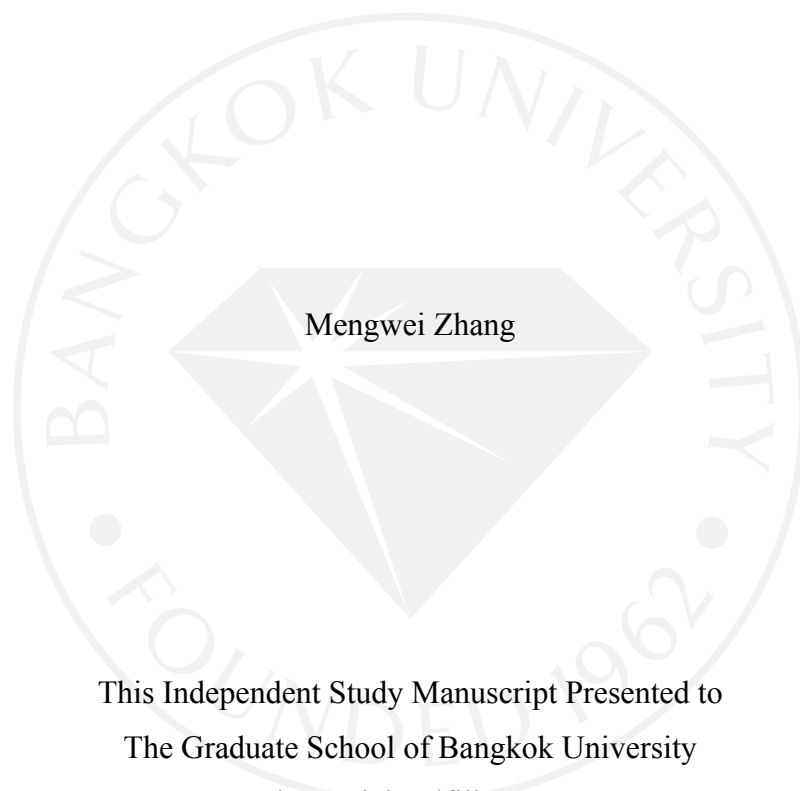


AN ANALYSIS OF MEDIA LITERACY SKILLS AMONG CHINESE SINA WEIBO
USERS



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USERS



This Independent Study Manuscript Presented to
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the Graduate School
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this survey research is to examine the Chinese users' media literacy skills gained before and after using Sina Weibo, and to examine the effect of their before-and-after usage of Sina Weibo on their media literacy skills. Two hundred Chinese Social Networking Service users of Sina Weibo were being selected by using random sampling to participant in the survey research. The mean and standard deviation were being analyzed by Paired Sample T-Test to examine the difference of media literacy skills before and after the usage of Sina Weibo. The findings revealed that Chinese Social Networking Service users gained significantly higher media literacy skills after using Sina Weibo than media literacy skills before using Sina Weibo. The respondents gained significantly access skills, analytical skills, evaluative skills, creative skills, and participative skills after using Sina Weibo.

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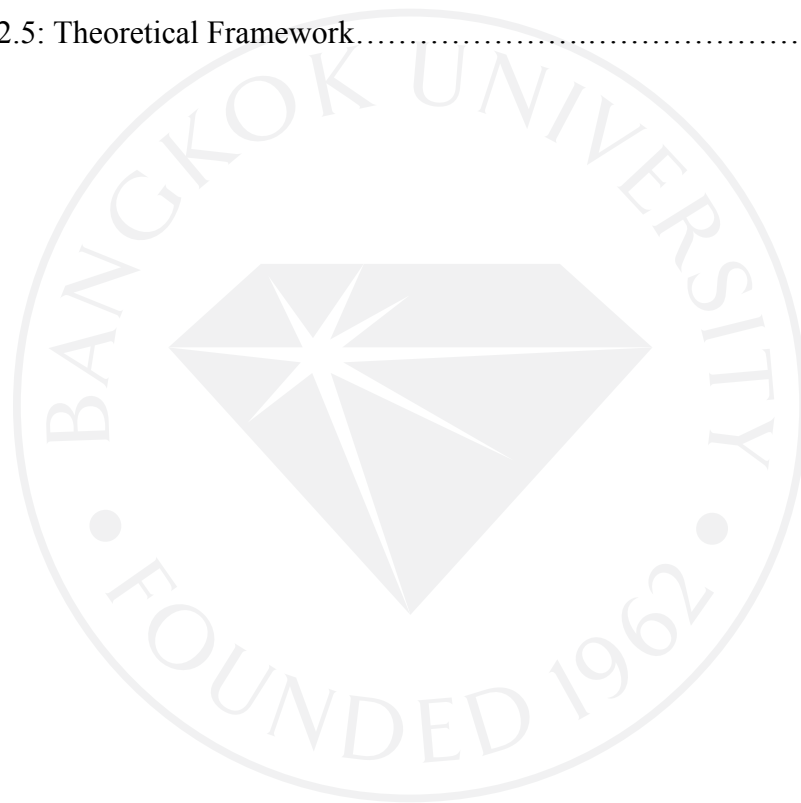
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale and Problem Statement

Due to the development of technology, the forms of media have become diverse. In recent years, people all over the world have seen the tremendous growth of social media. Social media provide opportunities to connect with others and obtain a large amount of information everyday that can influence our life. Beyond all doubts, China being the worlds' second largest economy, social media is also an inudant phenomenon (Chiu, Ip, & Silverman, 2012). In Chinese language, micro blogging is translated to the word called "Weibo" (Chiu, Lin, & Silverman, 2012). Chinese micro blogging service, Sina Weibo is one form of social media that has a similar function to Twitter, and it is a platform that gives people chances to share information, publish short messages and create discussions on the Web (Gao, Ablel, Houben, & Yu, 2012). Gao and his partners also indicated that Sina Weibo is leading China micro blogging market since Twitter became unavailable in China. After Sina Weibo was launched in 2009, the number of active users reached 61.4 million by the end of 2013 ("Sina Says", 2014). Facing the changing environment of new media, the mode of information propagation is also experiencing transformation, which is calling the significance of high media literacy skills to users (Wang, 2013).

Media literacy is "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms" (Aufderheide, 1993, p.6). Due to the boom of Sina Weibo, the ability to use Sina Weibo properly has become an inevitable topic since millions of messages are posted everyday on Sina Weibo. People who are exposed to a great deal of messages from micro blogging, to some extent, it is transforming the ways to get information and recognize the world as well as changing the relationship between people and media. In addition, these kinds of changes

somehow can be the driving force to push forward historical process of media literacy (Zhou, 2011). Ma (2014) regarded Weibo as one kinds of technology, which promotes exchange of information. She noted that everyone is able to become the information center and leads the direction of public opinions. Lei (2013) also suggested value Weibo users' media literacy skills situation in order to achieve their identity transition, from message spectators to message participants. Considering the power of social media, especially Sina Weibo, it is indispensable to investigate Sina Weibo users' media literacy situation. This study focuses on the difference and impacts of users' media literacy skills before and after they use Sina Weibo. Therefore, to find the difference in media literacy skills that Sina Weibo has brought to them, this study carried out a comparative survey to measure the users.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

According to the previous studies, the researcher found that scholars mostly conducted researches on the methods to develop Weibo users' media literacy skills. Though they put emphasis on the importance of media literacy among micro blogging users, they ignored the kind of impacts micro blogging really have brought to the users. Without a clear understanding of micro blogging users' actual situation, the results of researches lack basis. Thus, this study fills the knowledge gap and converts the angle of previous researches. The objectives of this study are as below:

1. To analyze the media literacy skills which are applicable to Sina Weibo.
2. To examine whether and how far the use of Sina Weibo has impact on media literacy skills among Chinese users.

1.3 Research Questions

What kinds of media literacy are applicable to Sina Weibo? Whether and how much does Sina Weibo impact Chinese users' media literacy skills?

1.4 Scope of Research

Since social media is basking in a great boom, media literacy becomes a topic worth studying. This study is conducted to discover weibo users' media literacy skills among weibo user, especially the impacts that Weibo has brought to the users. Thus, only cyber users will be selected as the sample. Sina Weibo is just one of micro blogging services in China. However, as what mentioned before, Sina Weibo acts as a leading role in China micro blogging market. Hence, only Weibo users are selected as respondents. According to Sina Weibo User Development Report (2013), the majority of Sina Weibo users are less than 24 years old that accounted for 53% percentage of all and those from 25~35 years old occurred about 37% out of all the users. A research conducted by Tencent Kid (2013) found that the development of body and mind of kids and adolescents are yet to mature. These kinds of people are easily affected by malicious information. In consideration of the immaturity of all aspects of people from this category, this paper studies those who finished compulsory education, which means above 15 years old in China. Quantitative method is adopted by using comparative questionnaire to examine whether users' media literacy skills have been impacted after they use Sina Weibo. Two hundred Sina Weibo users were selected by using random sampling to participate in the survey research. Five media literacy skills, access skills, analytical skills, evaluating skills, creative skills, and participative skills, were tested to examine the difference of media literacy skills before and after using Sina Weibo.

1.5 Significance of the Study

In China, media literacy is still a new topic waiting for more researches. This concept came into sight since 1997 and then got attention in 2003 (Liu, 2005; Hu, & Wang, 2007). Now that microblogging services are flourishing on this land, some researchers also began to attach importance to micro blogging users' media literacy study. According to the past researches, researchers mostly focused on the discussion

and suggestion of how to improve cyber users' media literacy skills. The problem is that previous researches failed to define what media literacy skills mean to micro blogging users. Comparing with the previous studies, this paper tries to explore and explain the exact distinction of media literacy skills influence before and after people use Sina Weibo. The result can provide a deeper analysis of Sina Weibo users' ability in managing media and media message. For further research, it could be the basis to study Sina Weibo's influence in our society in order to build a better network environment. It also will be helpful in explaining some social phenomenon happened in social media field.

1.6 Definition of terms

1. Media literacy: The ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a variety of forms (Aufderheide, 1993, p.6).
2. Media literacy skills: Media literacy focuses on the skills to analyze, evaluate, and create media and technology messages (Masterman, 1985; Messaris, 1994). In this study, media literacy skills include access, analyze, evaluate, create, and participate (Center of Media Literacy, 2008).
 - (1). Access skills refer to the ability to search and collect information effectively with more vocabulary of words and symbols. Such skills mean both access to information and access to tools (Center of Media Literacy, 2008; Danish Technological Institute, 2011).
 - (2). Analytical skills refer to the ability that understands the author's intention and how they construct and assume media messages (Hobbs, 2014). It's the ability to recognize media messages' form, structure, and sequence (Center of Media Literacy, 2008).
 - (3). Evaluating skills are defined as the skills of making judgments about authenticity, quality, and pertinence of messages (Center of Media Literacy, 2008).

