"Keeping a Safe Confession Distance between Strangers": The Spatial Structure of Social Accessibility in Networked Communities and Risk Avoidance of Stranger Confessions

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Abstract

This study focuses on the spatial structure of stranger social accessibility in networked communities and risk avoidance when socializing with strangers. Using *Confession Wall* as an example, this study contends that community social media fosters new connections by compensating for accessibility issues between strangers in local communities through flexible mediation of online and offline social interactions. This connectivity minimizes the costs and risks of emotional interactions between strangers in semi-acquaintance communities. This compensation for social accessibility highlights the value of digital media, especially community social media as a geomedia, in energizing communities and facilitating interactions between strangers. This is crucial in understanding the emotional interactions between strangers and how they are mediated by community social media in settings where acquaintances and complete strangers intermingle.

1 Introduction

Community, as a social phenomenon, involves establishing meaningful connections between people (Mynatt, O'Day, Adler, *et al.*, 1998). While the logic of traditional communities is fixed, digital technology has broadened the range of people's spatial activities, promoting the emergence of numerous new forms of communities and causing existing communities to also undergo a process of mediatization (Huang, 2020). Due to the deterritorialized nature of these communities, the digital era has witnessed the rise of many online interest-based groups, which are often referred to as "virtual communities" (Rheingold, 1993). Gergen (2003) refers to this phenomenon as a "new floating world". People can use the internet to find websites that correspond to their needs and feel as though they are part of a community. At the same time, the reality of such communities is often questioned, and there is a growing concern about the eroding effect they have on physical involvement in local communities, fearing that people are losing touch with local communities (Wellman, 2001).

Its essential presupposition is the dual opposition between virtuality and reality. (Baym, 2015: 81-82）Baym (2015:102) proposed that it is necessary to discuss how to engage or not in digital interaction and the extent to which engagement will, in turn, affect people's involvement in local communities. According to Hine (2000), there is no advantage to believing that a dichotomy exists between virtuality and reality. Networked communities and local participation are not a dual opposition but can even be mutually intertwined (Gruzd, et al., 2016), particularly in local-based new media communities (Marshall, Taylor, Yu, 2004).

Because of the proximity of physical spaces and identities, it is common for individuals to form local communities in areas such as campuses and residential neighborhoods (Xie, L., Pinto, J., & Zhong, B., 2022). As the scale of physical space expands, these communities are becoming more and more mixed with acquaintances and strangers, meaning that some members of the community are acquaintances whilst others are strangers to the individual. Such communities are called "semi-acquaintance communities". (Li & Ye, 2022). It has become crucial to discuss how strangers interact in these communities to stimulate community dynamics. Online social media based on geographical communities also play an essential role in fostering community interaction. Several digital platforms mediate the interactions among

strangers in communities, including WeChat (groups, mini-programs, official accounts), and community applications, which are digital community public spaces. Strangers in a local community may pass by each other every day and make eye contact, but not say a word to each other. They might also want to express themselves but because they are strangers, they are unable to do so in person. But they may end up expressing themselves anonymously or outside of the community's social media network. Face-to-face and social media-based scenarios represent a form of social accessibility in local communities, both of which are found in stranger interactions in local communities. However, questions must be asked regarding how these two kinds of social accessibility interact with each other. Moreover, what kind of spatial structure of social accessibility is generated, what kind of emotional expression practices among strangers in semi-acquaintance communities are fostered, and what are their implications for emotional communication? By examining the spatial structure of strangers' emotional expressions mediated through community social media in the digital age, this paper argues that the mediating role of community social media is characterized by a mixture of online and offline communities, thus forming a hybrid spatial structure. Based on this spatial structure, users can flexibly adapt online and offline access to form complementary advantages, maintaining a safe and comfortable social distance, and thus avoiding the risk of the socialization process with strangers to maximize the benefits.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Community Informatics and Networked Communities

