixin001. It does not only deal with the two websites' architectures, but also users' attitudes. This study also offers insight into the meaning of social network websites for Chinese users and the relationship between globalization and localization in the new media era. It may help people to understand the future of SNSs.

1.2 Research questions

This study is guided by the following questions:

RQ1: Why is local site Kaixin001 more popular than Facebook in China?

To deeply understand how Chinese youth make their choice between the two websites, the further question is posited:

RQ2: What are the differences between Facebook and Kaixin001?

1.3 Structure of the thesis

First of all, it is necessary to review and critique the key studies about social network sites. Therefore, Chapter two provides an overview of the history of social networks sites, and some important themes about SNSs usage. Chapter three will introduce the development of new media in China, especially social networks sites with the processes of globalization.

Chapter four overviews the ethnographic methods which were used in this research: in-depth interview. The procedures of research design, content choice, interview methods, sampling strategy and data collection are explained.

Chapter five offers the analysis based on prior data collection. A grounded theory approach is applied to code the process and find the difference between two websites. It also gives the results of the in-depth interviews.

In Chapter six, the literature review and the analysis are connected. This study goes deeper into issues around Kaixin001 within global context. For instance, what is the meaning of social network websites for Chinese users? It also talks about the limitation in this study and further research plan.

Chapter 2

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

In the drama *Six Degrees of Separation*, John Guare (1992) describes a “small world”:

I read somewhere that everybody on this planet is separated by only six other people. Six degrees of separation. Between us and everybody else on this planet. The president of the United States. A gondolier in Venice. Fill in the names. I find that A) tremendously comforting that we're so close and B) like Chinese water torture that we're so close. Because you have to find the right six people to make the connection. It's not just big names. It's anyone. A native in a rain forest. A Tierra del Fuegan. An Eskimo. I am bound to everyone on this planet by a trail of six people. It's a profound thought...Six degrees of separation between me and everyone else on this planet (p.45).

In other words, our society looks like a network, and every person is a “node.” We can connect with any person of the world through no more than 6 friends. It is the famous “6 degrees of separation” principle.

In the web 2.0 era, the idea of social network and the Internet are combined, and social network websites are founded. As boyd and Ellison (2007) note, both terms “social network sites” and “social networking sites” are often used in public discourse. In this paper, the author adopts boyd

and Ellison's choice "social network sites," because these websites do not emphasize networking with strangers, but communicating with the network which already exists (boyd & Ellison, 2007).

boyd and Ellison (2007) define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to

(1) Construct a public or semi- public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (para.4).

Simply speaking, social network websites link individual netizens through the Internet and construct various virtual communities. In these communities, people use web profiles (e.g. texts, music, pictures and videos) to show their personal tastes (Liu, 2007). On the other hand, they employ messages and comments to communicate with their friends. At the same time, SNSs can integrate various features into the websites, such as blogging, instant messaging and so on (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Through SNS, people can maintain their existing social connections and create new relationships at the same time (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007).

SNS is a less formal but quicker communication method than off-line network. It can be viewed as a "bridge" between people's on-line and off-line lives (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007). With these websites, people can maintain and develop relationships beyond the local limit. Based on SNSs, many virtual communities are built. "Virtual communities

are accelerating the ways in which people operate at the centers of partial, personal communities, switching rapidly and frequently between groups of ties” (Wellman, et al., 1996, p.232).

2.2 History

As a rising media, SNSs do not have a long history. The first recognizable SNS, SixDegree.com, appeared on the Internet in 1997 (boyd & Ellison, 2007). SixDegrees.com was based on the idea of “6 degrees of separation.” At its golden time, SixDegrees.com had nearly one million users. However, it was closed in 2000 because the idea was too new for its time (boyd & Ellison, 2007).

In 2002, Friendster was launched to help people connect with their friends. Because of Friendster’s popularity, many new SNSs emerged and tried to copy its model and success (boyd & Ellison, 2007). One year later, MySpace and LinkedIn were established. MySpace’s slogan is “a place for friends”, and LinkedIn allow users to develop networks and share professional information.

In 2004, Mark Zuckerberg and his friends founded Facebook at Harvard University. Although Facebook was designed to be only a college network, it changed its policy in 2006 and opened to anyone over the age of 13 (Zywica & Danowski, 2008).

Increasingly, the SNS wave swept the whole world and became a kind of mainstream social media. Facebook, MSN, Twitter and other giant

companies grow globally. From 2009, Facebook has been the most popular SNS in the world (Table 1).

In December 2010, Facebook intern Paul Butler created a Facebook Friendship Map (Figure 3). He used the map to visualize the friendships of 500 million Facebook users all over the world. This map shows that most of the world is conquered by this SNS giant, but China as well as South Pole is still in the dead zone (see Appendix B to know the detail).

At the same time, in South Korea, community website Cyworld implemented social network site features (boyd, 2008). Unlike Western SNSs, Cyworld has a “mini-rooms” application (“cyber-rooms that often reflect offline spaces”) which are “interconnected with other friends’ and family pages” (Hjorth, 2007, p.371). Users can visit their friends’ online “rooms” and interact with them. In Russia, Vkontakte is the number one SNS. In China, a lot of local SNSs share the big market, such as Xiaonei, Hainei and Kaxin001.

2.3 Cultural difference

Hofstede (1984) defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another” (p.21). He pointed that, in order to study culture difference, the values which individuals hold in different societies should be compared.

To be specific, Hofstede (1984) identified four dimensions among different national cultures:

- 1) Individualism / collectivism: How close people perceive their relations with groups.
- 2) Power distance: How people treat power differences (or hierarchy).
- 3) Uncertainty avoidance: How much people need rules or regulations — “A value system shared by the majority in the middle classes in a society” (p.139).
- 4) Masculinity/ femininity: People’s preference to male values (e.g. money) or female values (e.g. quality of life).

Based on Hofstede’s (1984) notions, Lewis and George (2008) tried to explore the four dimensions and deceptive behaviors on SNSs. They did an online survey on U.S.-based MySpace and Korea-based Cyworld. They suggested that “Korean respondents exhibited greater collectivist values, lower levels of power distance, and higher levels of masculine values than Americans” (p.2945). In addition, Lewis and George found that Koreans were more apt to lie than Americans.

Seong (2010) compared SNS users in Korea (Cyworld) and the U.S. (Facebook) to understand self-presentation cross cultures. Using two cultural dimensions (individualism/collectivism and high/low context cultures), the researcher combined a paper-based survey and “a content analysis of 151 online profiles” (p. ii). Findings revealed that Cyworld users from high collective context cultures require high degree of intimate and closer relationships. With respect to the degree of anonymity, “90% of

Facebook users used highly identifiable photos” while only 18% Cyworld users used identifiable photos (p.135). The author suggested that high collectivistic Cyworld users disclosed less personal information because they did not want to build out-group relations with strangers.

To understand how SNSs’ architectural features influence users’ interactions, Papacharissi (2009) compared three types of SNSs, the publicly open Facebook, the business-oriented LinkedIn and the member only ASmallworld. Over a ten month observation, the author tracked the three websites’ content “systematically and repeatedly,” and the architectural options, profiles, news stories were monitored and analyzed. The results highlighted four themes: “the private/public balance”, “styles of self presentation”, “cultivation of taste performance” and “the formation of tight/loose social settings.” The author claimed that the websites’ architectural features were adapted to different cultures and purposes of its users.

2.4 Motivation

Uses and gratifications theory is often used to explain SNS motivation (Urista, Dong&Day, 2009; Bumgarner, 2007). Employing the theory, Urista et al. (2009) investigated why youth use social network sites such as Facebook and MySpace. Through an in-depth analysis, researchers identified five factors: “1) efficient communication, 2) convenient communication, 3) curiosity about others, 4) popularity, and 5)

relationship formation and reinforcement” (p.221). Urista et al. (2009) suggested that netizens use SNS to answer their specific needs: “experience a selective, efficient, and immediate connection with others for their (mediated) interpersonal communication satisfaction” and “seek the approval and support of other people” (p.226).

In a similar way, Bumgarner (2007) developed a scale to measure different possible motivations for using Facebook, such as “Directory,” “Initiating relationships,” “Collection and connection” and so forth. He found that most people used Facebook as a social tool to connect with their friends and gossip rather than as personal expression for them.

Zywica and Danowski (2008) explored the relation between popularity and Facebook users. They tested two competing hypotheses: the Social enhancement hypotheses and social compensation. The result showed that both of them were supported. Zywica and Danowski (2008) found that those more sociable users were more popular both on Facebook and offline. At the same time, less sociable users attempt to look popular on Facebook, although they are not so popular in real life. It suggests that most Facebookers want to become popular, but this online popularity is different from offline popularity.