- (4). Creative skills refer to the ability to construct messages with various symbols and technologies creatively (Center of Media Literacy, 2008).
- (5). Participative skills refer to the ability to engage with others, participate in issues and make efforts to the society (Center of Media Literacy, 2008; Hobbs, 2011).
3. Social media: A collaborate media that based on Web 2.0, and provide Internet-based platforms for creating, exchanging and sharing user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Collins, Rahilly, Richardson, & Third, 2011).
4. Social Networking Service (SNS) refers to the online systems that offer interactive communication functions for people to manage profile and keep in touch with other cyber users (Richter & Koch, 2008). It helps users to cultivate common interest, build a platform for discussion, communicate personal and social situation with others (Ahn, Han, Kwak, Moon, & Jeong, 2007).
5. Micro blogging service: Microblogging is a new form of social media for users to share word limit messages with their followers, updating activities, thoughts, and status (Li, Zhang, Chen, Cao, & Zhou, 2014)
6. Weibo means Micrblogging in Chinese language (Chiu, et al., 2012). Weibo also can be used as both verb and noun, which means post messages and microblogging posts respectively on Sina Weibo.
7. Sina Weibo: One of Chinese Social Networking Services that owned by Sina Corporation. Sina Weibo provides a multimedia function rather than other similar service (Chiu, et al., 2012).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter aims to review past studies on media literacy skills and Sina Weibo. The researcher examines the definitions, principles, and related communication theory to develop the theoretical framework and hypotheses.

- 2.1 An Overview of Media Literacy
 - 2.1.1 Definition of Media Literacy
 - 2.1.2 Purpose of Media Literacy
 - 2.1.3 Media Literacy Review Frameworks
 - 2.1.4 Core Concepts of Media Literacy
 - 2.1.5 Media Literacy Process Skills
- 2.2 An Overview of Sina Weibo
 - 2.2.1 Introduction to Sina Weibo
 - 2.2.2 The situation of Sina Weibo users
 - 2.2.3 The functions of Sina Weibo
 - 2.2.4 The characteristics of Weibo
- 2.3 Social Cognitive Theory
- 2.4 Recent Research about Sina Weibo and Media Literacy in China
- 2.5 Hypotheses and Theoretical Framework

2.1 An overview of media literacy

2.1.1 Definition of Media Literacy

Recent years, media literacy has become a big word that arises on various issues worthy of discussion. The word literacy contains a variety of concepts such as having the skills and knowledge to read, interprets, and creates certain texts and gaining the exact tools and capacities to participate in culture and community (Kellner & Share, 2005). With the advance in technology of media, there is a growing need to develop

competence to manage media. The exact concept, definition, theoretical frameworks, settings, methods, and evaluation of media literacy have proved to be contentious (Luke, 1989).

Generally, media literacy is defined as "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms" (Aufderheide, 1993, p.6). National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE, n.d.) defined media literacy as a series of communication competencies. The National Communication Association (1998) also constructed a definition of it in communication field. The definition emphasized that a media literate person should have the capacity to understand how media is manufactured and "assign value, worth and meaning to media use and messages." Adams and Hamm (2001) indicated that media literacy is the ability to decode meaning of symbols from all kinds of media forms. To be a good decoder, people must be critical thinker who can understand the real media culture. Though the definition has developed in various forms over the years, Aufderheide's explanation is the most widely used one. This paper also uses the definition of media literacy based on Aufderheide's idea.

According to Hobbs's insight (1998), the definition of media literacy has been broadly developed to the process of analyzing and learning to create media messages critically. It shared the definition lies in the fact that media literacy not only means Information and Communication Technology skills but also contains critical, analytical, and creative skills (Vanwynsberghe, Boudry, & Verdegem, 2011). If we look throughout definitions given by scholars and organizations, we will find that media literacy scholars have highlighted critical thinking as key word. Action Coalition for Media Education (n.d.) encouraged civics to have critical thinking and free expression. Alliance for a Media Literate America (as cited in Heins & Cho, 2003) appealed for critical inquiry. To learn how to develop skills is much more important than just criticizing the media. The alliance believes that media empower people to think and create messages by the means of language, image and sound. It develops

literacy skills (as cited in Center for Media Literacy, 2008). Despite the basic capabilities such as writing and reading skills, we can conclude that to deal with media messages with critical thinking is also essential part of media literacy.

As shown above, media literacy is a kind of ability that requires critical thinking. Therefore, the researcher believed the ability of media literacy is measurable. This study will survey media literacy situation among Sina Weibo users.

2.1.2 Purpose of Media Literacy

In these years, the awareness of the significance of media literacy has become more remarkable (Verezub, Grossi, Howard, & Watkins, 2008). The purpose of media literacy is also a top most discussed issue. Potter (2010) noted that most writers announced the purpose of media literacy is to improve the human being's life by empowering people to understand how the media messages will affect them. Some considered media literacy as an educational curriculum while some view media literacy as mode of social activism.

Since people enter in the information era, we have to access information all the time, actively or passively. What people face today is not only a great amount of information, but information that is produced at the tremendous speed. The problem is no longer on how to get access to information but to deal with information properly (Potter, 2005), Internet is playing quite essential role in our life because people cannot stop accessing to information. In order to have a better understanding of the distinction between real world and manufactured world, we should become more media literate. Media literacy makes people “watch carefully, think critically; participate actively (Center for Media Literacy, 2008, p.53).”

People now engage more in creating and participating online content under social media use than ever before (Vickery & Wunsch-Vincent, 2007). Livingstone (2004a) argued, media literacy “should be recognized as a key means, even a right, by which citizens participate in society and by which the state regulates the manner and

purposes of citizens' participation (p. 20).” Media literacy plays a critical evaluation to protect against media messages that may cause negative effects (Martin & Grudziecki, 2006). A media literate person will have better ability to realize, think, and produce media messages.

In 2011, European Commission demonstrated the aim of media literacy is to make people recognize various media forms and contents. It assists in realizing how media influences and shapes people's perspectives and beliefs. In other words, media literacy makes citizens become more sensible and creative under overwhelming media information.

Facing the complicated and on-going changing environment of Internet, media literacy empowers people's competence to protect themselves from negative media effects.

2.1.3 Media Literacy Review Frameworks

In order to understand the essence of media literacy skills, it is necessary to review the structure and frameworks of media literacy. Therefore, the following pages will acknowledge the differences, and existing conceptual frameworks of media literacy.

Potter (2013) argued media literacy could be built from structures of knowledge. In order to establish such knowledge structures, people need tools, which mean skills. Most of media literacy frameworks are based on the definition created by Aufderheide, which emphasized four domains “access, analyze, evaluate and communicate”. The four elements are also mentioned frequently in scientific and policy documents (Danish Technological Institute, 2011). Livingstone (2004b) regarded these four elements as interconnecting skills-based approaches. Each element can support the others elements and then form an ever changing learning process. Livingstone, Van Couvering and Thumim (2005) elaborated the elements to “basic media access and ownership, navigate, control, regulate, comprehend, critique, interact and create.”

Center for Media Literacy (2008) added “participate” to existing four basic elements and defined “access, analyze, evaluate, create and participate” as media literacy process skills. In addition, in European Commission’s (Danish Technological Institute, 2011) standpoint, media literacy divides to personal competencies and social competencies. “Use and critical thinking” are part of personal competencies while “communicate and citizens participants” can be viewed as social competencies. European Commission (Danish Technological Institute, 2011) summarized and synthesized the consistency of eight key studies. From Table 2.1, we can have an overview of existing literature and conceptual consistency. In order to proceed, the researcher will follow CML’ media literacy process skills and develop questionnaire upon five elements mentioned above.

Table 2.1: Media Literacy Review Frameworks

Media Literacy framework					
Environmental Factors	Media availability Media content				
EAVI		EC	Ofcom	CML	NAMLE
Personal competences	Use	Access	Access/Use	Access	Access
	Critical understanding	Analyze	Understand	Analyze	Analyze
		Evaluate		Evaluate	Evaluate
Social competences	Communicate	Communicate	Create communications	Create	Communicate
	Citizen participation			Participate	

(Continued)

Table 2.1 (Continued): Media Literacy Review Frameworks

Media Literacy framework					
Environmental Factors	Media availability Media content				
EAVI		ACME	PIAAC	Livingstone	Martens
Personal competences	Use	Access	Acquire	Basic access and ownership	
				Navigate	
				Control	
	Regulate				
Critical understanding	Analyze	Evaluate	Comprehend	Analyze	
	Interpret		Critique	Evaluate	
Social competences	Communicate	Create	Perform	Create	Produce
		Communicate	Communicate		
	Citizen participation			Interact	

Source: Danish Technological Institute. (2011). *Testing and refining criteria to assess media literacy levels in Europe*. Brussels: European Commission.

2.1.4 Core Concepts of Media Literacy

The CML identifies five concepts that can be seen as core of media literacy. Kellner and Share (2005) summarized that these five core concepts refer to several topics about media which are the transparency, coding and decoding conventions, content and motivation of media. Masterman (1994) explained that media do not present reality but represent reality. Since there are diverse ways to code and decode messages, that's why people need skills to reexamine what media really is. Besides, the ability to see how multiply people can interpret the same message is necessary. The fourth concept explains the actual content of media messages which people embed purposeful values into the messages, and hence this concept focuses on questioning ideology, bias, and the connotations of media messages (Keller & Share, 2005). The last concept encourages people to discuss the role of media. If the power

of media is concentrated, the diversity and creativity of media messages may be threatened (McChesney, 2004).

These five core concepts raise five key questions for message consumers and producer respectively, which can be guides to develop media literacy skills. These five questions are listed to query the truth of media, which will be explained in the following part.

Table 2.2: Core Concepts of Media Literacy

Core Concepts	Key Questions
All media messages are constructed.	Who created this message?
Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.	What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
Different people experience the same media message differently.	How might different people understand this message differently?
Media have embedded values and points of view.	What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.	Why is this message being sent?

Source: Thoman, E. & Jolls, T. (2008). *Literacy for the 21st century: an overview and orientation guide to media literacy education*. Santa Monica, CA: Center for Media Literacy.

2.1.5 Media literacy Process Skills

Most researchers conceptualize media literacy by underlining following elements: (1) to access and use media and technology; (2) to analyze and evaluate the content, forms and contexts of media messages and media systems (3) to create media

messages by using digital, visual and electronic tools for purposes of self-expression, communication and advocacy (Hobbs, 2007). European Union also emphasized that citizens should have the ability to use the media, to understand and to evaluate media contents critically and to create communications in a variety of contexts (European Union, 2009). The researcher here followed CML's suggestions to help ascertain the range and scope of media literacy skills. According to CML, there are five media literacy process skills which are "access, analyze, evaluate, create and participate". In this section, the researcher will examine the literature of these five skills.