While there are many ways to build local communities (Lyon & Driskell, 2011), one of the critical ways is through people's awareness of and participation in local communities (Carroll, 2014), and the media is frequently seen as a key factor in this process. Modern information and communication technologies have also inspired new patterns of community and activity (Chen, Hanrahan, Yuan, Carroll, 2017). Some scholars have referred to this overlay of online information and local communities as "community informatics" (Gurstein, 2000; Keeble and Loader, 2001; O' Neil, 2002; Taylor, 2004). Unlike the de-localization of virtual communities, community informatics is concerned with the information and communication technologies of local communities. The study of how information and communication technologies impact geographically local communities is at the core of community informatics as a field of study (Gurstein, 1999). Community development through information is a key component of community informatics, and it assumes that local communities value digital information technology as its fundamental premise (Ian Goodwin, 2008). Community informatics is an approach that seeks to reconnect networked and local communities (Loader et al., 2000; Chen, Hanrahan, Yuan, Carroll, 2017).

The term "networked communities" is used by Mynatt et al. (1998) to describe the new kind of community that results from the fusion of local communities and digital networks. In their view, such communities are based on a sense of place that blends virtual and physical worlds, and they are in a continuous and dynamic process of development with "persistence", "periodicity", "boundaries", "engagement", "authoring", etc. These scholars argue that such online communities mediate the boundaries between the real and virtual worlds, opening up new avenues for social rhythm and community.

Many scholars have discussed this integration of online and offline communities. Green (2002) argues that ICT technologies can increase community awareness and boost participation among community members. Additionally, Han, Shih, Rosson & Carroll (2014) argue that mobile technologies can support community members' social interactions and reduce their involvement in various types of barriers to community activities. Using Freecycle, a local networking platform, as a case study, Alix and Christine (2018) argue that these mediated relationships have the potential to enable contact between people who would not otherwise meet, which in turn can affect residents' "local sense of community". None of these studies, however, adequately address how community members negotiate and flexibly adapt to social accessibility in networked communities or how such negotiation and adaptation are even possible. This makes it difficult for us to understand how offline interactions work and how they lead to new spatiotemporal community structures and new interpersonal network connections.

2.2 Social Accessibility and Its Temporal Structure

The shift from agricultural to industrial societies has also resulted in the transition from an acquaintance society to a stranger society. An acquaintance society is built on kinship and geography and is characterized by custom-based trust. Stranger societies are based on increased social mobility and expanded spatial scope and are characterized by contract-based trust. (Zhang, 2008) The concept of a "stranger" can generally be traced back to Simmel (2008), who introduced the term in German industrialization at the end of the nineteenth century to describe those wanderers who do not come today and leave tomorrow but instead come today and stay tomorrow. This stranger is physically close to the locals and socio-culturally diverse. In his migration studies, Parker further expands on Simmel's concept of the stranger by referring to this group as "marginalized". The contrast between locals and visitors, friends and strangers, is embodied in this discussion of outsiders and marginalized people and is predicated on the idea that cultural identity is certain and

consistent. However, with the development of individualism in late modern society, high mobility and pluralism of identity became essential prerequisites for discussions surrounding strangers. Bauman (2002: 41) relates the concept of the stranger to the high level of uncertainty in modern society. According to him, a stranger is anyone we do not know well enough to be either close to or far from, neither part of us nor them, neither friend nor foe.

To some extent, strangers in networked communities are a hybrid of Simmel's and Bauman's definitions of strangers. On the one hand, community members exhibit a relative certainty of identity as part of the community (for example, residents living in the same residential district) and have a particular vigilance towards outsiders (such as facial recognition technology at the entrance and exit of the residential district). At the same time, members' social identities and cultural backgrounds are different, expressing stranger uncertainty. Thus, strangers in such local communities can have both certainty and uncertainty.