2.5 Social capital and politics

Many scholars offered insight into the relationship between social network websites adoption and social capital (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe,

2007; Erikson, 2008; Wellman, Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001; Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009). Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) defined social capital as “the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (p. 14). Wellman et al. (2001) claimed that social capital had three forms: “network capital”, “participatory capital” and “community commitment” (p.437). “Network capital” refers to the bonding with individuals, “participatory capital” means the engagement with “politics and voluntary organizations”, and “community commitment” talks about the involvement in social communities (p.437).

Regarding SNSs usage, Valenzuela et al. (2009) divided social capital into users’ “life satisfaction”, “social trust”, and “civic and political participation” (p.877). Therefore, they used a survey to test the relation between Facebook use and the three aspects of social capital. They noted there is a positive relationship between Facebook use and social capital, although this positive association is small.

Ellison et al. (2007) identified “three measures of social capital — bridging, bonding and maintained social capital” (p.1152). For Ellison et al. (2007), “bridging” is found in some loose social networks (e.g. interact with new students at universities), and “bonding” is linked to close relationships (e.g. get support from new connections). In addition, “maintained social capital” refers to online connecting after offline disconnecting (e.g. connect

with former high school friends). Then, they did a survey on undergraduate students at Michigan State University (MSU) to examine their Facebook experience. The results showed that students could benefit from their Facebook usages. They stated that “a strong association between use of Facebook and the three types of social capital, with the strongest relationship being to bridging social capital” (P.1143). Moreover, they suggested that the usage of SNS could help people to build self-esteem and improve life satisfaction. For instance, Facebook may "lower the barrier to participation" and help student engage in the MSU community (p.1162).

Some scholars believe that Internet provide more chances for individuals to participate in politics. Wellman et al. (2001) analyzed the “National Geographic Society Survey 2000”, and then found that heavy Internet usage was associated with increased political participation and organizational involvement (p.441). “The more online participation in organizations and politics, the more offline participation in organizations and politics” (p.448).

From the other side, “with Web 2.0, a politician could use the Internet to allow for considerable participation in the campaign by letting supporters contribute campaign content and interact with the party and with other supporters”(Small, 2008, p.87). Erikson (2008) examined the relation between SNS and political fandom during the 2008 presidential election. In that period, a series of virtual campaigns were launched on

Facebook, MySpace and YouTube. To be specific, Erikson (2008) observed Hillary Clinton's MySpace page and examined the campaign messages and the interactions between politicians and Hillary's Fans. He suggested that "MySpace expands the way in which we do politics; it opens up a new space in which to approach politics and thus engages new participants" (p.5).

2.6 Privacy and surveillance

The spread of SNSs raises the issue of privacy. Using Sandra Petronio's Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory and Michel Foucault's notion of the Panopticon as theoretical grounding, Tyma (2007) explored the value of privacy and the rule of information control within MySpace.com. On the one hand, Tyma suggested that MySpace members present and manage their private information in several boundaries. On the other hand, Tyma compared the members in MySpace with the prisoners in the Panopticon. He found that the members had to discipline their behaviors and dropped into a net of self-surveillance. Just as Tyma (2007) wrote, "the privacy and boundary rules of the community punish the prospective user, only giving access to the user if he or she becomes compliant to the rules of the community, further disciplining the user into social norm adherence"(p.38).

From a political economy perspective, Cohen (2008) analyzed the process of user engagement and the production of content within Web 2.0

company Facebook. For Cohen, Web 2.0 is a “descriptor for websites based on user-generated content that create value from the sharing of information between participants” (p.6). Through web applications (e.g. Blog, peer to peer, SNS), netizens obtain more platforms to participate and share. Cohen notes that Web 2.0 model turns consumers into the free labor (self-production and self-surveillance). In his opinion, making comments, uploading pictures, creating profiles et al., all of these behaviors on Facebook could be seen as free labor and a source of value for commercial companies. “Despite privacy settings, Facebook information has been accessed by third parties” (Cohen, 2008, p.15). Therefore, Cohen suggested that these social network sites “can be situated within more general capitalist processes that follow familiar patterns of asymmetrical power relations between workers and owners, commoditization, and the harnessing of audience power”(2008, p.8).

2.7 Social games

Although online games have attracted major media attentions, few researchers have studied them. Hjorth (2007) introduced the adaption of global game media in Korea, “the most broadbanded country in the world” (p.370). According to Hjorth, Korea became a center of online MMOGs (massively multiplayer online games) which were played “on stationary PCs in social spaces (PC bangs)” (370). Hjorth viewed Korea’s game place as a kind of social space, and claimed that “these social spaces have

histories that are imbued by the local” (370). In conclusion, she pointed out that global games were localized in Korea, and modernization was not homogeneous in the local culture.

Hou (2010) defined social games as “the game applications that are integrated in the social network platforms. Key components which differentiate social games from the others are: (a) social platform-based, (b) multiplayer, (c) real identity, and (d) casual gaming” (p.4). The main difference between social games and other online games (e.g. Massively Multiplayer Online games and Role-playing Games) is that social games are based on SNS platforms. It means that players know each other and interact with friends in virtual communities.

From a Uses and Gratifications perspective, Hou (2010) did an on-line survey targeted on Happy Farm (a social game on Kaixin001) players. Three variables were identified: “expected social gratifications”, “expected game gratifications” and “game play intensity.” The finding showed that social gratifications correlated positively and significantly with game play intensity, while there was no positive relation between game gratifications and play intensity. Hou (2010) suggested that social games users played games in order to become more popular rather than to get gratifications of fantasy. Players can use social games to get attention from other people. Therefore, “social games should be described as social media rather than just one of many online computer games” (Hou, 2010, p.20).

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter gives an overview of the definition, history and key issues about SNS. In essence, most scholars agree that SNS users can choose media to meet their particular needs. In addition, there is a bridge between SNS usage and off-line life. SNS usage could have impact on social capital. At the same time, some scholars find that SNS users lose their privacy and drop into a self-surveillance trap.

However, most literatures focus on few SNS giants, such as Facebook and MySpace. The next chapter will introduce some local SNSs in China. Chinese government's new media policy under global background is also discussed.

Chapter 3

NEW MEDIA IN CHINA

3.1 Introduction

As a socialist state, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has been viewed as a centrally organized country with a strict media censorship system. Traditionally, Chinese media works as a venue for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to publicize its policy and guarantee its governance. However, China has been experiencing great changes in the past three decades. Benefiting from many factors, including China's Open Door policy, the spread of Internet technologies and its entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Chinese media system began a process of deregulation and liberalization (Lu, 2008).

In the 1980s, computers were luxurious devices available for few Chinese families. According to China Internet Network Information Center's report (CNNIC), by the end of 2009, the number of Chinese internet users has reached 384 million, representing growth of 86 million people over the same period of the previous year (Table 2). "In five core areas as measured by landline phones, mobile phones, cable subscriptions, Internet use, and installed PCs, China takes the lead in four while lagging only behind the United States in the remaining (i.e., installed PCs) area" (Tai, 2010, p.2). In conclusion, China has the largest online population and the world's biggest Internet market.

In this digital age, because of peer-to-peer software and other new technologies, it is impossible for a government to censor the Internet completely. The distribution of new media and technologies empowers Chinese audiences and gives them an expansive sense of choice, access, participation. Although most Chinese netizens use the Internet for entertainment and socialization, “the Internet becomes a significant source of information and a powerful tool for civic engagement” (Zhang & Wang, 2010).

Yang (2010) reviewed the relation between Chinese common people and their government from a historical perspective, and described them as “sheep” and “the shepherd.” Yang suggested that, due to the diffusion of new media, the sheep became “the agents for creating virtual public spaces and personalizing the real private spaces” (p.6946). Sun and Starosta (2008) added that “the rapid spread of the Internet can defy regulation by the ruling party in China, and creates a more democratic atmosphere in the public sphere” (p.4).

On the other hand, the peer-to-peer potential of Internet is in contradiction to the government’s control, because “the state has fears of the ability of the youth to crystallize into a community, mobilize each other, and partake in collective actions” (Fung, 2008, p160). Zhang (2006) tried to investigate China’s new media policies from the inside, and so he interviewed “19 high –ranking Chinese policymakers” (p.271). Zhang found out there are two shifts in the policy making process. First, the policy’s

operator shifted from the Communist Party of China (CPC) to the China's government. Second, the policy shifted from censoring completely to encouraging the flow, and controlling the content.