Access skills

Hobbs (2011) identified access as basic competencies that need time to develop. Access is a prerequisite to literacy because media literacy can develop only when people get access to the media (Livingstone & Thumim, 2003). According to CML (2008), access is the ability to search and collect useful information so to get individual information or achieve entertainment goals (Wulff, 1997) as well as understand the meaning of information effectively. When people are equipped with access skills, they are able to recognize and comprehend more vocabulary of words and symbols. In the process of searching information, media literate people master advanced skills and methods to find relevant message. European Commission (2011) noted that access skills means both access to information and access to tools, thus containing the skills to use technology tools properly. It also including the ability to get and use information in a various media forms (Chen, 2007). Access skills also include knowing how to select right equipments and tools for an appropriate purpose (Jane, as cited in Kirwan, Learmonth, Sayer & Williams, 2003)

Analytical skills

Analytical skills mainly mean to understand the author's intention, how they construct and assume media messages (Hobbs, 2011). Aufderheide (1993) considered media messages as constructed information. The media messages shown are not as

transparent as the real world because media may shape and reconstruct the reality (Kellner & Share, 2005).

The phrase “critical media awareness” needs in applying the ability to analyze and question media messages through the media (Del-Moral & Villalustre, 2013). Media analysis and evaluation refer to decode messages and judge expected audiences, and assumed objectives. Media literacy encourages people to possess elaborate critical analysis skills of news, journalism, and entertainment media messages that may conducive to the citizens (Hobbs, 2007).

According to CML’s document (2008), media literature people are able to recognize media message’s form, structure, and sequence. When people analyze a media message, they should be capable of interpreting the purpose, audience, stand, format, main idea, and context of the message. They also can use strategies to understand the effects of media messages on the receiver (Chang, Liu, Lee, Chen, Hu and Lin, 2011).

Evaluating skills

Since the media may shape personalities, change perceptions and understanding of the world (Chang, et al., 2011), and even have potentially negative effects on audiences (Potter, 2010), the ability to evaluate media messages becomes essential.

CML (2008) defined “evaluate” as the skills of making judgments about authenticity, quality, and pertinence of messages. According to CML, when people evaluate messages, they are able to interpret messages in different forms and styles. Based on the content, media literature person will estimate inside elements and probable results of media messages to facilitate proper selection (Chang, et al., 2011). They should know how to evaluate the quality of a message and the reliability and credibility of different sources (Jenkins, 2009). In addition to the ability of judgment, Jenkins also noted the ability to challenge unsolicited or offensive media content and services. With good media literacy skills, one is capable to judge the value of a message through previous experience.

Creative Skills

Kahn and Kellner (2003) pointed out the requirements of “writing skills” in Internet environment, especially the importance of clarity and precision of expression. According to CML (2008), people “write” their opinions by using words, sounds, or images when they create messages. Bachmair and Bazalgette (2007) also agreed with the idea of using media creatively to express and communicate. It is worth noting that such skills not only refer to write or create messages. Meanwhile those who have skills are able to make effective use of technologies to compose and spread messages.

CML gave a clear explanation of creation skills in details. It pointed out that when people create messages, firstly they should make use of their minds and brains. Then they need to master good writing and speaking skills of language. In spite of language skills, the ability to utilize various symbols and technologies to construct messages is also necessary.

Participative Skills

After all, media and media messages do not merely serve individuals, but help sublimate the society. The ability to use media for better society is the ultimate goal. According to CML, when people participate in constructing messages, they engage and interact with other people. Jenkins (2009) encouraged effective use of media for democratic rights and civic responsibilities.

Hobbs (2011) suggested using media literacy to “make a difference in the world,” participate as a community member, and make efforts to solve problems in this society (p.12, p.18). This skill is utilized to solve problems in real world by connecting to relevant social issues and debates. Kamerer (2013) asserted that proper usage of media for individuals could help create effective communicators that serve for something larger such as social group, family, or government.

2.2 An Overview of Sina Weibo

2.2.1 Introduction to Sina Weibo

The rapidly advancing information technologies in social media have led to a

revolution in ways of communication with other people (Zhang & Ling, 2012). Micro blogging has developed as a recently emerging service because people can use it instantaneously and conveniently. Many people utilize it to publish and share messages about different topics (Java, Song, Finin, & Tseng, 2007). Weibo, generally meaning micro blogging in Chinese is a new emerging social media service. It developed from Twitter and partly shared same functions with Twitter. In August 2009, Sina Corporation, one of the Chinese portal sites, launched its beta version micro blogging service into the market. Although some other Chinese portal sites such as Sohu and Tencent also began to release their micro blogging website in 2010, there is no doubt that Sina Weibo is still the leading role in the market (Gao et al, 2012).

Up to the end of 2013, Sina Weibo numbered 61.4 million registered users as daily active users (Reuters, 2014). Through Sina Weibo, users could realize instant interaction by posting texts with photos, video, or locations wherever and whenever they want (Zhang, 2012). According to the data from Alexa, Sina Weibo is the 6th most visited website in China and the 27th in the world as of May 2013 (Alexa, 2013). Many Chinese mainstream media and organizations, government departments, and corporations have already created their official micro blogging accounts on Sina Weibo. Since Chinese micro blogging service have frequently discussed with respect to their capacity to bring the country social changes, it is significant to study the impacts that such service may cause.

2.2.2 Situation of Sina Weibo Users

According to China Internet Network Information Center (2013), the total figure of Chinese Internet users has already risen to 618 million by the end 2013, which is more than 40% of the country's population. Sina Weibo, as an indispensable social media platform, provides Chinese Internet users a well channel for communication.

Sina Weibo Official (2013) reported that 53% of its users are less than 24 years

old while the secondary huge population is between 25~35 years old by the end of November 2013. The percentages of Internet users with the education background of university and above as well as senior high school were 70.8% and 12.3% respectively. It shows that the users present a trend of getting younger and more educated. About the gender, both male and female occupied almost half percentages.

2.2.3 Introduction to Functions of Sina Weibo

Sina Weibo is fundamentally based on Twitter with basic micro blogging service and functions including instant message and comments. Sina Weibo has involved and integrated many functions from other social networking sites into its service (Cheng, 2013). Hence, Sina Weibo is more competitive than other kindred service. As shown from table 1, Sina Weibo provides such functions.

Table 2.3: The Basic Function of Sina Weibo

Function	Description
Weibo(Post)	Sina Weibo users can weibo (which means post) personal updates within 140-character limit and upload photos and videos.
Follow	Sina Weibo users can follow those who they want to follow. Once users follow another one's Weibo, they can get this person's instant updates.
Comment	Sina Weibo users can make comments to the posts that they are interested in. When clicking the link "Comments", all the comments of this post will be revealed.
Mention	Sina Weibo users can mention or talk to other people by using "@UserName" format.
Forward(Repost)	Sina Weibo users can forward (which means repost) the original post with personal comments.

Instant Search	Sina Weibo supports instant search. When users search keywords on Weibo, relevant posts will be displayed in chronological order.
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(Continued)

Table 2.3 (Continued): The Basic Function of Sina Weibo

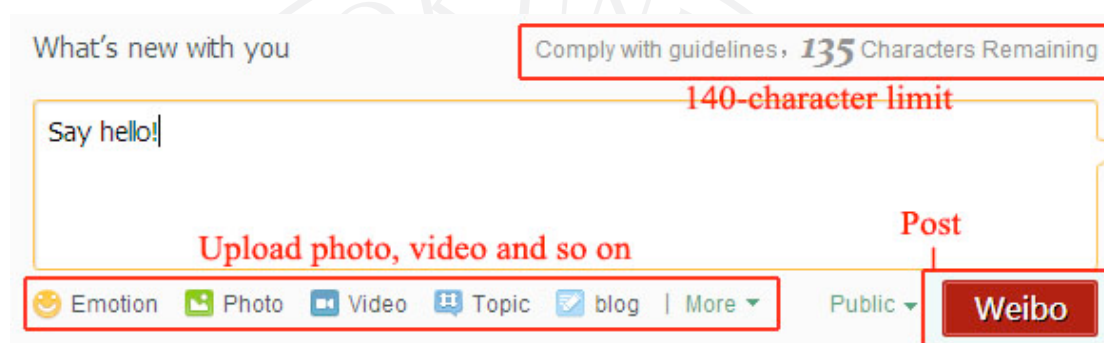
Like	Sina Weibo users can click “Like” to show support to particular posts.
Alert	When users get new comments or “@”, they will receive alerts immediately.
Information Reporting	Users can report and inform wrong or inappropriate Weibo (post) to Sina officials. Once the officials accept the case, both informer and reported user will be put into an online court and then wait for the judgment by Sina officials and vote from neutral users.
Caution for false information	Once the information from any Weibo (post) is proved to be false, Sina officials will mark a caution to that post to remind other users.

From Table 2.3, we can see that except for basic functions such as post, comment and forward (Figure 2.1a & 2.1b), Sina Weibo also elaborately develops advanced functions. Through reporting function, users are able to report inappropriate posts or information to the Sina Weibo Officials. After that, the committee members will take the case and verify the information. Meanwhile, neutral Weibo users could vote and express personal opinions as bystanders to specific case (Figure 2.2). In order to prevent the spread of false information, Sina officially marks cautions to original untrue post to remind other users (Figure 2.3). Compare to other similar services, Sina Weibo initiates many new patterns in developing functions, which finally structure its own characteristics.

2.2.4 The characteristics of Weibo

Weibo has become a new information source for users to learn more about the world. Li (2012) believed that Weibo has become the fastest information platform undoubtedly. He defined Weibo as a prevalent and multifunctional social networking site within latest topics and critical opinions. According to Xu's statement, Weibo users can receive instant information and interact with others immediately, which shows advantages over other comparable services (2010).

Figure 2.1a: Screen-capture of the English Version Interface of Sina Weibo



On the basis of functions, Zhang (2012) summarized nine characteristics of Weibo, which differ from other means of network communication or traditional communication.

1. Weibo is convenient to **access** from both technological and content-based perspectives. The convenience of Weibo provides opportunities for users to deliver messages timely and freely
2. Weibo reflects **anonymity**. According to Zhang, the advantage of anonymity is obviously, because it eliminates individual differences. Thus, Weibo users are able to speak out their opinions under an equal circumstance.
3. Weibo reflects **originality**. The convenience of Weibo encourages the users' originality when they share information.
4. Users are able to become citizen reporters and share **real time information**, which challenges the traditional media.