The idea of social accessibility is crucial when talking about interactions between strangers. This concept can be traced back to Simmel (2008), whose view is that it is a way of managing interpersonal relationships in a city of sensory overload. In discussing face-to-face interactions, Goffman (1963: 104) argues that those present must be prepared to make potential face-to-face encounters with others possible and that refusal to accept contact is unwarranted, which he sees as an expression of "situational presence". For Quan-Haase & Collins (2008) and Pieber (2021), social accessibility can be interpreted as the capacity to reach out to others. According to Milgram (1970), modern urban life is characterized by "large numbers, density, and heterogeneity". He argues that the way to deal with this urban overload is through social accessibility management, which includes the management of social time, costs, and public-private boundaries. Milgram (1970) argues that managing social accessibility, such as time, costs, and public-private boundaries is the way to deal with this urban overload, with time being a vital component. In particular, Zerubavel (1979) outlines a conceptual framework of social accessibility and distinguishes between private time, during which individuals are legitimately inaccessible to others, and public time, during which they are freely accessible. Quan-Haase & Collins (2008) discussed computer-mediated communication in terms of the 'temporal structure of social accessibility', and 'individuals' definitions of public and private time". However, in addition to time, space is another crucial aspect to consider when talking about social accessibility.

2.3 Spatial Structure of Social Accessibility in Networked Communities

Urban public spaces are important places that facilitate this accessibility (Carr, Francis, Rivlin & Stone,1992). People can interact, observe, communicate, and debate in public spaces. Calhoun (1986) and Goffman (1963: 104) argue that people in public spaces have a responsibility to provide accessibility to ensure collective solidarity. However, scholars such as Sonnett (1976) are concerned that as cities grow, people will move from the public to the private sphere. Silence becomes a pattern of behavior that people take in public places, "people do not have the right to talk to strangers," and "everyone has the right not to be disturbed."(Sonnett, 2000) From the perspective of social accessibility, this silence is the management of social accessibility.

With the development of mobile digital networks, online technologies have altered social patterns among local community members (Humphreys, 2010), as well as how people gather and interact in public spaces (Gurstein, 2000). The development of mobile media has facilitated socialization among acquaintances, while at the same time fostering rich social practices among strangers. Current research on social media and strangers focuses on minority groups, such as gay men who use location-based applications such as *MoMo*, *Blued*, and *Grindr* for localized interactions with other gay men (Race, 2015). Youth groups also use social media to build positive interactions with strangers online (Wang & Edwards, 2016). Less focus has been placed on how strangers communicate with one another locally via neighborhood social media.

A networked community is a form of community that is a mixture of online and physical communities, which combines the dual logic of cyberspace and physical space. The articulation of physical space and cyberspace generates what de Souza e Silva (2006) calls "hybrid spaces". In the age of mobile communication, this idea seeks to redefine the relationship between the network's physical and digital spaces. In his view, this hybrid space is a connection, movement, and social space. It constitutes the spatial structure of stranger interactions in locally networked communities, which in turn influence strangers' emotional expressions and interaction behaviors.

Following the logic of the spatial structure of networked communities, this paper argues that community social media, as a geomedia, allows local physical communities and online communities to merge, shifting the paradigm of local community accessibility. This new type of community accessibility is crucial for emotional expression and social interaction among community strangers. However, on a more practical level, it is necessary to investigate with specific empirical data how community social media functions as a geomedia that mediates social accessibility in networked communities as well as the types of affective expression and social interaction practices that are encouraged.

3. Case and Methodology

3.1 Case Study

Confession Wall is an interactive platform for students to express their emotions on campus, using social media platforms such as *QQ*, *Weibo*, and *WeChat*. On the platform, students can confess their feelings, add friends, and exchange feelings. The general process is as follows: firstly, the operation team of the confession wall applies for an account on the social media platform (Weibo, QQ, or WeChat official account) named "*XX University Confession Wall*"; secondly, students follow this account, and those who want to confess their feelings will send their confessions to the platform in the form of private messages; thirdly, the platform will publish the anonymous confessions in the platform. For example, on one WeChat Confession Wall, students send messages to the account as private messages, management will filter and summarize these messages every day, and then publish these messages in the form of public posts on the same or the following day. Users who subscribe to the public account can then read the confessions.

In terms of case selection, although the *Confession Wall* is a special community social media for love confession, these confessions are a component of the daily emotional practices of community members. Analyzing the emotional expression in local communities can be helpful. In addition, a campus is also a unique form of community, and its composition and interaction style are somewhat different from other urban communities. However, the confession wall is comparable to other community social media platforms like the WeChat groups run by district owners in terms of online and offline interaction and social accessibility adaptation. Therefore, this study aims to discuss the effect of community social media in mediating the emotional expression of unfamiliar community members through the *Confession Wall*.