3.2 New media under globalization

In many ways, China's modernization overlaps with the processes of globalization or Westernization. As Erla Zwingle (1999) defined in *National Geographic*, globalization is "an inexact term of a wild assortment of changes in politics, business, health, entertainment" (p.12). It is a shift from local or regional phenomena into global ones. At the same time, it's the advent of cheap and ubiquitous information technologies are dissolving our sense of boundaries. Appadurai (1990) analyzed the global culture flow by using five "scapes": "ethnoscapes", "technoscapes", "finanscapes", "mediascapes" and "ideoscapes." This means that there is a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order among these flows, rather than a one-way street. For Appadurai, new media is one of "the central elements which make the current era of globalization a culturally distinctive one" (Flew, 2007, p.42).

With regard to the new media area, lots of transnational media corporations such as Yahoo, Google, MySpace and Facebook have moved into China's immense market. Talking about the impact of Internet on China, former Google China president Kai-Fu Lee pointed out, "the idea of personal expression, of speaking out publicly, had become vastly more

popular among young Chinese as the Internet had grown and as blogging and online chat had become widespread” (quote from *The New York Times*, 2006). However, this kind of freedom is relative, and the “big brother” still exists. A good example is Google’s agreement with China’s government: their search results must be filtered to “obey China’s censorship laws” (*The New York Times*, 2006). In 2009, a China-based SNS, Douban.com was forced to suspend its new group application and “examine all existing groups and delete those which contain ‘inappropriate content’” (Zhang & Wang, 2010).

At the same time, these transnational media giants suffer a huge attack from their Chinese clones. For example, on March 2010, Google shut down its Chinese search engine Google.cn in the name of free speech. They explained that they could not offer censored search according to Chinese government’s requirement (see <http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2010/03/new-approach-to-china-update.html>). On the other side, some people believe that the local based Baidu kicked Google out, because “Baidu had 60 percent of the Chinese search market while Google’s share is about a third” (CNN, 2010). As early as 2006, *The New York Times* described Google’s “China problem”: it failed to adapt itself to accord with China’s culture and policy. On the contrary, Baidu developed special features to meet Chinese user’s special purposes. For example, due to “the national fervor for chat,” Baidu allowed “people to

create instant discussion groups based on popular search queries” (*The New York Times*, 2006).

3.3 SNSs in China

SNSs are quite prevalent in China. At the end of 2009, SNSs have already attracted 1,760 million Chinese users. It means that 45.8% Chinese netizens are SNSs users (Chen & Haley, 2010). The Chinese market is dominated by local websites, and there are thousands of local players in China.

In 1999, ChinaRen.com launched its “Alumni” application which enabled students or former students to maintain connections to their classmates. It is the first Chinese website with SNS characteristics, and it is even earlier than Zuckerberg’s Facebook in Harvard.

An interest-oriented SNS, Douban.com was established in 2004 (Zhang & Wang, 2010). At first, it focused on book reviews, and then expanded its field to movies and music. People with the same interest linked together and shared their reviews. In 2007, Douban has already gotten one million users (Zhang & Wang, 2010).

Xiaonei.com (it means “on campus” in Chinese) was launched in 2005. As a faithful copy of Facebook (it even copied Facebook’s blue and white color scheme), it also opened to young students. In 2006, Xiaonei was acquired by a Chinese holding company, Oak Pacific Interactive. In

2009, Xiaonei began to open access to public, and then changed its name to Renren (it means “everybody” in Chinese) (Zhang & Wang, 2010).

In March 2008, Binghao Chen, a former technology executive at Sina.com (a leading web portal in China), launched Kaixin001 in Beijing. “Kaixin” means “happiness” in Chinese. At first, Kaixin001 targeted white-collar workers, because they are working in office cubicles and want to get entertainment in their boring life. Gradually, it attracted not only white-collars but also people in various areas.

For Zhong (2010), these Chinese SNSs can be divided into four models regarding to their different target markets: 1) campus-based (e.g. Xiaonei.com and Zhanzuo.com) 2) entertainment-oriented (e.g. Kaixin001.com, 51.com and douban.com) 3) business-oriented (e.g. Wealink.com, Tianji.com or XING.com) and 4) romantic relationship-oriented (e.g. Jiayuan.com and Marry5.com). According to CNNIC’s 2009 report, Chinese SNSs users have reached 176 million. Nearly half of Chinese netizens are using SNSs, and most of them choose local websites.

Zhang and Wang (2010) compared two types of SNSs in China—interest-oriented website Douban and relationship-oriented Xiaonei. They examined the two websites’ design components, and then conducted a survey in the members’ networks. They found out the two websites have different relationship formations. For example, Douban encourages users to interact with new members and to create new ties,

while Xiaonei users are often based on off-line relationships. Thus, they suggested that interest-oriented Douban could produce more chances for mobilizing people and organizing Internet-based collective actions. However, they also pointed out that these chances could not be taken for granted. The government keeps its control on SNSs in China. At the same time, “programmers can use codes to encourage collective action and they can use the same codes to forbid collective action” (Zhang & Wang, 2010, para. 35).

Chen and Haley (2010) tried to explore Chinese white-collar workers’ attitude towards Kaixin001. By conducting in-depth interviews, they noted four kinds of shared meanings: “participants’ interpretations of time, fun, need to belong, and social interactions” (p.15). Specifically, white-collar users employ Kaixin001 to keep fast pace life, pursue fun, build belongingness, and to maintain social relationships.

3.4 Conclusion

In brief, although Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and other western SNSs have active users all over the world, they face big challenges in China’s market. These challenges come from Chinese counterparts, cultural differences, and the government’s policy and so on. Just as Wang and Chen (2008) concluded, “China’s encounter with the global media industry has led to a three-way alliance between the Chinese state, the Chinese media industry, and the global media corporations” (p.11).

Chapter 4

METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The research questions have been addressed in chapter one. This section will deal with the research design. The focus of this paper is the comparative analysis of two websites. Specifically, the comparison contains two layers: the two sites' architectural difference and the usage difference. For the first I carried out a comparative description of the sites which provided relevant background for the interviews with users. Therefore ethnographic methods (naturalistic inquiry) are appropriate.

4.2 Comparative description

Papacharissi (2009) defined SNS's architecture as "composite result of structure" (e.g. index page and sub-page), "design" (e.g. aesthetic choices) and organization" (e.g. discussion groups) (p.205). For Papacharissi, those three items are interrelated and overlap, and they combine to form the space of SNS's architecture. Following her idea, the three components will be examined. In view of the massive content of the two website, this analysis focused on key elements of their Sign in/off homepages (To guides users, the initial web page automatically loads when one logs on/off) and sub-pages provided by them.

As a registered member to the two websites, the author logged on the two websites using her username and collected data through computer

observation. On August 31, 2010, the author visited both websites' Sign in/off homepages and subpages at the same time, because the architectures of websites are relatively fixed. As Garcia, Standlee, Bechkoff and Cui (2009) suggested, the author tried to "integrate visual aspects of the data into their observations and analysis and treat visual data (e.g., the use of pictures, colors, page layout, and graphic design of Web sites) as a key aspect of the online location" (p.62). The two websites' Sign in/off homepages and subpages are examined and compared over an 8-hours period. Then, some themes were identified, such as the websites' appearance, usage patterns and applications.

4.3 In-depth interview

Because of SNSs' privacy policies, most of information is only open to their friends. In other words, it is difficult to get users' information through observation. For that reason, in-depth interview was conducted to involve users directly and identify, describe, and analyze Chinese netizens' attitudes with regard to both Western new media, Facebook, and its Chinese counterpart, Kaixin001.

Snowball sampling was used as a purposive sampling strategy to recruit the target population. The sampling method involved the author and participants soliciting participation from friends, family members, coworkers identified as fitting the specific netizen criterion. To be specific, they must be Chinese who have Facebook and Kaixin001 usage experience. For

example, the author's friends on Facebook and Kaixin001 were drawn from a given population. Then, they were asked to give referrals to other possible respondents. The interview was on a purely voluntary basis. Participants were required to be 18 years or older and are interested in this topic. Every participant received a cover letter explaining the purpose of this research.

A sample of twenty five people participated in this study. Forty percent of the sample is female and sixty percent is male. The age of participants ranges from 21 to 35. All of them report their ethnicity as Chinese. 32% are living in American, 68% are living in China. 75% have completed a bachelor's degree, 25% have completed a master's degree or above.

Given that Facebook and Kaixin001 are from different countries, the language barrier was considered. In this study, all interviewees can (fluently or not) read and write English contents, because English is the second language for Chinese students. In addition, Facebook has over 100 languages versions (Seong, 2010), including the Chinese version. Therefore this barrier can be overcome. Depending on the participants' will, both languages (English and Chinese) can be used in the interview process.