5. Messages shared on Weibo are **more refined**. It increases efficiency for users to access information in unit time.

Figure 2.1b: Screen-capture of the English Version Interface of Sina Weibo

The screenshot displays the Weibo profile for Kobe Bryant. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'Home', 'Hot', 'Apps', and 'Game' options, along with a search bar containing 'Hot search: 泰妍'. A notification box in the top right corner shows '1 New Followers, View followers' and '2 Weibo @Me, View Now'. The profile header includes a profile picture of a young Kobe Bryant, the name 'Kobe Bryant' with a 'Verified' checkmark, and a 'Verification Sign' label. Below the name, it shows 'No Personal Slogan yet', '3132181 Followers', and '41 Weibo'. A 'Follow' button is visible. The main content area shows a feed of posts. Three posts are highlighted with red boxes and labels:

- Original Weibo (Post) with photo:** A post from 2013-11-27 01:08 with the text 'What an HONOR #laker4life# 我在: W 6th St'. It includes a photo of a group of people and has 8474 likes, 5927 forwards, and 6363 comments.
- Forward (Repost) with personal comment:** A repost of a post from @NikeBasketball with the text 'I try to talk to them about the execution of the game. It's one of the most important things for players to understand – that it's not about an emotional contest, you have to think X's and O's. @NikeBasketball'. It has 5118 likes.
- Original Weibo (Post):** A post from 2013-10-14 12:48 with the text '#科比教我# How do you encourage your teammates and be a leader when you cannot play because of injuries? @nikebasketball @kobebryant'. It includes a photo of Kobe Bryant and has 5118 likes.

On the right side of the page, there are sections for 'Weibo relations Social Graph', 'His followers (3132181)', 'Photos', '个人图片', and 'Suggested'.

Figure 2.2: Screen-capture of Reporting Function of Sina Weibo

微博社区管理中心

处理大厅 社区公约 社区委员会 我的举报

举报处理大厅 > 不实信息

User@Echo小疯狂 Report User@vian1107 for spreading false information

@Echo小疯狂 举报@vian1107 不实信息 上一条 | 下一条: @Echo小疯狂..

受理编号: K1CaK8Atg8q0h 状态: 举证阶段 > 结果公示 访问次数: 2

举报人信息 (共1人举报)

Echo小疯狂 其他

被举报人信息

vian1107 四川绵阳

Judgement from Officials

站方判定

该微博称“谁有兴趣领养狗?.....有个杀狗场被捣毁。有几百只狗无人领养就要安乐死了”, 经查, 类似消息多年来就在网络流传, 且早有媒体证实为假消息, 详情: <http://t.cn/Rv68DMf>, 被举报人言论构成“发布不实信息”。现根据《微博社区管理规定(试行)》(<http://service.account.weibo.com/roles/guiding>) 第22条, 对被举报人处理如下: 扣除信用积分2分。上述处理在公布后60分钟内生效。

举报人陈述时间: 2014-06-17 07:46

Echo小疯狂: 骗人的

被举报微博 发布时间: 2014-06-14 10:52:13 | 原文

vian1107: 成都、绵阳高朋友有兴趣领养狗, 免费的。有泰迪(刚出生纯黑七只), 古牧, 罗威, 金毛(半月三只), 德牧, 土狗, 番狗, 在桐梓林马场有个杀狗场, 被捣毁。有几百只狗, 无人... [查看全文](#)

Vote from neutral users

旁观用户支持率

支持 举报人 投票支持后才能看到当前票数 支持 被举报人

支持说明: 每24小时可以支持1次, 投票结果只代表旁观用户观点, 对判定不产生直接影响。

你是旁观用户, 欢迎对本举报发表观点

Figure 2.3: Screen-capture of Caution from Sina Weibo Official



6. The limitation of characters may rustle in **information fragmentation** when users share information individually.
7. The **diversity of settings** supports users to filter useless information according to their concerns.
8. **Viral propaganda** of information on Weibo achieves social impacts when emergencies happen.
9. The most distinctive characteristic is that Weibo encourage **interaction** among users because users are able to obtain instant feedback from others through forward and comment functions.

From all above, researchers basically underlined interaction as indispensable feature of Weibo. Weibo help users to build relationship when they share and access information, and interact with others as well (Zhang, 2012). As a representative product among Weibo services, Sina Weibo possesses the characteristics above doubtlessly.

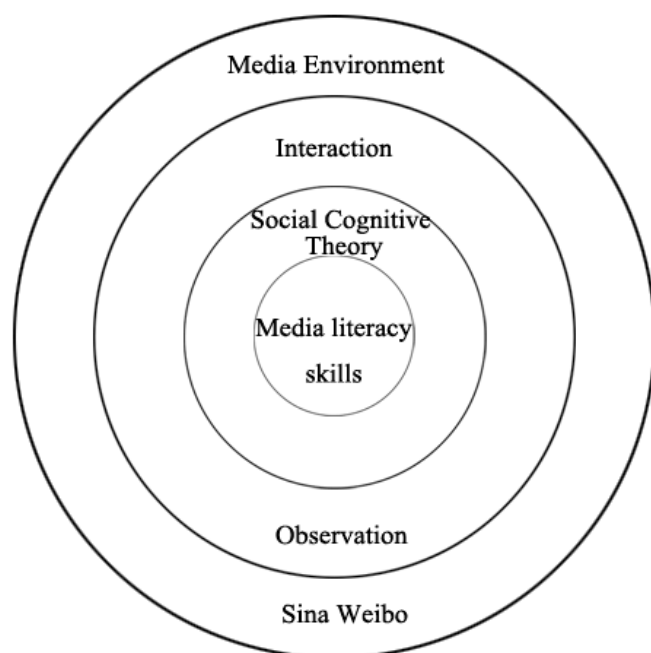
2.3 Social Cognitive Theory

Martens (2010) stated that the consequence of media literacy education is to affect how people reflect to media messages. Though few scholars did theoretical work to test empirical hypotheses, he also found some helpful connections between media literacy and communication theory. Martens pointed out that the key aspects of social cognitive theory can be explained and explore media literacy.

Social cognitive theory, developed by Bandura, stemmed from research on Social Learning Theory (SLT). Bandura (2001) proposed that human behaviors is influenced and shaped by external environmental factors or internal dispositions. According to social cognitive theory (SCT), social interaction counts among the factors that may impact human behavior. People widen their scope of knowledge and get understanding of causation in terms of personal and vicarious experiences. SCT asserts that people learn the world at the interactive level, which means they develop cognition not only from their own experiences, but also by observing others' behavior (Glanz & Rimer, 2005). SCT has been successfully applied as the fundamental theory for behavior change. In addition, Bergsma's research (2011) also provides some clues of the relationship among media environment, media literacy education, SCT and behavioral change. He stated that media environment, media literacy education, SCT are asymptotically influenced and finally result in behavioral change.

According to the preceding content, Sina Weibo successfully promotes interactivity in the communication. Li (2012) believes that Weibo's unique characteristics make Weibo an interactive channel where provides platform for various views and opinions to collide. Open discussion and debate may happen on Weibo all the time. That is to say, as a social media, Weibo builds an interpersonal environment for interaction. With Sina Weibo, users achieve interaction by observing others' behavior and then develop their personal cognitions and behaviors, which influence their media literacy skills.

Figure 2.4: Framework of Media Literacy and SCT



2.4 Recent Research about Weibo and Media Literacy in China

As the development of media continues, Chinese audiences' media literacy skills are also improving. Media literacy education is to enhance and improve the ability to use media. With the innovation of technology and media channels, audience's media technological literacy is experiencing enhancement (Wang, 2012). Wang (2012) indicated that most people view Weibo as substitute of traditional media. For these people, Weibo means a platform to provide critical thinking and show hidden information when significant events happen. The core function of Weibo is to publish and access information. Users are able to find required information on Weibo easily. Zhang and Pentina (2012) examined the motivations of users to use Weibo. The findings suggested that Weibo users use Weibo to express themselves, develop social relationships, and exchange assistance.

The researcher found that most of previous studies select university students as study populations. According to Liu and Zhu (2012), contemporary university students are equipped with reasonable media literacy. They are able to take advantage

of Internet to access information, express opinions and interact with others. Due to the characteristics of micro blogging, messages and discussions of specific issues can spread rapidly. Thus the speed of dissemination through micro blogging, especially upon some social issues and sudden events, is much faster than through other media (Chen & Li, 2012). In the modern age, it becomes a trend that people eager to get diversified information. Micro blogging exactly satisfies such requirements (Cao, Dai, & Zhang, 2012).

In addition, the use of Sina Weibo in social issues is a topic worth studying. Qu, Huang, Zhang and Zhang (2011) studied the use and influence of Sina Weibo after a major disaster Yushu earthquake in China and found that users mostly use Sina Weibo to express opinions about the disaster, update situation, and support actions. Many social issues have been promoted through Weibo communication, showing that Weibo expands the areas for citizens to participate in social affairs.

Wang (2013) considered Weibo as a double-edged sword. According to Wang's opinion, there are four favorable factors for Weibo users to improve media literacy spontaneously. In spite of the factors we have already discussed in previous context, Wang mentioned the key words "critical thinking." Wang argued that Weibo users would select information and develop their critical thinking towards media when they are facing lots of information. He also valued Weibo's advantage in integrating users' power. He pointed out that Weibo drive media engagement from virtual world to reality, promoting democratic supervision. However, Wang indicated the negative influence of Weibo as well. The noise in the Weibo communication, like false information, may interfere with the user's judgments. According to Wang, to develop media literacy, "It's the best of times; it's the worst of times." Similarly, Han (2013) viewed Weibo as an emerging platform to criticize media as the superiority of Weibo is increasingly apparent, though, sometimes rational thinking is absent.

Yi (2011) first definitely assumed the use of Weibo as a new opportunity to promote media literacy. According to Yi's statement, Weibo is a platform for multi

source information. It is beneficial to analyze and judge media messages because users could track the source of the messages. Moreover, high frequency and high engagement of using Weibo provide chance for users to recognize the influence of media. Weibo affords a space for equal say and direct communication, which in favor of avoiding agenda settings. According to Yi, the use of Weibo enables users to think from different angles and check from multi-channel.

Sina Weibo is establishing a culture of public expression and diffusion of alternative ideologies in Chinese system that is showing an unprecedented social phenomenon (Liu & Pascual-Ferra, 2012). This study would mostly focus on media literacy and Sina Weibo, to analyze the impacts that the latter might bring to the former.

2.5 Hypotheses and Theoretical Framework

The researcher has utilized the assumptions of social cognitive theory in this study to explain the relationship between the variables, which are media literacy skills and the use of Sina Weibo. Social cognitive theory is an appropriate theory for this study, because the theory assumes that people learn the world upon what they observe and eventually their behavior may be affected.

Based on the above discussions of media literacy and Sina Weibo, the researcher proposed the following research questions:

RQ1: What kinds of media literacy are applicable to Sina Weibo?

RQ2: Whether and how much does Sina Weibo impact Chinese users' media literacy skills?

Research Questions ask about what and how impacts Sina Weibo may have on users' media literacy skills. As outlined above, the characteristics of Weibo determine it a specific platform to cultivate interaction, critical thinking and transparency of information. The ability to access useful information and think critically is crucial

component of media literacy skills. Hence, the hypothesis of this study is:

H1: The use of Sina Weibo would increase users' ability to access media messages.