The *Confessions Wall* features a variety of content including confessions from men and women who seek a partner, confessions of praise or complaint, confessions of study friends wanted, as well as general comments about campus life. Among these types of confessions, 'seeking a partner' is the most important. These best reflect the original purpose and characteristics of the *Confession Wall*, so this study selects these types of content as the primary object of research. In terms of content, the study focuses on two types of confessions: the "*fishing*" (捞人)confession and the "*friend wanted*" confession. The former originates from a physical encounter whereby the confessor wishes to find the confessed or obtain the contact information of the confessed through the confession wall. The latter encompasses confessors who announce their situation and criteria for a girlfriend or boyfriend on the confession wall, and those who are interested can contact the confessor using their contacts.

3.2 Methodology

This study chose the *Confession Wall* of G University as the research field. There are three reasons for this. Firstly, many users of the *Confession Wall* of G University present rich media practices. There are more than 40,000 students at G University. As of November 2020, there are more than 32,000 fans who follow the account, with an average daily reading of around over 13,000, with 99.1% of students belonging to G University. The *Confession Wall* claims to be the most active WeChat official account on campus. Second, this study does not examine the variations in public communication practice among various communities, but rather the practice of public communication promoted by community media as a geomedia in embedding local communities (such as colleges and universities in other regions or universities at different levels).

The fieldwork of this study officially commenced in June 2020 and lasted for ten months. Using an in-depth interview method, 25 participants were interviewed. Their participation was obtained through open recruitment and snowballing methods. Among them were 22 students (12 women and 10 men), most of whom are active users of the confession wall. These active users have the following features: they recognize the social role of the confession wall, have the habit of reading the content regularly, and have participated in confession wall-related confession activities.In addition, the study also interviewed three moderators of G University's confession wall, to gain a deeper understanding of the survival status, moderation, and editing process of the wall.The students interviewed were coded in the text starting with A. Interviews with students focused on the following topics: habits and reasons for using the confession wall; experiences of confessing or being confessed to by others on the wall; opinions on this social method, etc. The interviews with the confession wall operators mainly include the process and standard of content review, the profit model, etc.All interviewers are anonymous in the text, with student codes beginning with A and moderators' codes starting with B.

With the interviewee's permission, the conversation was recorded and then sorted into a text file using iFlytek Hearing and manual work. During the interview, the researchers recorded the relevant reactions of the interviewees. Interviewees who did not wish to take part in a face-to-face interview were interviewed online, and the relevant responses were also sorted into text manuscripts. In addition to in-depth interviews, the researchers read and analyzed the content of each issue of the confession wall of G University from 900th to 1000th edition，and have a perceptual understanding of these applications on a personal level.

4. Findings

Users of the Confession Wall often use the words "fishing"(捞) and "being fished"（被捞）to describe the act of confessing their love for others and being confessed by others. There is a famous phrase at G-college known as "fishing under the sea"(*海底捞*), which refers to publicly asking for someone's contact information on the Confession Wall. A complete process of "fishing" (i.e. posting a message on the confession wall to find someone) and "being fished" (i.e. the person the message is destined for viewing the message or accepting the confession) can be divided into four essive stages: The first stage involves falling in love with a stranger after seeing them in a physical space. This could be someone who is single and cannot find a boyfriend or girlfriend in their daily circle of acquaintances. In the second stage, those individuals post messages on the Confession Wall in an effort to connect with potential dates. In the third stage, the target receives the confession and decides whether they wish to connect or not. In the fourth and last stage, if successful, the relationship moves from online to offline. This process reflects the spatial structure of social accessibility in locally networked communities, where physical space is interconnected with cyberspace. Face-to-face social accessibility and social accessibility through community media balance one another out, enabling strangers to manage the proper social distance and lower the "risk" of social interaction.