The interview followed a semi-structured/unstructured with conversational approach and was guided by a script (see APPENDIX). The open-ended questions give a space for people to open their mind and

speak out their feelings. Participants initially were asked to recall their website (Facebook and Kaixin001) usage experience. Subsequent questions focused on their practices and attitudes towards social network websites, and drew from the details provided by the participants. For example, “what is your favorite social network website,” or “why do you prefer to use Kaixin001/Facebook.” Each interview lasted approximately ten minutes, depending on the interviewee’s will. Given the problem of distance, the author conducts interviews through multiple methods, including face-to –face, telephone and Internet (e.g. MSN and other personal methods). Field notes and audiotape are used to record the processes.

As Garcia, et al. pointed out, “the blurring of public and private in the online world raises ethical issues around access to data and techniques for the protection of privacy and confidentiality” (2009, p.53). To ensure confidentiality, each participant was interviewed individually, so they are not afraid to speak out their true experience of SNS. In addition, interviewees’ responses will not place them at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to their financial standing, employability, or reputation.

The electronic data was kept strictly in a computer with password. Participants’ information (age, gender and education etc.) was kept strictly confidential. Participant information and data were recorded separately and stored in a secure location accessible only to the investigators. Data

collected via the internet was deleted as soon as the data have been recorded and stored for analysis. Data and analysis were not reported in any way that will enable individuals to be identified.

Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory methodology was used to analyze the interview transcripts. Grounded theory is a methodology developing theory from the analysis of similar categories in the process of using data. With regard to this research, the interview texts were coded and categorized to see if some similar themes exist in these texts, and then some concepts were extracted from the texts. From the perspective of grounded theory, the constant comparative method of data analysis was employed. Glaser and Strauss explained the basic rule of the constant comparative analysis: "while coding an incident for a category, compare it with the previous incidents in the same and different groups coded in the same category" (p.106). Following Glaser and Strauss's method, two steps were used to find categories in the data: First, each participant's answers were divided into incidents and extracted into key topics. Second, participants' similar topics were grouped into different categories, and compared to each category. In this process, the text was reviewed several times, and the frequency of each theme was noted. Then, the categories were integrated and examined together to induce a pattern of people's attitudes.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, a combination of ethnographic methods was identified to gather more information on the relationship between Facebook and Kaixin001. First, the author carefully described and analyzed the architecture and lay-out of the two websites. Second, the author conducted in-depth interview to investigate Chinese users' attitude towards Facebook and Kaixin001.

As Babbie (2007) noted, "Field research seems to provide measures with greater validity than do survey and experimental measurements" (p.317). However, it may "pose problems of reliability" (Babbie, 2007, 318). Specifically, qualitative methods (e.g. observation and interview) are often criticized as too subjective because there are no statistical results. For this reason, the author had an awareness of avoiding her own biases. Thus, a survey would be a plus to this research, because it could provide "statistical descriptions of a large population" (Babbie, 2007, 318). Given that Kaixin001 has a survey application, a small survey on Kaixin001.com was included. "Survey" has some twitter's characters but it is easier to use than twitter. In other words, "survey" makes the silent majority to speak out easily.

Chapter 5

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will deal mainly with the analysis using the data obtained from the foregoing research. In particular, section 5.2 offers a comparison of two websites' appearance, usage patterns and applications.

In section 5.3-5.5, based on interview texts, some emergent themes were discussed.

The end of the chapter provides a summary of the findings of two methodologies.

5.2 Almost the same, but not quite

Kaixin001 is regarded as a faithful clone of Facebook. Many people believe that "Kaixin001 succeeds simply by cloning only the most successful Facebook applications and bring them to the Chinese market before anyone else" (Techcrunch, 2008). Indeed, Kaixin001 looks pretty much like Facebook. After the observation of the two websites' homepages (Figure 4 and Figure 5), findings from this research revealed that they have many similar features:

First, both websites are similar in appearance, except the color. Facebook's theme color is blue, while Kaixin001's is red. Interestingly, blue is the theme color of America flag, while red is the theme color of Chinese flag. In the Chinese flag, red represents revolutionists' blood. In addition,

the symbol of Kaixin001 is a yellow star. In the Chinese flag, the yellow star represents Chinese people.

Second, although both of them are open to everyone, the two websites are all based on real relationships and only can be browsed by logging on with a user ID and password. Given SNS's bonding and bridging functions, most of them require users to register their real names to link with more friends. On Facebook and Kaixin001, most friends of the author use their real names as their IDs. On Facebook's official website, it is described as "a social utility that connects people with friends and others who work, study and live around them." It means that, in some degree, real communities are built in the two websites through virtual communication methods.

Third, both of them adopt an email invitation spreading way, and the friendship is based on bilateral agreement. To be specific, users' accounts are linked to their email, so they can send out notifications to friends and invite them to become Facebook/Kaixin001 users. It is an effective strategy, since "new users who might otherwise ignore the invitation are seduced by the presence of a familiar name on the email" (China Daily, 2008). As a result, the two websites get a lot of extra users via this method.

Finally, most of Kaixin001's applications look like Facebook, such as "Profile" (provide the user's age, sex, location, interests and other information), "Photos" (post and share pictures with friends), "Messages" (leave comments on friends' wall), "Games" and so on. It suggests that

both of them are typical SNSs. Just as Ellison (2008) identified, “profiles”, “friends” and “comments” are three key elements on SNSs (Ellison, 2008).

However, compared to the author’s Facebook homepage, Kaixin001 provides some special applications:

1) “Music”: It is an application which allows users to upload and share their favorite music. At the same time, they can enjoy their friends’ choices.

2) “Reprint”: Using the application, people can forward and share interesting articles with their friends.

3) “Online shared drive”: Kaixin001 provides free 1GB online shared drive for every user. Users can upload (music, books and so on) and save their files easily.

4) “Survey”: Although Facebook has similar application named “Fun survey,” Kaixin001 highlights this feature and regards it as a basic application. With this application, netizens can make a questionnaire and examine people’s attitude on a hot topic. Thus, Kaixin001’s users can express their opinions quickly without writing a long article. For instance, a survey was proposed when Google abandoned mainland China in March 2010. Thousands of netizens took the survey and analyzed the reasons.

5) “Visitors”: Through this application, users can figure out who has visited their profiles.

At the same time, Facebook and Kaxin001 emphasize different applications by the placement on the sign-in homepage. For example,

Kaxin001 put a lot of entertainment features (e.g. games, music) on its homepage, while Facebook's page is simple and only provides basic communication applications. It implies that the architecture of Kaixin001 guide users to enjoyment, while Facebook serves as a formal SNS. In addition, on the right of the homepages, Kaixin001 shows recent visitors, while Facebook helps users to find new friends. It suggests that Kaixin001 focuses on maintaining old relationships, while Facebook emphasizes bridging new connections.

The results of this overview also showed that, unlike Facebook, Kaixin001 users rarely created original content (such as writing blogs or posting photos). The author posted a small survey on the Kaixin001.com using the "survey" application. The author's question was "Which application of Kaixin001 do you use most?" Benefiting from the peer-to-peer spreading strategy of SNS website, 212 people responded the survey in only two weeks. 141(67%) respondents chose "Forward posts and read posts"; 41(19%) respondents chose people "Online games"; 9 (4%) respondents chose "Connect with friends"; 2(1%) respondents chose "Write blogs"; 1(0%) respondents chose "Post pictures"; 18 (8%) respondents chose "Others."

The observation on the author's Kaixin001 homepage confirms this survey's result. In 40 update news (latest 3 days), 21(52.5%) are articles forwarded by author's friends. Most of the articles are entertaining topics, such as "Ask her to move her makeup before merry her", "The secret of

how to buy shoes”, “Ten tips about interpersonal relationship” and so on.

5.3 Great wall becomes Great firewall

In the interview process, most people were very open to talk about the differences between Facebook and Kaixin001, since the conversations were confidential. When talking about the block of Facebook, most interviewees did not think it was a huge loss, because they had other choices like Kaixin001. Only few respondents who have overseas experiences felt “upset” or “very angry,” because they have “many foreign friends on Facebook.” Obviously, as SNSs users, friendship is the one feature about which they most care.

However, it does not mean that they do not worry about China’s new media policies. In the process of interviews, fourteen respondents mentioned “Great fire wall” (Figure 6), and ten participants stated they were discontented with this circumstance. Great firewall refers to a censorship system called the Golden Shield Project in China, and it was launched in 2003 (Tai, 2010). At the age of the Qin Dynasty, Chinese people built the Great wall to defend themselves against foreign invaders. Now, the Chinese government implements a Great firewall to block or restrict access to some “sensitive” online information (danger, violence, pornography and so on). According to Tai, some websites run by international media giants (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, et al.) are the targets of blocking, because they are prevalent all over the world. In other words, these

websites may have great impacts on netizens. “A major strategy the Golden Shield utilizes in restraining online content is to territorialize China’s cyberspace into a gigantic intranet by applying control at the topmost level of the network” (Tai, 2010, p.9).