H2: The use of Sina Weibo would increase users' ability to analyze media messages.

H3: The use of Sina Weibo would increase users' ability to evaluate media messages.

H4: The use of Sina Weibo would increase users' ability to create media messages.

H5: The use of Sina Weibo would increase users' ability to participate in media messages.

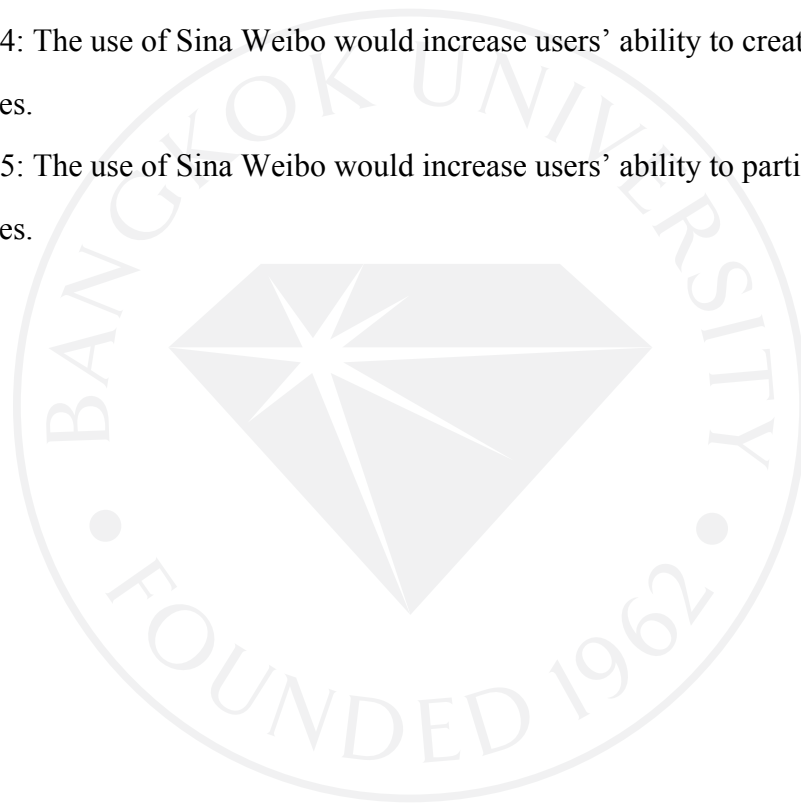
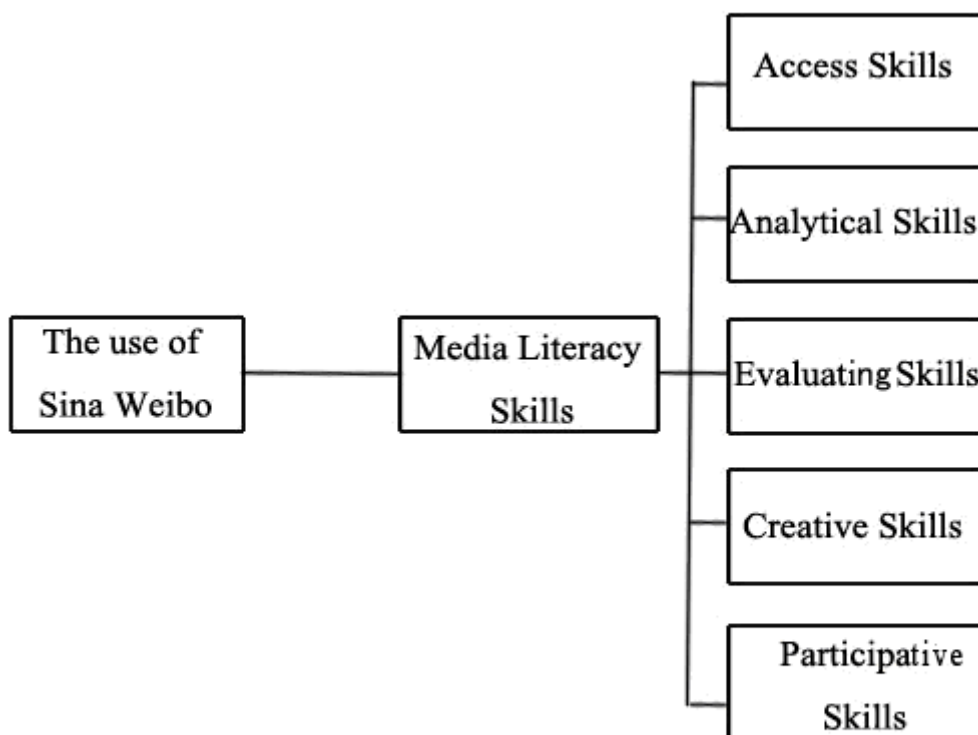


Figure 2.5: Theoretical Framework



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CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter is to describe the methodology of this research. This chapter will introduce the research design, sample, instrument and procedure. The content of this chapter includes the following parts:

- 3.1 Research Design
- 3.2 Population Sample Selection
- 3.3 Research Instrument
- 3.4 Pretest of the Instrument
- 3.5 Data Collection Procedure
- 3.6 Data Analysis

3.1 Research Design

Ashley, Maksl and Craft (2013) indicated that media literacy may be topic specific. This research sought to contribute to the knowledge about the influence of Sina Weibo on users' media literacy skills. Hence, the goal of this study is to investigate current Sina Weibo users' media literacy skills by comparing the difference users' behavior before and after using Sina Weibo. This study focused more on developing a better understanding of whether and how far the use of Sina Weibo influences users' media literacy skills. The cross-sectional survey would be used to measure the skills.

Due to high interactivity of Weibo, users are able to send and receive messages at the same time. Though most of the study of media literacy are based on receivers' perspectives, Yin and Li (2010) pointed out that the research of Weibo users' media literacy situation should focus on both sender's and receiver's perspective. They indicated that as a receiver, people should know how to think critically about the messages they receive. Meanwhile, as a sender, social responsibility is necessary.

Great voice means more responsibility to maintain media ecology. Combined with the functions of Sina Weibo, the items of the questionnaire would cover both senders and receivers' perspectives. Besides demographic information, users would be required to recall their media-literacy-skill-based behavioral change before and after they used Sina Weibo. Hence, all the items are in pairs.

However, the problem is that the measurement of media literacy skills is still a critical challenge in such field (Arke & Primack, 2009). From the previous studies, researchers have just developed instruments in view of specific topics, such as smoking (Primack, Gold, Switzer, Hobbs, Land, & Fine, 2006). The researcher would develop and test a new pilot measurement of media literacy skills based on the literature review. Items were formed according to composite conceptual models and administered to Sina Weibo users (n = 200).

3.2 Population and Sample Selection

In this study, the target population of sample was Chinese Sina Weibo users. Because previous research discover that kids and adolescents are more easily to negatively affected by Internet, only those who above 15 were selected to participate in this study (Tencent Kid, 2013). In order to make sure that all the participants can gain access to Internet, the surveys would launched online by using Simple Random Sampling method. Finally, only Sina Weibo users above 15 years old were accepted as sample.

3.3 Research Instrument

In this study, the questionnaire consists of two sections. The first section is to collect respondents' demographic data. The second section is to measure their media literacy skills.

Section 1: Personal Information Data

The questions in this section are set to investigate respondents' personal

demographic data. The items include questions about age, gender, location, education background, Sina Weibo use habits, and monthly income and so on. Items 1-7 were designed for collecting demographic data.

Section 2: Media Literacy Skills

As was stated above, media literacy is generally defined as “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms” (Aufderheide, 1993). CML (2008) has adopted this definition and Hobbs’ work (2011) that further defines media literacy skills. The researcher used the core principles mainly developed by CML and other scholars to underlie the conceptual framework of media literacy skills. Thus, the measurement of media literacy skills consisted of five domains: access, analyze, evaluate, create and participate. CML and Hobbs have already given elaborated explanation and statement to all five domains. The researcher used these core principles to underlie the items in the instrument. In order to combine these five domains and topic, the researcher adapted the content to Sina Weibo specific. To compare the difference before and after users use Sina Weibo, a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used to measure the five domains. As what was mentioned before, Yin and Li (2010) suggested that receivers are supposed to be alert when they identify media messages on Weibo. Likewise, senders should express rationally and constructively through media. Inspired by Yin and Li, not only the ability to examine media messages as a receiver, the responsibility to sell messages properly would also be measured. And in creative skills part, only senders’ perspective would be measured. Paired Sample T-Test would be employed to test the difference of media literacy skills between means before and after the users used Sina Weibo.

Access skills:

Access skills are mainly about the ability to select and utilize useful information and interpret the meaning effectively (CML, 2008). Hence, items (items 8-11) were to test users’ ability in accessing and understanding information.

Analytical skills

Critical thinking is an essential element in media literacy, which reflects in deciphering and judging media message (Kellner & Share, 2005). Covington (2004) also stated that media literate person should be capable to view and evaluate media content critically. Thus, items (items 12-16) in this part and following part (items 17-24) would emphasize to test users the ability of critical thinking.

When people have the ability to analyze message, they could examine the design of message and notice the context under the message (CML, 2008). In this section, the items are to measure whether the users could analyze the design of media messages critically as both senders and receivers.

Evaluating skills:

CML (2008) stated that when people are equipped with such skills, they are able to assess the truth and quality of media messages. In this part, the items were designed to test users' ability of examining the reality of what they get from the media. This domain assesses whether Sina Weibo users can detect media messages with critical attitude. Items include questions to assess the ability of judging the quality and the source of media messages from both senders and receivers' perspectives. In addition, the sense of responsibility as a sender also has been noted as required media literacy skills by Zhang and his partner (2011). Hence, the sense of responsibility would be tested by investigating whether the users would concern the possible results when they communicate messages.

Creative skills:

Creative skills are more than general writing skills. Such skills include the ability to increase influences of created messages. In this domain, items (items 25-26) were designed to test users' ability in selecting and structuring messages for effective use. Beyond that, objective self-expression is also one of tested items.

Participative skills:

According to CML (2008), participative skills include the ability of engagement

and interaction with other people. Hobbs (2011) defined it as “take an action”. In this domain, items (items 27-29) were designed to test whether users are able to effectively interact with others and engage in social development after they used Sina Weibo.

3.4 Pretest of the Instrument

The instrument of this study is developed both from previous researches and the research self. In order to test the reliability of the instrument, a pretest was conducted. The questionnaire was delivered to 30 people before formal testing. Crobach’s alpha coefficient was used to test the reliability. The results showed as below:

Table 3.1: The Results of Pretesting

Media Literacy Skills	Items	Alpha (Before)	Alpha (After)
Access Skills	Items 8-11	.7639	.7137
Analytical Skills	Items 12-16	.6924	.7958
Evaluating Skills	Items 17-24	.8097	.7034
Creative Skills	Items 25-26	.7270	.7012
Participative Skills	Items 26-27	.7666	.8053
Total		.9012	.8954

Table 3.1 shows that the Crobach’s alpha coefficient was .9012 ($>.07$) before using Sina Weibo and .8954 ($>.07$) after using Sina Weibo.