4.1 The "Risk" of Social Accessibility in Physical Spaces

Due to their close proximity, people in local communities frequently interact in person with other members of the community. Sometimes it is an extended encounter. Other times it is a brief glimpse. Sometimes it is a long conversation with an acquaintance. Or other times it is a simple nod to a stranger. This social accessibility in physical space can be divided into two categories: the first is contact with acquaintances, such as classmates, school friends, neighbors, etc., which leads to forming a 'circle' in the local community. The other is chance encounters in public spaces, which suggests opportunities to break out of the circle of acquaintances and come into contact with more heterogeneous individuals in the local community. These two categories also correspond to two risks of social accessibility: the circle of acquaintances that are accessible in a physical space, which to some extent means 'closed' (i.e., no access to more heterogeneous individuals); and the chance encounter with strangers in a physical space, which can result in the 'abruptness' and 'awkwardness' of a face-to-face encounter. This 'risk' sheds light on why individuals in local communities use online media to express themselves to strangers in the community.

4.1.1 " Can't Find Someone to Express Love": the Confusion of Geeks and Nerds

The physical community of today differs from the traditional community in that although individuals in the community share a similar identity or one that is close to it, there is still a distinction between acquaintances and strangers. This semi-acquaintance community means that there is a circle of acquaintances. This circle of acquaintances is formed through daily spatial activities. On university campuses, dormitories and classrooms anchor certain relationships, such as roommates, students studying the same major, etc. "*In my daily activities at school, the people I met were very limited to that fixed circle, such as roommates and classmates who attended classes together. Even if they are classmates, the ones who are often together are those fixed people. Unless I join some activities or school clubs, I can meet people outside this circle*." A11 said.

An increasing number of students prefer to become "*geeks and nerds*" on campus. Even though the dormitories are small, they are very active and are not limited to simply talking, sleeping, and playing video games. "*Many students are willing to read, play computer games, and complete homework in their dormitory. Other than for class, we usually don't leave the dormitory, and often eat takeout*" (A03). In response to this phenomenon, at the start of the summer holidays in 2021, the G student residence was installed with an access control system that requires students to swipe their cards to enter and leave the residence, with one of the rules stating that failure to leave the residence for a day is considered an "accommodation irregularity" and will lead to disciplinary action. A18 noted: "*I like to stay in my dormitory, I rarely participate in school club activities, and have nothing to do but play games on the Internet. I have a wide variety of online friends. The girls I know are the same as the ones in my class, and I don't have any feelings for them. So, I want to confess but can't find the object of confession.*"

Breaking the circle of acquaintances is therefore essential if you want to find a boyfriend or girlfriend. One of the main reasons why A04 uses the confession wall is to "*find someone from another college.*" He explains, "*In my first year, I knew people in my department by then, and I didn't like anyone in particular. I used the wall to meet different people outside my circle.*"

For example, the 43rd confession in the 933rd issue of the G school confession wall reads: "*I want to stop being single in my second year, I am around 177cm tall, average looking (mainly depends on how you look at it) sunny and cheerful, I have a drop of face control, I hope to find a girl who is around 160cm tall, want to hang out with you, campus ride, study with each other, spit out trivial things. qq: 147 ****446*" This type of confession is for a particular kind of person who meets the confessor's need for a relationship rather than for a specific person. It stems from a desire to escape the realities of a relationship.

This impulse to confess still stems from the certainty of social circles. The uncertainty and consistency that comes with a community of strangers provide a possibility of accessibility for individuals to discover people outside their circle.

4.1.2 "Wuss" and "Embarrassment": The Right Not to Be Disturbed in Public Space

When a chance encounter occurs in the physical world, confessions of love frequently start with "love at first sight." This love at first sight usually occurs when one person meets another at a casual glance and they develop a crush on them but is too embarrassed or shy to speak to them or ask for contact information in person. The presence of a face-to-face physical space and visual contact becomes an important starting point for the practice of confession. In most cases, "*it often starts with a facial attractiveness* " (A20), an experience shared by both A08 and A10. In particular, A10 describes his only experience of confession on the confession wall as: *"I think I saw a girl on the road, and it was kind of maybe a heart attack...... she was just very clean, nice and lovely. So, I expressed my love on the wall."* (A10).