Tai (2010) divided the Great firewall’s filtering functions into three categories:

“Packet dropping (or IP blocking) targets specific IP (Internet Protocol) addresses to make all content hosted there inaccessible in China, DNS (Domain Name System) poisoning renders sites using certain textual hostnames inaccessible, and IDS (Intrusion Detection System, also called TCP reset) triggers blocking of Internet traffic based on the inspection of IP packets through a constantly-updated list of banned keywords” (p.9).

For some respondents, they claimed that they preferred to use Facebook but switched to Kaixin001 finally, because Facebook has been blocked several times since it entered China’s market. In July 2008, Facebook was blocked in some cities without official explanation. A month later, it was opened again because “the government employed Facebook as a tool to propagandize the Beijing Olympic Games” (#25). The recent block happened in 2009, because of Xinjiang province’s riots. The government claimed that some activists employed a Facebook group to hatch the riots. The state’s official mouthpiece *People’s Daily* implied, “this group has overstepped the boundaries of normal cyber activities and

become a foothold for 'Xinjiang independence' organizations' collusion and alliance overseas" (People's Daily, 2009). Referring to this blocking, an interviewee working in Beijing expressed:

"I don't like Kaixin001. I despise the plagiarist, whatever any form ... Facebook is my first social network website experience. I regarded Facebook as a symbol of foreign fashion, since only a few people in China knew Facebook at that time. I had some friends on Facebook, but it was blocked by our government quickly. I even have no time to be familiar with Facebook's applications" (#12).

Ironically, this "symbol of foreign" may be viewed by the government as a symbol of evil—for example, a foothold for "Xinjiang terrorist." Because of the contradiction, many respondents like #12 have to accept Kaixin001, although it is a mere copy of Facebook in their eyes.

A common misunderstanding is that Chinese users can not get access to Facebook. In fact, the block is for a limited time, and is not permanent. It confirms Tai's (2010) statement, "at sensitive times or when objectionable stories are published there," the Great firewall may block access to the website (2010, p.10). At the same time, for some Chinese Facebook fans, if they want to access Facebook, they have to use various proxy servers to bypass the Firewall. A respondent described Great Firewall as "Berlin Wall":

"Facebook is better, but we need to get over the 'wall'. Facebook is in 'West Berlin', we are in 'East Berlin'" (#8).

The two countries representing different ideologies (China and America) are separated by the “wall,” but the wall can be bypassed by proxy servers.

On the author’s Kaixin001 sign in page, political topics are notably absent. The author tried to search for some Chinese government leaders on Kaixin001, but the result is zero. Then, the author tried to register Kaixin001 using some leaders’ names, it also seems impossible. For the Great firewall, these names are sensitive and are filtered. Kaixin001’s practice can be explained as Zhang (2006)’s notion of “self-regulation.” According to the Chinese government, self-regulation is a legal requirement for all websites. Rather than being blocked, SNSs need to regulate themselves and filter some sensitive topics or words. Just as Zhang (2006) cited, “Self-regulation is an effective and common practice for media supervision..... The government wanted to change its manner and role in the process of media supervision” (p.280).

In contrast, many American politicians have their own Facebook homepage. In the 2008 presidential election, Democratic candidate Barack Obama’s campaign groups also utilized Facebook to reach supporters and raise funds (Small, 2008). Because of the Obama team’s successful Facebook campaign (Figure 7), “2.2 million people have ‘friended’ the Democratic presidential candidate on Facebook, compared to just over half a million for John McCain” (Small, 2008, p.86). Finally, Obama became the

biggest winner in 2008. In this period, CNN also collaborated with Facebook for the live reports of the election.

Overall, although SNSs open a new avenue for online political communities in the world (Wellman et al., 2001; Erikson, 2008; Valenzuela et al., 2009), the avenue is limited in China. By the reason of Great Fire Wall, Kaixin001 is maintained as a politically “safer” site than Facebook.

5.4 “Play” social network

When referring to SNSs, 9 respondents focused on social games, especially Kaixin001’s games. Both Facebook and Kaxin001 have some similar games, such as

(1) “Friends for sale”: Users can “buy” their friends as their slaves. The slaves can be compelled to dig mines or clean toilets;

(2) “Happy farm”: Users can plant vegetables in their own gardens and steal vegetables from friends’ places;

(3) “Parking war”: Users can make money by parking their cars. When they have enough money, they can buy new cars.

All of them are social games because they are based on SNS platforms and real identities (Table 3). Some interviewees in China believed that the biggest usage difference between Kaixin001 and Facebook was games. As one claimed:

“Kaixin001 looks similar with Facebook but in fact not. We use Kaixin001 to play games ... but Facebook is for friend connection” (#7).

Although both Kaixin001 and Facebook are SNSs, this interviewee views games as Kaixin001’s main function. It suggests that Kaixin001 is not a traditional SNS which focuses on friend connection.

As mentioned previously, “Games” is the second popular application on Kaixin001, only next to “Reprint.” Although most of them (“Friends for sale”, “Happy farm”, “Parking war” and so on) were copied from Facebook, those Chinanized games are more popular on Kaixin001. One respondent who works at a newspaper recalled

“In my hometown, a lot of people are stealing ‘vegetables’ and raising ‘livestock’ on Kaixin001 ... Not only young people ... I can give you many examples of my father or my colleagues’ fathers. Some of them even can not read Chinese characters” (#6).

It seems that not only youth, but all Chinese users are fond of social games. In an article *Miracle of China’s Social Game Industry: National Campaign Triggered by Game on Farm*, “Grow vegetables” is described as a game which “brings active players 2 times more than World of Warcraft” and “attracts users aging from 6 to 80”(Life Science Weekly, 2010, p.4054). One student admitted:

“For me, SNS means games. Most of my friends are growing ‘vegetables’ on Kaixin001. If you do not play this game, you will be

out. I need to check my 'garden' everyday, especially during the maturation period, or they will be stolen ... I also use Facebook, but my friends on Facebook are not interested in these games ... Of course, I won't play these games with strangers" (#23).

Another interviewee described her affections to Kaixin001's game "Friends for sale":

"On Kaixin001, I am sold by my friends as a 'slave'. My 'master' changes every day. It is so funny! In fact, Facebook has the similar business, but my Facebook friends seem not like that" (#21).

China Daily (2008) also suggested that the secret of Kaixin001's success was the combination of social network and social games. For World of Warcraft and other online games, players may do not know each other when they play games. In contrast, "social game players usually use real-name identity in order to interact with real life friends" (Hou, 2010, p.19). For these interviewees, they play games with their friends, and build connections at the same time. As Hou (2010) pointed out, social games "may allow individuals with certain characteristics to become connected in society more comfortably" (p.19). On the other side, it confirms that contemporary China is in "an era of leisure communication" (Chen & Haley, 2010, p.16). In this era, entertainment and social activities can be combined on SNSs.

In summary, Kaixin001 looks like a relaxed game platform rather than a regular social network which focuses on sociality. Kaixin001 users

prefer to play visual games in true social circles. Exactly speaking, Kaixin001 users employ games to connect with their friends. They are “playing” social network through interactive games.

5.5 More real identity, more self discipline

“On the Internet, nobody knows you are a dog.” It is a famous adage which describes the virtual nature of the Internet. It implies that individuals on the Internet have absolute freedom to say what they want. However, SNSs initially do not support the anonymity of users. “Although some SNS have abandoned such policy, most SNS users still register with their real name so that their friends can find them” (Hou, 2010, p.5). Both Facebook and Kaixin001 require users’ real identities. Like most SNSs, they all have strict privacy policies to protect users’ rights. However, as Cohen (2008) mentioned early, SNSs’ privacy policies can not be trusted, because users’ personal information could be gained by third parties, such as the web 2.0 companies—the commercial surveillance system.

In order to protect their privacy, most Kaxin001 users (72%) claimed that they limited the access to their personal information and open to friends only. However, on the author’s Facebook homepage, only few people use the “friends only” application.

For this phenomenon, one respondent explained this phenomenon from the standpoint of Western/Eastern difference:

“Western people like to make new friends. They are more open to strangers... We Chinese people are shy. We won't show our privacy to strangers. Facebook encourages users to expand their social network, to meet more people, but I do not want to get foreign friends. All of my friends on Kaixin001 are my old classmates, relatives and colleagues” (#15).