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

Considering that our target sample are Chinese Sina Weibo users, all the items would be translated into Chinese language by the researcher. In order to reduce translation errors and understanding gaps, the questionnaire was translated and confirmed by a back translator, who can speak both English and Chinese.

The questionnaire was randomly delivered online through online survey service website sojump.com. It assured that all the respondents are cyber and Sina Weibo

users, which means all of them have the access to Social Networking Service. Before the respondents answer the questionnaires, the purpose of this questionnaire was presented. Only Sina Weibo users above 15 years old were required in this study. The whole process took about 5 months. Ultimately, 200 respondents were accepted.

3.6 Data Analysis

After the data collection, SPSS (Statistical Product and Service Solutions) program would be used to analyze the data. In order to test the hypotheses, the researcher would compare difference between users' media literacy skills before and after users used Sina Weibo. Hence, Paired-Samples T-test would be used to examine if there are significant difference between these two situations. Since the questionnaire used a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), the researcher defined the average level of media literacy by calculating the class interval.

*Note: $(5-1)/4=0.8$

1.00 – 1.80 = Very low

1.81 – 2.60 = Low

2.61 – 3.40 = Medium

3.41 – 4.20 = High

4.21 – 5.00 = Very High

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

This research conducted questionnaire survey to collect data. SPSS (Statistical Product and Service Solutions) program was used to analyze the data collected. In this chapter, the researcher will present all data analysis covering research objectives into three parts respectively.

- 4.1 Frequency Distribution of Descriptive Variables
- 4.2 Results of Media Literacy Skills
- 4.3 Findings of Hypotheses Testing

4.1 Frequency Distribution of Descriptive Variables

The first part focuses on the descriptive information of whole 200 respondents. This part includes the data of age, gender, residential areas in China, duration of use Sina Weibo, frequency of using Sina Weibo, and monthly income. The results are showed as below:

Table 4.1: Demographic Information Classified by Age and Gender

Characteristics	Frequency (persons)	%
Age:		
Less than 15	-	-
15 – 25 years	99	49.5
26 – 35 years	77	38.5
36 – 45 years	17	8.5
46 – 55 years	7	3.5
Over 55 years	-	-
Total	200	100

(Continued)

Table 4.1(Continued): Demographic Information Classified by Age and Gender

Gender:		
Male	93	46.5
Female	107	53.5
Total	200	100

The results in Table 4.1 show that the majority of respondent's age is from 15 to 25 years old with 49.5 percent. In addition, the 26 – 35 age group accounts for 38.5 percent while the 36 – 45 age group accounts for 8.5 percent of the respondents. Those who aged from 46 to 55 rank the lowest, 3.5 percent. About the gender, according to the study, the majority of respondents are female (53.5 percent). And 46.5 percent are male.

Table 4.2: Residential Areas of Respondents

Residential areas (in China)	Frequency (persons)	%
Shanghai	34	17
Beijing	21	10.5
Jiangsu	17	8.5
Zhejiang	16	8
Guangdong	16	8
Shandong	10	5
Chongqing	9	4.5
Sichuan	9	4.5
Guangxi	8	4
Henan	8	4
Fujian	8	4

(Continued)

Table 4.2(Continued): Residential Areas of Respondents

Hubei	7	3.5
Liaoning	5	2.5
Jiangxi	4	2
Jilin	4	2
Anhui	4	2
Hebei	3	1.5
Heilongjiang	3	1.5
Tianjin	3	1.5
Yunnan	3	1.5
Hunan	2	1
Shanxi	2	1
Gansu	1	0.5
Hainan	1	0.5
Shaanxi	1	0.5
Sikiang	1	0.5
Total	200	100

From Table 4.2, the majority of respondents are from Shanghai (17.0 percent) Followed by Beijing, which accounts for 10.5 percent, Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Guangdong with 8.5 percent, 8 percent and 8 percent respectively.

Table 4.3: Duration of Using Sina Weibo

Duration of using Sina Weibo:	Frequency (persons)	%
Less than 0.5 year	7	3.5
0.5-1 year	29	14.5
1-2 year	49	24.5

(Continued)

Table 4.3(Continued): Duration of Using Sina Weibo

2-3 years	60	30
More than 3 years	55	27.5
Total	200	100

About the duration of using Sina Weibo, Table 4.3 illustrates that 30.0 percent of the respondents have used Sina Weibo for 2-3 years. Secondly, those who have used for more than 3 years accounts for 27.5 percent while 1-2 years for 24.5 percent.

About the frequency of using Sina Weibo, the majority of respondents expressed that they use Sina Weibo everyday (73.0 percent), followed by 16.5 percent who use Sina Weibo every few days.

Table 4.4: Frequency of Using Sina Weibo

Frequency of using Sina Weibo:	Frequency (persons)	%
Everyday	146	73
Every few days	33	16.5
Several times a month	13	6.5
Not use for long time	8	4
Total	200	100

Table 4.5: Education Background of Sina Weibo Users

Education:	Frequency (persons)	%
Junior middle school or equivalent	3	1.5
High school or equivalent	11	5.5
College	35	17.5

(Continued)

Table 4.5 (Continued): Education Background of Sina Weibo Users

Bachelor's degree	123	61.5
Master's degree	26	13
Doctorate degree	2	1
Total	200	100

About the education background: Most respondents (61.5 percent) have got or are studying for bachelor degree. Secondly, there are 17.5 percent of respondents graduated from or are studying at college. Followed by 13.0 percent of respondents have got or are studying for master's degree.

Table 4.6: Monthly Income of Sina Weibo Users

Income (CNY):	Frequency (persons)	%
No Income	57	28.5
Under 2,000 yuan	14	7
2001 – 4000 yuan	59	29.5
4001 – 6000 yuan	39	19.5
6000 – 8000 yuan	16	8
Over 8000 yuan	15	7.5
Total	200	100

* Note: Yuan is Chinese currency.

About the monthly income: For the majority of respondents, the average monthly income is 2001-4000 yuan with 29.5 percent, followed by 28.5 percent and 19.5 percent of respondents who have no monthly income and 4001-6000 yuan respectively.

4.2 Results of Media Literacy Skills

This part presents the levels of five media literacy skills which include: (1) Access skills; (2) Analytical skills; (3) Evaluating skills; (4) Creative skills and (5) Participative skills by using mean (\bar{X}) and standard deviation (S.D). Before presenting the results of five skills, the researcher would define the level of skills first. Because the questionnaire utilized a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), the level of skills would be defined according to the class interval. The average level of media literacy skills is as below:

1.00 – 1.80 = Very low

1.81 – 2.60 = Low

2.61 – 3.40 = Medium

3.41 – 4.20 = High

4.21 – 5.00 = Very High

Table 4.7 illustrates that before starting to use Sina Weibo, the majority of respondents are equipped with medium access skills (Mean = 3.25). Then after using Sina Weibo, the majority of respondents showed high level (Mean =4.08) in access skills. Through comparison of all mean values of access skills, the table showed that the ability to access messages from different perspectives increased the most (Mean=4.07).

Table 4.7: The Mean (\bar{X}) and Standard Deviation (S.D.) of Media Literacy Skills in Terms of Access Skills

Access skills	Before			After		
	\bar{X}	S.D.	Meaning	\bar{X}	S.D.	Meaning
Q8 Access Extensive Information	3.32	0.72	Medium	4.15	0.63	High
Q9 Understanding Symbols	3.28	0.86	Medium	4.13	0.63	High

(Continued)

Table 4.7 (Continued): The Mean (\bar{X}) and Standard Deviation (S.D.) of Media Literacy Skills in Terms of Access Skills

Q10 Access Message Sources	3.33	0.73	Medium	3.99	0.71	High
Q11 Access Different Perspectives	3.07	0.8	Medium	4.07	0.68	High
Total	3.25	0.58	Medium	4.08	0.46	High

Table 4.8 illustrates that before starting to use Sina Weibo, the majority of respondents are equipped with medium analytical skills (Mean = 3.23). Then after using Sina Weibo, the majority of respondents have high level (Mean = 3.78) in analytical skills. The table showed that, after using Sina Weibo, the ability to understand media operate increased the most compare to other analytical skills (Mean=3.71).

Table 4.8: The Mean (\bar{X}) and Standard Deviation (S.D.) of Media Literacy Skills in Terms of Analytical Skills

Analytical skills	Before			After		
	\bar{X}	S.D.	Meaning	\bar{X}	S.D.	Meaning
Q12 Analyze1 My Goal and Target Groups	3.45	0.86	High	3.85	0.78	High
Q13 Analyze Media Operate	2.91	0.85	Medium	3.71	0.81	High
Q14 Analyze Sender	3.28	0.89	Medium	3.81	0.79	High
Q15 Analyze Receiver	3.25	0.87	Medium	3.74	0.78	High
Q16 Analyze Message Purpose	3.28	0.86	Medium	3.81	0.71	High
Total	3.23	0.63	Medium	3.78	0.56	High

Table 4.9 shows that before starting to use Sina Weibo, most of respondents are equipped with medium evaluating skills (Mean = 3.23). After using Sina Weibo, most of them have high level (Mean =3.88) in evaluating skills. Most respondents showed the most significant difference in doubting the authenticity of media messages before and after they started to use Sina Weibo (Mean=4.05).

Table 4.9: The Mean (\bar{X}) and Standard Deviation (S.D.) of Media Literacy Skills in Terms of Evaluating Skills

Evaluating skills	Before			After		
	\bar{X}	S.D.	Meaning	\bar{X}	S.D.	Meaning
Q17 Investigate Before Communicate	3.4	0.88	Medium	3.9	0.77	High
Q18 Concern Possible Impacts	3.4	0.83	Medium	4.09	0.69	High
Q19 Discover Bias	3.19	0.77	Medium	3.82	0.69	High
Q20 Doubt Authenticity	3.25	0.85	Medium	4.05	0.7	High
Q21 Check Authenticity	3.16	0.86	Medium	3.75	0.86	High
Q22 Compare Sources	3.19	0.78	Medium	3.66	0.76	High
Q23 Discover Hidden Messages	3.01	0.84	Medium	3.84	0.73	High
Q24 Detect Advertisement	3.24	0.86	Medium	3.92	0.7	High
Total	3.23	0.58	Medium	3.88	0.48	High

Table 4.10 indicates that before the respondents starting to use Sina Weibo, most of them had high level in creative skills (Mean = 3.49). After using Sina Weibo, most of them have high level (Mean =3.92) in creative skills.