As A19 says, everyone has the right to not be bothered in a public place. "*For example, if I'm in a restaurant or a library and someone suddenly comes up to me and says they are more attracted to me and want to go out with me, I would feel a sense of being offended, I guess, just out of the blue, and it might be awkward for a while.*"

"If I met someone I liked, I would probably tell her I have a crush on her and want to go out with you. Or if I think someone is acting awesome, I might express it in person, or maybe even not express it and hide it in my heart if I don't get the chance." (A21). During the fieldwork, A21 was the only participant who said he would initiate a face-to-face conversation. At the same time, the rest of the interviewees were wary of expressing themselves in person, explaining that they do not dare to do so. The direct expression might have the opposite, unintended effect and cause offense or embarrassment.

One of the best features of the confession wall is that it allows people to avoid embarrassment when confessing their feelings. A03 and A10 have both publicly confessed their feelings to others on the wall. When talking about this confession experience, A03 said, *"I saw a guy once when I was picking up a delivery. I took a picture and posted it on the confession wall. I posted that I felt he dressed well, looked good, and I wanted to express my love to him."* A03 and A10 both said they were "*scared*" when asked why they didn't confess their feelings to their target, saying, *"it's the kind of thing that makes people feel offended and embarrassed if you do it to their face."* A10 said, *"When you use the confession wall, there is a real wimp mentality but I still want to confess my feelings."*

4.2 Confessions through the "Wall": Social Security and Accessibility Based on Confession Walls

The mediated interactions in local social media platforms partially make up for the inaccessibility of strangers in a community due to the "awkwardness" and "embarrassment" of face-to-face interactions, or the inaccessibility of differentiated others due to the restrictions of the circle of acquaintances. The confessions on the wall are made in a virtual space that is anonymous and controlled for disclosure of information. At the same time, the local community nature of these "walls" makes the identity of the confessors identifiable. This creates safe conditions for confessions and possible social accessibility between strangers. The intended recipient of a confession will respond to the confessor according to their needs.

4.2.1 "Anonymous"and "in the Same Community": The Safety of Confessions through Walls

Anonymity is one of the more important characteristics of public discourse on social media. This anonymity brings a sense of security to public expression and protects individuals from the risks associated with self-exposure (Akdeniz, 2002). The confession wall is also an anonymous platform for expression, where members of the local community express their feelings anonymously, meaning that the confessor does not need to "*worry about rejection or being called rude after confessing in person*" (A20). This allows the individual can confess "*with no worries*" (A17). When posting a confession, the confessor is required to leave their contact information so that the person they are confessing to can contact them. However, this seems to go against anonymity. On the other hand, users of the confession wall can leave the details of a 'side account', one which people use to make friends with strangers, as opposed to a main account. A main account is used exclusively by acquaintances to socialize. In this way, they do not risk revealing their true identity. For example, the 23rd confession on the G-School confessions wall, issue 1274, reads: " *I'm looking for a girlfriend about 5 '5" ...... I'm a junior, here is my side account to prevent familiarity q: 3395632840*"

In the new media landscape, there are many ways to express private emotions, including public channels like Weibo, exclusive channels like moments on WeChat, and tree-hole type accounts or platforms represented by *Tell* and others. Interviewers such as A13 and A16 use polymedia (Madianou & Miller, 2013) to express their daily emotions. WeChat Moments is mainly used to share feelings with acquaintances selectively and is oriented towards impression management; Weibo is anonymous wherein the audience is strangers and the platform is primarily used to post emotions that cannot be posted within a circle of friends, such as "*complaining about roommates or teachers, etc.*" (A11); users of tree-hole media "*mainly want to find listeners among strangers anywhere* " (A14).