It implies that the eastern people are more conservative with regard to personal information. Using Hofstede's notion of cultural difference (1984), Kaixin001 users can be seen as individualistic. As mentioned above, Seong (2010) also found that Cyworld users in Korea did not like to use identifiable photos, and they only wanted to show their profiles to close friends. Seong (2010) claimed that people from high collective cultures required a high degree of intimate, because they tended to stay in their groups (e.g. friends and family) and avoided interaction with strangers.

From another standpoint, a respondent expressed:

“I love Kaixin001, because it makes me relax. I just read some interesting articles, plant 'vegetables' in my 'yard'. I need not write a long diary or try to please some one. I also won't talk about politics. It is too serious. SNSs are places to have fun ...And do not forget: you use real name, and so it is easy to be identified. Big brother is watching you” (#2).

“Big Brother” is a fictional person, the leader of the party in George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In this novel, Orwell described an

dystopian society which is ruled by a totalitarian socialist government through constant surveillance. Citing Orwell's notion, this respondent implies his fear about censorship. For this respondent, he chooses Kaixin001, because the game-based SNS means safe. On the other hand, he has to do safe activities, because "big brother is watching you." Sharing articles and music, playing social games in a small online community, that is Chinese SNS users' routine. This routine can be explained by Tyma's (2007) idea of "self discipline." The real name system and the "big brother" work together and form the power of "Panopticon." Through a virtual "observation tower," individuals can be monitored and located. Thus, "the user is disciplined into specific behaviors, monitoring herself or himself to ensure that he or she is following those rules, and is offended by those who would not follow the rules" (p. 37). For example, on July 8, 2009, the English version of *People's Daily* (2009) published a report titled "80 pct of netizens agree China should punish Facebook," because "an online group named 'Global protests. Support Uygurs to seek independence' appeared on Facebook."

A respondent shared the similar feeling:

"Because of the real name system (the identity verification system), we don't want to get into trouble" (#24).

In this interviewee's view, the "trouble" may come from "the government" or "strangers" (#24). Therefore, the "safest" strategy is keeping silence—"Do not speak out using your real name" (#24).

To sum it up, because of the real name system and the government's censorship, users on Kaixin001 tend to be more conservative than those on Facebook. From one side, they set a clear boundary between friends (the private) and strangers (the public). They emphasize the maintenance of social relationships rather than building new ones. From the other side, they discipline their behavior and focus on less sensitive content, such as entertainment news, music and games. As mentioned above, Hofstede (1984) used power distance to describe how people treat human inequality. From his perspective, people with high levels of power distance prefer to accept the existing power distribution rather than to challenge it. In a society with high levels of power distance, less powerful people discipline themselves and obey the authority. Following Hofstede's idea, Kaixin001 users show high level of power distance, because they accept the existing political system and do not want to express their disagreements.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, comparative description was used to examine the architectures and electronic data of the two websites, Facebook.com and Kaixin001.com. The results show that:

(1) The two websites have many similar features: First, both websites are similar in appearance, except the color. Second, they are all based on true relationships and only can be browsed by logging in a user

ID and password. Third, both of them adopt a virus-like way of gaining new members. Finally, most of Kaixin001's applications look like Facebook, such as "Profile", "Photos", "Messages", "Games" and so on.

(2) At the same time, compared to the author's Facebook homepage, Kaixin001 provides some special applications, such as "Reprint", "Online hard drive", "Survey." In addition, unlike Facebook, Kaixin001 users rarely create original contents (such as writing blogs or posting photos).

To identify, describe, and analyze netizens' attitudes with regard to Western new media (Facebook) and its Chinese copy (Kaixin001), in-depth interviews were employed. The findings show that:

(1) For some respondents, they preferred to use Facebook but switched to Kaixin001 finally, because Facebook has been blocked several times since it entered China's market. The obstacle is the Great firewall, which Chinese government implements to block or restrict access to some online information

(2) Compared to the author's Facebook, users regard Kaixin001 as a game platform rather than a social network website. Although most of them ("Friends for sale", "Parking war" and so on) were copied from Facebook, those Chinanized games are more popular on Kaixin001.

(3) With respect to users' privacy, Kaixin001's users tend to be more conservative than Facebook. Most of Kaxin001 users limit the accesses of their personal information and open to friends only.

Chapter 6

DISCUSSION AND LIMITATION

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provides some results based on a comparative description and in-depth interview. According to the results of this study, deeper discussion in the context of globalization is presented in this chapter. As many other studies, the limitation of the study is mentioned. Moreover, further research directions are also suggested.

6.2 Apolitical culture

According to the literature review, many scholarly works found there were positive relations between SNSs and social capital (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007; Erikson, 2008; Wellman, Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001; Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009). In particular, SNSs are often used to promote political participation and organize collective activities (Erikson, 2008; Small, 2008). However, the results of this study seem to go against the perception: SNSs are not always democratic, especially in a circumstance which combines real name system and the Great Fire wall.

On the other hand, various possible motivations for using SNSs have been identified (Bumgarner, 2007; Urista, Dong&Day, 2009). Although different scholars have different criteria, all of them focus on interpersonal communication. In other words, they view SNSs as social

tools. Based on previous analysis, yet, the finding shows that Chinese netizens use Kaixin001 for enjoyment rather than serious social network.

Kaixin001's games are even used to launch some grassroots events. For example, a Kaixin001 user posted: To mark the first Anniversary of Wenchuan earthquake, please plant chrysanthemums in your garden, so they can blossom on May 12 2009 ... On May 12, please do not 'steal' any chrysanthemum from friends' gardens." This proposal was called "Chrysanthemum Operation." As of 5 pm, May 11, the post has been forwarded over 430 thousand times on Kaixin001 (Source: http://news.xinhuanet.com/society/2009-05/06/content_11323954.htm). The "chrysanthemum" is imaginative and the organization is fantastical, because any off-line assembly, parade or demonstration need government's permit under Chinese law, and "the state still legally forbids any association that could potentially mobilize and assemble youth for any purposes" (Fung, 2008, p.160).

This phenomenon may be explained by Fung's (2008) argument about "apolitical culture." Fung (2008) claimed that Chinese young people are addicted to "a lifestyle of enjoyment," and Chinese culture becomes "the apolitical, highly commercialized popular culture" (p.157). From Fung's perspective, Chinese young people get a safe zone (in capitalism and material consumptions) from the national state, but this zone does not include political and ideology areas. It also fits Zhang's (2006)

understanding of China's new media policies: encouraging the flow, but controlling the content.

Chinese netizens get multiple choices in local SNS websites. Using Fung's notion, these localized websites can be viewed as the state's "release valves," and they can fulfill people's desire of expression. Then, they may have an imagination that "they now live with and travel with a globality that is democratizing and liberalizing" (Fung, 2008, p.171). On the other hand, there is much incongruence between their expectations and their real life. "Western consumption has not extended their daily life politics into real politics" (Fung, 2008, 170).

Kaixin001 users set a clear boundary between the private and the public. They are fond of self-satisfaction, and not interested in political participation. At the same time, SNSs are grassroots based and have the potential to organize transnational political activities. For the state, these collective and transnational actions are dangerous and need to be controlled. The government fears the mobilizing potential of SNSs, and keep its Web-savvy power to monitor and control its usage. As one respondent (#2) putted it, "big brother is watching you." Therefore, The Great Fire wall and self discipline work together and result in the apolitical culture, instead of political engagement.

In 2011, an article titled *The Facebooks of China* (Fast Company, 2011) showed an interesting illustration (Figure 8). A Chinese young couple wears western Wedding clothes and enjoys copycats of Apple

products, when the founder of the P.R. China, Mao Zedong watches them. Just like Fung (2008) said, “the people’s desires and the state agenda converge: the apolitical, highly commercialized popular culture caters to the audience while at the same time remaining unchallenging to the legitimacy of the state” (157).

6.3 Digital divide

As a product of Web 2.0, SNS “is a location where people can gather together and engage each other in dialogue and debate with an increasing ease of access” (Erikson, 2008, p.5). As SNSs develop and flourish, the digital technology shortens the interpersonal distance, and expands the chance of equality, democracy and participation. As some western scholars noticed, SNS utilization had positive relation with collective actions, such as political participation or community commitment (Wellman, Haase, ea al., 2001). However, the findings of this study imply that, for Chinese SNS users, there is a gap between SNS utilization and collective actions. It means that the digital divide still exists.

The digital divide refers to two aspects of inequality in Internet usage: access and utilization (Chen, Boase & Wellman, 2002, p. 109). For example, “Countries outside North America have wider inequality in access to the Internet and deep inequality in the way the Internet is used” (Chen, Boase & Wellman, 2002, p.109).