Table 4.10: The Mean (\bar{X}) and Standard Deviation (S.D.) of Media Literacy Skills in Terms of Creative Skills

Creative skills	Before			After		
	\bar{X}	S.D.	Meaning	\bar{X}	S.D.	Meaning
Q25 Objective Expression	3.52	0.79	High	3.9	0.68	High
Q26 Structure Messages Effectively	3.46	0.78	High	3.94	0.63	High
Total	3.49	0.67	High	3.92	0.56	High

From Table 4.11, the participative skills among respondents are at medium level (Mean=3.22). After using Sina Weibo, most of respondents have high level (Mean =3.85) in participative skills. The respondents have already obtained a high level in maintain relationships before using Sina Weibo. The ability of engagement increased the most among all skills (Mean= 3.82).

Table 4.11: The Mean (\bar{X}) and Standard Deviation (S.D.) of Media Literacy Skills in Terms of Participative Skills

Participative skills	Before			After		
	\bar{X}	S.D.	Meaning	\bar{X}	S.D.	Meaning
Q27 Use Media Power	3.16	0.71	Medium	3.81	0.76	High
Q28 Engage in society	3.06	0.81	Medium	3.82	0.77	High
Q29 Maintain Relationships	3.43	0.74	High	3.91	0.7	High
Total	3.22	0.59	Medium	3.85	0.6	High

4.3 Hypotheses Testing: The Effect of Sina Weibo on Media Literacy Skills

In the study, there are five hypotheses. The hypotheses are showed as below:

H1: The use of Sina Weibo would increase users' ability to access media

messages.

H2: The use of Sina Weibo would increase users' ability to analyze media messages.

H3: The use of Sina Weibo would increase users' ability to evaluate media messages.

H4: The use of Sina Weibo would increase users' ability to create media messages.

H5: The use of Sina Weibo would increase users' ability to participate in media messages.

To test the hypotheses, Paired Sample T-test was applied to find the differences of media literacy skills between before and after using Sina Weibo. The results of T-test are showed as below:

Table 4.12: Paired Sample T-Test of Access Skills

Media literacy skills	Before		After		t-test	Sig.
	\bar{X}	S.D.	\bar{X}	S.D.		
Access skills	3.25	0.58	4.08	0.46	17.244*	.001

Table 4.12 shows that the mean value of access skills before using Sina Weibo is 3.25 and after using Sina Weibo is 4.08. The pair t-Test indicates a statistically significant difference in before using Sina Weibo and after using Sina Weibo (t-Test = 17.244 $p < 0.01$). The table shows that H1 is significantly supported.

Table 4.13: Paired Sample T-Test of Analytical Skills

Media literacy skills	Before		After		t-test	Sig.
	\bar{X}	S.D.	\bar{X}	S.D.		
Analytical skills	3.23	0.63	3.78	0.56	11.263*	.001

Table 4.13 shows that the mean value of analytical skills before using Sina

Weibo is 3.23 and after using Sina Weibo is 3.78. The pair t-Test indicates a statistically significant difference in analytical skills before using Sina Weibo and after using Sina Weibo (t-Test = 11.263 $p < 0.01$). The table shows that H2 is significantly supported.

Table 4.14: Paired Sample T-Test of Evaluating Skills

Media literacy skills	Before		After		t-test	Sig.
	\bar{X}	S.D.	\bar{X}	S.D.		
Evaluating skills	3.23	0.58	3.88	0.48	15.724*	.001

Table 4.14 shows that the mean value of evaluating skills before using is 3.23 and the after is 3.88. The pair t-Test indicates a statistically significant difference in evaluating skills before to use the Sina Weibo and after to use the Sina Weibo (t-Test = 15.724 $p < 0.01$). It means that H3 is significantly supported.

Table 4.15: Paired Sample T-Test of Creative Skills

Media literacy skills	Before		After		t-test	Sig.
	\bar{X}	S.D.	\bar{X}	S.D.		
Creative skills	3.49	0.67	3.92	0.56	9.294*	.001

Table 4.15 shows that the mean value of creative skills before using Sina Weibo is 3.49 and after using Sina Weibo is 3.92. The pair t-Test indicates a statistically significant difference in creative skills before using Sina Weibo and after using Sina Weibo (t-Test = 9.294 $p < 0.01$). The table shows that H4 is significantly supported.

Table 4.16: Paired Sample T-Test of Participative Skills

Media literacy skills	Before		After		t-test	Sig.
	\bar{X}	S.D.	\bar{X}	S.D.		
Participative skills	3.22	0.59	3.85	0.6	15.424*	.001

Table 4.16 shows that the mean value of participative skills before using Sina Weibo is 3.22 and after using is 3.85. The pair t-Test indicates a statistically significant difference in participative skills before using Sina Weibo and after using Sina Weibo (t-Test = 15.424 $p < 0.01$). The table shows that H5 is significantly supported.



CHAPTER DISCUSSION

This chapter describes the discussion and conclusion of this research. The researcher will discuss the real impact of Sina Weibo on users' media literacy skills. In addition, the limitations and suggestions for further study will also be discussed. The summary of chapter 5 is listed as below:

- 5.1 Conclusion of this Research
- 5.2 Findings and Discussion of this Research
- 5.3 Limitations
- 5.4 Recommendation for Future Application
- 5.4 Recommendation for Further Study

5.1 Conclusion of this Research

This research served as an exploratory study in uncovering the impact of Chinese Social Networking Service: Sina Weibo on media literacy. This study sought to analyze the media literacy skills which are applicable to Sina Weibo and examine whether and how far the use of Sina Weibo has impact on media literacy skills among Chinese users. The researcher uniquely focused on the topic of media literacy and Sina Weibo. This study also contributed to fill the knowledge gap of current study of media literacy and Sina Weibo. CML (2008)'s statement of media literacy skills was applied in this study. In this research, two research questions were raised, and five hypotheses were tested.

The results of descriptive variables showed young people between 15 – 25 years old are the majority of Sina Weibo users. Most of them come from Shanghai, Beijing, Zhejiang, and Jiangsu and other areas. With regard to the usage situation of Sina Weibo, about 30 percent users have used Sina Weibo for 2 – 3 years while 27.5

percent users have used for more than 3 years. The majority of respondents have use Sina Weibo everyday with 73.0 percent. In respect to their educational background, 61.5 percent of the samples completed bachelor's degree, followed by College degree with 17.5 percent. The majority of respondents have the average monthly income 2001 – 4000 Chinese yuan with 29.5 percent. With 28.5 and 19.5 of respondent who have no monthly income and 4001 – 6000 Chinese yuan, respectively.

The results of access skills of Sina Weibo showed the highest mean in the ability to access information from different perspectives. The results of analytical skills showed that the users understand more about media operations and are capable to analyze the purpose and source of messages than before using Sina Weibo. The results of evaluating skills showed that the users are much more sensitive about the authenticity, bias and hidden story of media messages than before. The results of creative skills present an apparent difference of creativity before and after using Sina Weibo. The results of participative skills showed that the ability to engage in society increased the most among all skills.

The results of this hypotheses suggested that the use of Sina Weibo is positively related to media literacy skills, which are access skills, analytical skills, evaluating skills, creative skills, and participative skills. The researcher hypothesized that after using Sina Weibo, users' five media literacy skills will increase significantly. The users are supposed to have more ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create and participate in media messages. In order to test hypotheses, a questionnaire with 200 samples who are Sina Weibo users was conducted. In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to recall the difference of their media literacy skills before and after they used Sina Weibo. Then the researcher used Paired Sample T-Test to measure the difference. From the results, we can see significant differences of these five media literacy skills before and after users used Sina Weibo. The results are

consistent with the researcher's hypotheses and also extended Yi (2011)'s statement that Sina Weibo can become an opportunity to promote media literacy. Yi suggested the relationship between Sina Weibo and media literacy with non-system based illustration. This study verified Yi's assumptions and also contributed to further study of media literacy skills in the scope of Sina Weibo.

5.2 Findings and Discussion of this Research

According to social cognitive theory, people realize the world and develop cognition through the interaction with others and the observation to the environment. It explains how Sina Weibo users gradually get affected in the environment of Sina Weibo. From personal level, individuals improve and adjust themselves through communication and feedback from other Weibo users (Zhuang, 2013). To some extent, Zhuang regarded it as a kind of intrapersonal communication, which actually reflects the real society and finally impacts and drives the social practices.

The findings of hypothesis one suggested that the use of Sina Weibo can increase access skills. Based upon comparison of mean values, the results showed that access skills increased with highest mean amongst the users. According to Yu (2010), the core function of Sina Weibo is to publish and access information. When traditional media channels and sources of information couldn't effectively meet all needs of users, the value of Weibo can be embodied. The results revealed that after using Sina Weibo, users are able to access more messages from different angles than the past. During the 7.23 bullet train accident in China 2011, Sina Weibo was the first platform to publish this news at the same moment the accident happened, which is two hours earlier than media report (Gao, 2012). Weibo empowers audiences to access first hand information, showing that media are no longer the only source. The use of Weibo isn't limited to time, space, and objective condition, thus, Weibo enables users get opinions and suggestion from different perspectives.

The findings of hypothesis two and three suggested that the use of Sina Weibo can increase analytical and evaluating skills. In the literature review, the researcher has highlighted the importance of critical thinking. Precisely because Weibo provides convenience for all users to share and get messages, people can't deny all negative impacts that Weibo may cause, for example, the spread of rumors. In order to avoid such situation, Sina Weibo developed various distinctive functions which reflect its uniqueness. In Chapter 2, the researcher has detailedly introduced the unique functions of Sina Weibo. To decrease rumors, false messages on Sina Weibo would be marked caution. This function serves as the role of gate-keeper. Moreover, neutral users also could evaluate reported disputable messages, express personal opinions and vote for whom they support. It builds supervisory function of the media and raises awareness to behave cautiously. The transparency of Weibo messages provides users opportunities to track the source of messages in order to analyze and judge the quality of the messages. Yu and Deng (2013) stated that Weibo users tend to question the media, weaken the power of framing and deconstruct the framed agenda. It revealed that citizen's consciousness is waking up under development of media technology, especially Weibo technology.

In addition, the results of frequency distribution of descriptive variables in Chapter 4 showed that the respondents from urban or developed areas occupied a large portion of the whole samples. Most of them are well educated and have college degree or beyond. The activeness of the users is also in a high level. The situations of the respondents are in close agreement with the results given by Sina Weibo User Development Report 2013. It supported Li (2013)'s arguments that since the quality of Weibo users are generally high, the function of agenda setting can be weakened to certain extent.