Upon closer examination, it is clear from the results presented in this study that Chinese netizens lack access to Facebook, because of the Great Firewall. Facebook has been blocked several times, and Chinese users have to use proxy servers to bypass the “wall.”

More importantly, there is a digital divide between Chinese and western netizens in SNS utilization—the way to use SNSs. All of our respondents are well-educated (they have at least bachelor’s degree and can read and write English texts). At the same time, they all have used Internet for over ten years and can get access to Facebook (through proxy servers) and Facebook’s copycat Kaixin001. However, unlike western netizens, they are only interested in entertainment activities, such as playing games, listening to music et al., rather than creating original content or building social capital. In other words, they discipline themselves to do safe activities only, since they “don’t want to get into trouble” (#24). Just as Zhang and Wang (2010) cited, “[i]t is not a question of whether Internet-based collective action is possible ... the question is whether Internet-based collective action can succeed in challenging the state” (para.35). Although SNSs have democracy potential, it is not the way it’s supposed to be.

For most overseas Chinese interviewees, they are more willing to use Facebook than respondents in China, given the absence of the Great Firewall. However, they are still fond of Kaixin001, because of the “games.” It also confirms the divide of utilization.

6.4 Globalize versus Chinanize

With regard to western cultural commodities, Pilkington and Johnson (2003) pointed out that young people in other countries have adopted a “pick and mix” strategy. When looking upon their web design, Kaixin001 looks very similar to Facebook. However, it is just a copycat, though not the exact one. The analysis shows that, beyond taking a similar form to Facebook, Kaixin001 developed its own localized features. For instance, Kaixin001 creates more special applications, such as survey, reprint and so on. Therefore, netizens can spend their time on leisure entertainment, instead of collective actions or other “sensitive” activities. The author may specify this by saying that Kaixin001 tries to adapt SNS to fit China’s culture and political contexts.

From a perspective of postcolonial theory, some researchers (Ashcroft et al, 2000; Bhabha, 1994) referred this kind of copy as “colonial mimicry”.

Bhabha (1994) described colonial mimicry as:

The desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference...Mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy

of reform, regulation and discipline, which “appropriates” the Others as it visualizes power...Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both ‘normalized’ knowledges and disciplinary powers (pp.122-123).

According to Bhabha’s notion, China-based Kaixin001 can be viewed as a colonial mimicry of Western giant Facebook. Chinese edition “Facebook” can interpret SNS differently, according to their own cultures and values. Specifically, Chinanized SNS Kaixin001 is a transfer from social media to game media, and it develops a new model of social relationship. As Hou (2010) noted, Kaixin001 users play social games to interact with friends rather than to get “game gratifications.” It is a kind of “leisure communication,” which employ games as a social space. Similar to Hjorth’s (2007) observation about “the adaption of global games” in Korea, SNSs in China redefine themselves and produce new kinds of forms, in which the local and global are mixed together in various ways. Therefore, the localized Kaixin001 can be seen as a challenge to the homogeneity of globalization.

It may be too simple to view SNSs in a postcolonial discourse, because the globalization is not equated with westernization and the relation between China and USA is not a simple colonial model. Wilk’s idea of “structures of common difference” provides a more reasonable

perspective. Wilk (1995) emphasized the relation of empowerment and disempowerment, and globalism and hegemony. According to Wilk, on the one hand, global culture promotes difference. On the other hand, he reminded us: “the nature of culture hegemony may be changing, but it is hardly disappearing...Its hegemony is not of content, but of form” (p.118). These structures of common difference may be empowering some kinds of diversities in “safe zones” (e.g. art, music, ethnic group) while suppressing other “dangerous” ones (e.g. national identity, ideology). He viewed the global cultural system as one that promotes diversity in content, but hegemony of form. For this case, we can find three structures of common difference:

First, in the new web 2.0 era, although diversity can be produced through localization and adaption, Kaixin001 keeps the same SNS form with Facebook. At the same time, Kaixin001 emphasizes a particular form of relationship: Users interact through social games.

Second, although the globalization trend binds people around the world, different information communities (e.g. Western countries and China) still have their own boundaries.

Third, although SNS open a new space for politics and democracy (Small, 2008; Erikson, 2008), at the state level (marginal state and central state), the chances are unequal.

To sum up, SNS is a special new media. From one side, it contains Internet’s freedom spirit and peer-to peer essence, and has the potential to

promote democracy and social capital. From the other side, compared to traditional internet media, real name based SNS can not protect users' privacy effectively and can be controlled by the third part easily (e.g. commercial companies, governments). This study acknowledges the effect of localizing, and believes that globalization is a blend of old and new culture. At the same time, it suggests that Chinese netizens fall into a net of self-surveillance and fail to use SNS for political engagement. Compared to Western users, Chinese netizens may have access to Internet, but they had deep inequity in utilization at the same time.

6.5 Limitation and future research

The author realizes that this study has some limitations. First and foremost, this study lacks extended time and samples to explore the SNSs under global context deeply and continuously. Because of the dramatic development of the Internet and the motivation of interest, various websites dabble in social network applications and change the business structure quickly. Different data resource may result in different ranking. For instance, based on its 612.5 million QQ (a kind of instant messaging software) message users (see <http://www.tencent.com/en-us/ir/factsheet.shtml>), Tencent's Qzone started to engage in SNS business in 2009 and claimed to be the biggest SNS in China immediately. In addition, unlike regular SNSs, Qzone dose not require user's real identities. This study chose Kaixin001 as the research subject because it is popular and has more

similar features with Facebook. Both of them are relationship-oriented website, and people view Kaixin001 as a “copy” or “clone” of Facebook (Techcrunch, 2008; China Daily, 2008). On the other hand, with the development of globalization, Chinese government’s new media policy is changing.

Second, because this study is an Internet-mediated research, it is difficult to perform face-to-face interactions to collect data. Therefore, some information may be lost.

Third, with regard to this study’s qualitative nature, it is hard to avoid personal bias and to analyze data equitably. In addition, the measure scales may be relatively narrow because the author has to restrict the length of the interview. At the same time, the respondents’ high level of education (75% have a bachelor’s degree, and 25% complete a master’s degree and above) may also have some effect on the findings. Although it is easier to collect effective data from users with higher education, the convenience sample cannot represent all users. Further research is certainly needed to collect extended samples.

The global SNS structure changes every day and the SNS research should be continued in a long term. Since it is a burgeoning media, there are many blank areas in SNS research. In the process of interview, the author got some “meaningless” response, for example:

“I can not figure out what is the difference between Kaixin001 and Facebook. I choose it only because I meet it first and have a lot of friends

on it. So I can not switch to other website, if I do not want to lost connections with my friends” (#4).

Upon closer examination, it implies an important field—the connection between on- and off-line lives. Traditionally, people see on-line lives as an accessorial method to off-lives. However, in some cases, the SNS websites (Facebook or Kaixin001) they involved determined their off-line social lives. People chose a website accidentally, and then they established networks with some friends, classmates or colleagues. It means that they may have fewer connections with the people outside the net. Sometimes they even can not quit the website, because they really want to keep the connections. For further study, the users’ dependence on social network websites may be addressed to seek more comprehensive and deeper understanding of SNS.

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Table 1: *Top 25 Social Networks Re-Rank*

(<http://blog.compete.com/2009/02/09/facebook-myspace-twitter-social-network>)

Top 25 Social Networks Re-Rank

(Ranked by Monthly Visits, Jan '09)



Rank	Site	UV	Monthly Visits	Previous Rank
1	facebook.com	68,557,534	1,191,373,339	2
2	myspace.com	58,555,800	810,153,536	1
3	twitter.com	5,979,052	54,218,731	22
4	fixster.com	7,645,423	53,389,974	16
5	linkedin.com	11,274,160	42,744,438	9
6	tagged.com	4,448,915	39,630,927	10
7	classmates.com	17,296,524	35,219,210	3
8	myyearbook.com	3,312,898	33,121,821	4
9	livejournal.com	4,720,720	25,221,354	6
10	imeem.com	9,047,491	22,993,608	13
11	reunion.com	13,704,990	20,278,100	11
12	ning.com	5,673,549	19,511,682	23
13	blackplanet.com	1,530,329	10,173,342	7
14	bebo.com	2,997,929	9,849,137	5
15	hi5.com	2,398,323	9,416,265	8
16	yuku.com	1,317,551	9,358,966	21
17	cafemom.com	1,647,336	8,586,261	19
18	friendster.com	1,568,439	7,279,050	14
19	xanga.com	1,831,376	7,009,577	20
20	360.yahoo.com	1,499,057	5,199,702	12
21	orkut.com	494,464	5,081,235	15
22	urbanchat.com	329,041	2,961,250	24
23	fubar.com	452,090	2,170,315	17
24	asiantown.net	81,245	1,118,245	25
25	tickle.com	96,155	109,492	18