The results of hypothesis four suggested that the use of Sina Weibo can increase creative skills. The results of hypothesis five confirmed that the use of Sina Weibo can increase participative skills, which means users are tend to interact more with

others and engage more in solving problems before they started to use Sina Weibo. Danish Technological Institute (2011) defined creative and participative skills as social competencies. Hobbs (2011) indicated that the dimension of such skills ultimately contribute to real world. When analyzing the items, the researcher found that after using Sina Weibo, users are much more tend to utilize or engage in media. From the social public level, due to the characteristics of Sina Weibo, users have the right to be citizen journalists. That means everyone has equal rights to achieve or use same power as media. Users are able to both initiate and join in the issues through the functions of Sina Weibo. The real engagement can be realized by the reactions.

5.3 Limitations

1. As an explorative research, this study also includes some limitations. As a popular Social Networking Service, Sina Weibo owns 61.4 active registered users. This study is limited by the sample size of 200. The restricted number of respondents cannot be generalized by all the Sina Weibo users. A larger sample size can be used in further study. Additionally, it's a cross-sectional research, which also impeded the research period and depth.

2. Secondly, due to the lack of relevant journal and research articles, there were limitations with regard to information about Sina Weibo and media literacy. In Chapter one, the researcher have already pointed out the gap in literature. It justified the significance to do this research.

3. Thirdly, this research paper is a quantitative research, which may overlook some of users' inner thoughts. The skills showed in questionnaire may not cover all media literacy skills in the scope of Sina Weibo.

5.4 Recommendation for Future Application

1. For Media Literacy Education: Media Literacy is a quite new topic in China. The findings suggested that the use of Sina Weibo would be positively related to

users' media literacy skills. Besides media education curriculum, this study provides a new perspective to promote media literacy into practice level in China.

2. For Sina Weibo: Sina Weibo and kindred sites such as Sohu Weibo and Tencent Weibo can focus more on relevant topic in order to develop much improved functions and services to support media literacy education.

5.5 Recommendation for further study

1. Media literacy, as a huge literacy system, is related to some other literacy such as digital literacy and information literacy (Koltay, 2011). Limited to time and relevant studies, this study just examines the impacts on media literacy. Further studies could extend the impacts of using Sina Weibo on other literacy skills.

2. The results of hypothesis 5 showed that after using Sina Weibo, users are more likely to engage in social issues and participate in solving problems. Previous studies by Yi (2011) and Li (2013) mentioned that the use of Sina Weibo may weaken the influence of media agenda setting. Cohen (1963) argued that the press "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about (p.13)." The use of Sina Weibo promotes interaction and initiative, which provides users more opportunities to participate in issues. During 2010 Yushu Earthquake, Sina Weibo played an important role as civilian platform for citizens to join the rescue (Qu, Huang, Zhang & Zhang, 2011b). The use of Sina Weibo reveals the potential to citizenship agenda, which raise issues from bottom to up instead of media setting. In the future study, researcher can focus more on such topic to study the effect of Sina Weibo on citizenship agenda setting.

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Questionnaire

This questionnaire is to examine Sina Weibo users' media literacy situation. Please recall your personal situation in terms of following items and choose the answer. Thank you for your cooperation. The results of the surveys will only be used for educational purposes.

Section 1 Personal Data

1. What's your age?

- A. Less than 15 B. 15-25 C. 26-35 D. 36-45 E. 46-55 F. 55+

2. What's your gender?

- A. Male B. Female

3. Where do you come from? (Chinese geographic area)

- A. Anhui B. Beijing C. Chongqing D. Fujian E. Gansu F. Guangdong
 G. Guangxi H. Guizhou I. Hainan J. Hebei
 K. Heilongjiang L. Henan M. Hong Kong N. Hubei O. Hunan
 P. Jiangsu Q. Jiangxi R. Jilin S. Liaoning T. Macao
 U. Inner Mongolia V. Ningxia W. Qinghai X. Shandong Y. Shanghai
 Z. Shanxi AA. Shaanxi AB. Sichuan AC. Taiwan
 AD. Tianjin AE. Sikiang AF. Tibet AG. Yunnan AH. Zhejiang

4. How long have you used Sina Weibo?

- A. Less than 0.5 year B. 0.5~1 year C. 1~2 year D. 2~3 year E. More than 3 years

5. How often do you use Sina Weibo?

- A. Everyday B. Every few days C. Several times a month D. Not use for long time

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- A. Junior middle school or equivalent B. High school or equivalent
 C. College D. Bachelor's degree E. Master's degree F. Doctorate degree
 G. Professional degree

7. What's your monthly income? (Chinese currency)

- A. No Income B. Under 2,000 yuan C. 2001~4000 yuan D. 4001~6000 yuan
 E. 6000~8000 yuan F. Over 8000 yuan

Section 2 Media Literacy Skills of Sina Weibo

This part of questionnaire would like to ask about Sina Weibo users' media literacy situation.

5 = Strongly Agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Medium; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly Disagree

		Please read the following content and then indicate how strong you agree with the items.	5	4	3	2	1
Access	8.	A. Before I started to use Sina Weibo, I have the ability to access extensive information to broaden my vision.					
		B. After I started to use Sina Weibo, I have the ability to access extensive information to broaden vision.					
	9.	A. Before I started to use Sina Weibo, I understood meaning of a lot of words, symbols and messages.					
		B. After I started to use Sina Weibo, I understood meaning of a lot of words, symbols and messages.					
	10	A. Before I started to use Sina Weibo, I know the source to acquire information.					
		B. After I started to use Sina Weibo, I know the source to acquire information.					
	11.	A. Before I started to use Sina Weibo, I can easily get the information from different angles.					
		B. After I used Sina Weibo, I can easily get the information from different angles on Weibo.					
Analyze	12.	A. Before I started to use Sina Weibo, when I communicated, I knew my purpose and target audience clearly.					
		B. After I used Sina Weibo, when I posted, I know my purpose target audience clearly.					
	13.	A. Before I started to use Sina Weibo, I knew the way media operate.					
		B. After I used Sina Weibo, I knew the way media operate.					
	14.	A. Before I started to use Sina Weibo, when I get information from media, I					

		know who is sending message to me.					
		B. After I used Sina Weibo, when I get information on Weibo, I know who is sending message to me.					
	15	A. Before I started to use Sina Weibo, when I get information from media, I know who the target audiences of these messages are.					
		B. After I used Sina Weibo, when I get information on Weibo, I know who the target audiences of these messages are.					
	16	A. Before I started to use Sina Weibo, when I get information from media, I know what the purpose of the message is.					
		B. After I used Sina Weibo, when I get information on Weibo, I know what the purpose of the message is.					
Evaluate	17.	A. Before I started to use Sina Weibo, I checked the authenticity of the information when I communicated with others.					
		B. After I used Sina Weibo, I checked the authenticity of the information when I posted or reposted it on Weibo.					
	18.	A. Before I started to use Sina Weibo, when I distributed information to others, I cared about the possible impacts.					
		B. After I used Sina Weibo, when I posted information to my followers, I cared about the possible impacts.					
	19	A. Before I started to use Sina Weibo, when I get information from media, I might find the bias of the message.					
		B. After I used Sina Weibo, when I get information on Weibo, I might find the bias of the message.					
	20	A. Before I started to use Sina Weibo, when I get information from media, I might doubt the authenticity of the message.					
		B. After I used Sina Weibo, when I get information on Weibo, I might doubt the authenticity of the message.					
	21	A. Before I started to use Sina Weibo, when I doubt the authenticity of					

		information from media, I tend to investigate the truth.					
		B. After I used Sina Weibo, when I doubted the authenticity of information on Weibo, I tend to investigate the truth.					
	22	A. Before I started to use Sina Weibo, I could compare and evaluate information from different sources.					
		B. After I used Sina Weibo, I could compare and evaluate information from different sources.					
	23	A. Before I started to use Sina Weibo, I can discover the part of the story that is not being told by the media.					
		B. After I used Sina Weibo, I can discover the part of the story that is not being told by media.					
	24	A. Before I started to use Sina Weibo, I could judge what message is advertisement.					
		B. After I used Sina Weibo, I could judge what message is advertisement.					
Create	25.	A. Before I started to use Sina Weibo, I could objectively express my opinion.					
		B. After I used Sina Weibo, I could objectively express my opinion through. Weibo.					
	26	A. Before I started to use Sina Weibo, I could choose and structure effective information to achieve my goal.					
		B. After I used Sina Weibo, I could choose and structure effective information to achieve my goal.					
Participant	27	A. Before I started to use Sina Weibo, I would use the power of media to solve my problem					
		B. After I used Sina Weibo, I would use the power of media to solve my problem.					
	28	A. Before I started to use Sina Weibo, I would engage in the issue that reported by the media.					
		B. After I used Sina Weibo, I would engage in the issue that reported on Weibo.					

	29.	A. Before I started to use Sina Weibo, I could keep good social relationship.					
		B. After I used Sina Weibo, I could keep good social relationship.					



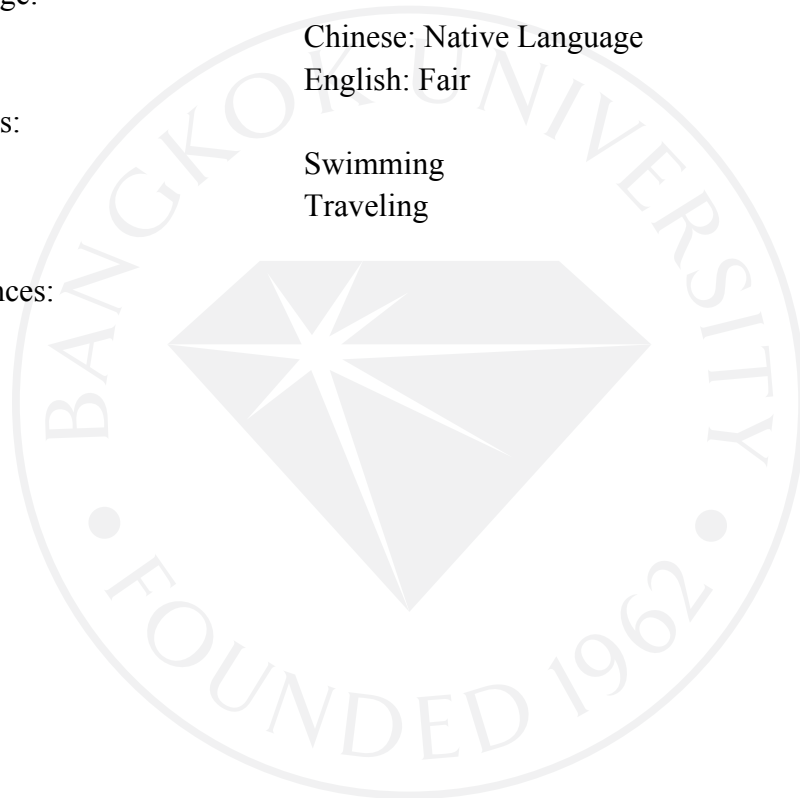
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