Table 2:

The 25th Statistical Survey Report on the Internet in China

(www.cnnic.net.cn/uploadfiles/pdf/2010/1/15/101600.pdf)



图 1 中国网民规模与增长率 Chinese Online population and the rate of growth

Table 3: Top 25 Facebook games for May 2010

(<http://www.insidesocialgames.com/2010/05/03/top-25-facebook-games-for-may-2010/>)

Top 25 Facebook Games for May 2010						
Rank	Game	Monthly Actives	Developer	MAU Change	(Last Month)	
1	FarmVille	78,372,815	Zynga	-4,421,186	82,794,001	
2	Birthday Cards	34,282,569	RockYou	-5,573,382	39,855,951	
3	Texas HoldEm Poker	29,085,277	Zynga	108,810	28,976,467	
4	Café World	27,663,941	Zynga	-2,620,779	30,284,720	
5	Treasure Isle	25,218,555	Zynga	N/A	N/A	
6	Mafia Wars	23,882,928	Zynga	-1,419,334	25,302,262	
7	PetVille	20,902,303	Zynga	123,378	20,778,925	
8	Happy Aquarium	19,543,935	CrowdStar	-4,250,199	23,794,134	
9	FishVille	18,535,027	Zynga	-3,948,880	22,483,907	
10	Pet Society	18,036,726	Playfish	-1,557,965	19,594,691	
11	Zoo World	16,874,635	RockYou	-2,529,771	19,404,406	
12	Restaurant City	13,950,139	Playfish	-1,899,367	15,849,506	
13	MindJolt Games	13,159,736	MindJolt.com	-7,972,058	21,131,794	
14	Hotel City	12,999,627	Playfish	N/A	N/A	
15	Social City	12,602,784	Playdom	N/A	N/A	
16	YoVille	11,374,512	Zynga	-1,149,742	12,524,254	
17	Happy Island	10,634,348	CrowdStar	-1,079,804	11,714,152	
18	Bejeweled Blitz	10,071,868	PopCap Games	-504,754	10,576,622	
19	Country Life	9,207,397	Country Life	-63,854	9,271,251	
20	Farm Town	9,068,285	Slashkey	-597,331	9,665,616	
21	Happy Pets	8,826,120	CrowdStar	-572,208	9,398,328	
22	Island Paradise	6,524,372	Meteor Games	-352,569	6,876,941	
23	Tiki Resort	6,200,204	Playdom	N/A	N/A	
24	Bumper Sticker	6,177,734	LinkedIn	-54,741	6,232,475	
25	Bubble Island	6,031,709	Wooga	N/A	N/A	

InsideSocialGames.com

Figure 1: Kaixin001 and Facebook in Google Trends (Techcrunch, 2008)

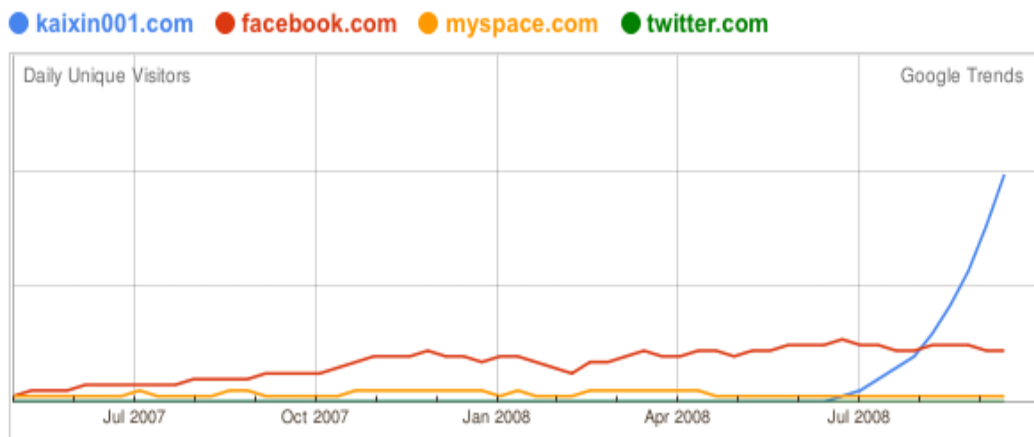


Figure 2: Facebook's Chinese edition



Figure 3: Facebook friendships map by Paul Butler



Figure 4: The author's Kaixin001 sign-in homepage



Figure 5: The author's Facebook sign-in homepage



Figure 6:

A Facebook group named "I hate The Great FIRE-Wall of China"

The screenshot shows the Facebook interface for a group named "I Hate The Great FIRE-Wall of China". The group's profile picture is a cartoon illustration of a person running away from a wall of fire. The group's name is displayed prominently, along with a "Join" button. Below the name are tabs for "Wall", "Info", and "Photos". The "Basic Info" section shows the group's name, category ("Common Interest - Activities"), and a description: "If you've ever been to China and used a computer you know exactly what I'm talking about." The description is repeated in a larger font below. The "Information" section on the left also provides the category and description. The right side of the page contains a message: "Have you spent many frustrating times trying to access Facebook, only to see the dreaded 'The connection was reset: The connection to the server was reset while the page was loading.' * The site could be temporarily unavailable or too busy. Try again in a few moments. * If you are unable to load any pages, check your computer's network connection. * If your computer or network is protected by a... (read more)".

Figure 7: *President Obama's Facebook homepage*

The screenshot shows the Facebook homepage for Barack Obama. The top navigation bar includes the Facebook logo, a search bar, and links for "Home", "Profile", and "Account". The main header features a large profile picture of Barack Obama, his name, and a "Like" button. Below the header are tabs for "Wall", "Info", "OFA Store", "Photos", "Join OFA", and "Video". The "Wall" tab is active, showing a post from Barack Obama: "On October 22, I'm going to Nevada for a rally to launch the final push for this fall campaign, and I want you there with me—backstage." The post includes a photo of a "BACKSTAGE BARACK" sign and a link to "my.barackobama.com". Below the post are options to "View Feedback (6,808)", "Share", and "Flag". To the right of the post is a "Create an Ad" section with "Facebook Pages" and "More Ads" options. At the bottom right is a "Chat (0)" button. The left side of the page has a "Suggest to Friends" button and a text box: "This page is run by Organizing for America, the grassroots organization for President Obama's agenda for change. To visit the White House Facebook page, go to WhiteHouse.gov. OFA is a special project of the Democratic National Committee."

Figure 8: An illustration in an article named *The Facebooks of China* (Fast Company, 2011)



APPENDIX
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

This study is conducted to compare netizens' perspectives on the two different social network service (SNS) websites: Facebook and China-based Kaixin001.

The interview schedule is a loose conversational guide rather than a strict agenda. It is an interview on attitudes toward Facebook and Kaixin001. This interview might take about 10 min, and ask some questions about respondents' attitudes and experiences for Facebook and Kaixin001. The talk is an informal, short, non-invasive "casual conversation." The participation in this study is voluntary, and respondents are 18 or older. Respondents can choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time. They decide whether or not to participate will not result in any loss of benefits. Data and analysis will not be reported in any way that will enable individuals to be identified. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to their participation.

Respondents can choose face-to-face, telephone or digital interview methods (E.g. MSN or other personal methods). Digital data will be saved as in independent digital format and the original communication deleted to ensure the separation of participant responses and identities. The electronic data will be kept strictly in a computer with password. All the information will be kept strictly confidential and anonymity is ensured.

The interview may be audiotaped, but it will not be recorded without respondents' permissions. Even though they agreed to be recorded, they can also change their mind at any time after the interview starts. The tapes will be kept in a secure place and will be destroyed after the analysis process is completed.

Guideline Questions:

- How many years do you use internet?
- In the past week, on average, approximately how many minutes/hours per day have you spent on Facebook/Kaixin001?
- Are you popular on Facebook/Kaixin001?
- How many friends do you have on Facebook/Kaixin001?
- Will your profile open to strangers?
- Why you choose Facebook/Kaixin001? Could you figure out what is the difference between them?
- What is the difference between your on-line and off-line life?
- Which function of Facebook/ Kaixin001 attracts you most (E.g. Blog, Groups, Picture wall and so on)? Why?

Demographic Questions:

- How old are you?
- What is your occupation?
- Where are you coming from?

- What is the highest level of education you completed?