The use of all three of these social media for emotional expression is, to some extent, not limited by geography. However, the *Confession Wall* as a geomedia is geographically specific. Describing the role of the confession wall, A09 says: "*There are certain emotions that you can't post in your moments or talk about to people around you. It's just a bit private. I also don't want to post 'tree holes' because the people on them may not be able to empathize with you because they are in a different environment than you are in. They are still things I want to share with others and listen to their responses, so I send them out on the wall.*"

Nowadays, socializing with strangers has become an essential part of social media. For example, in China, there are dating apps for heterosexuals including *Tan Tan* and *MoMo*, and dating apps specifically for gay men, such as *Blued*. These apps provide a way for strangers to communicate with each other. However, there is a stigma attached to these apps for many people. For example, *MoMo* and *Blued* are often labeled as "dating apps". As A03 says, these apps can be complicated. "*It's okay to chat on them, but there's no practical use, and it's hard to turn offline interaction because the identity is different*", says A16. Identity consistency becomes a crucial assurance for offline communication. The community stranger social networking platform emphasizes its distinctive value in this context because of its nature as an anonymous social networking platform. Yet, at the same time, this social networking is localized, and the users have a unified identity. This gives strangers in local communities security for their emotional confessions.

4.2.2 Private Feelings That Are Made Public

It is because of these security guarantees that confessions are posted on the wall. Posting confessions on the wall is a process of publicizing private feelings, but the risk of such publicization is effectively avoided by the anonymous nature of the wall. On another level, this "publicity" becomes a "joint effort to find someone."

According to empirical material, posting usually happens shortly after an encounter of "love at first sight". The process can be divided into three steps: the user sends the confession to the back office of the wall; the editor of the wall reviews and edits the confession, the confession is then published in the form of an article on the official WeChat account.

The stage of receiving a confession is when the audience reads the content of a confession posted on the public account. At this stage, the audience can be divided into three categories according to their relation to the confession: The general audience (people who have no contact with the person to whom the confession is intended, they generally exist as spectators and occasionally participate in feedback), the classmates or friends of the target (people who have some contact with the target in their daily lives), and finally the target of the confession.

When the acquaintance of the confessed, such as classmates etc., see the confessions about their friends while browsing the confessions, they usually pass it on them. he target can also take steps to contact, for example, according to the contact information left by the confessor. A10 says: "*Sometimes when I recognize a post destined for a friend, I might take a screenshot and just send it to a group related to them or send it to them personally.*" Depending on the content of the confession, the target may have different reactions when receiving the message. For example, A06 felt that "*being confessed to was a form of approval,*" while A07 thought it was offensive.

When asked why he had to confess his love on this platform, A08 said, "*Because I want to use everyone's power to get this person's contact information or let this person see my confession to contact me directly.*"

As a result, the decision to confess privately has two goals for the fishing style confession: first, for the confessed person to see on the confession wall. "*There are many users of the confession wall, and the person I'm confessing to probably looks at the wall every day and just happens to see what I'm confessing.*" (A11); Secondly, an acquaintance of the target sees confession and passes it on to them or provides relevant contact details to the confessor. For the girlfriend-wanted confession, as A01 says, *"I'm casting a wide net, so people who see my criteria for dating may add me as a friend, then I'll take my time to filter through them".*

4.3 Risk Management in the Relationship-Building Process

The interactions based on the confession wall have a practical orientation, meaning they pursue establishing a realistic, intimate relationship. Therefore, once the target of the confession has received the message from the confessor, they will contact the confessor through the contact details in the confession, or through the contact details provided by the target's friends, if the target is interested in taking the relationship to the next stage. Of course, if the target does not want any involvement with the confessor and refuses to provide contact details, the confession process ceases to go any further. The subsequent process of relationship building consists of two stages: the first stage is disclosing one's identity through social media such as QQ and WeChat until both parties develop a willingness to interact offline; the second stage is confirming the impressions made in the online interaction during the offline interaction and then choosing to continue or halt the relationship. The social accessibility process is also complementary between these two steps, with the former's accessibility manifesting in online information disclosure and impression formation and the latter's

accessibility in offline confirmation and actual contact.

4.3.1 Online Disclosure and Impression Formation

Users of Confession Wall can either use anonymous expressions to ask for information support in nearby online communities or use a workaround to make the information visible to the confessed, gaining a degree of accessibility. This accessibility extends beyond just the digital realm. Users also pursue offline accessibility, attempting to establish a personal connection. As A01 said, the users of the confession wall are not seeking a kind of online love but have an ultimate goal of offline private interactions.

After receiving a confession, if the person being confessed has the desire to establish a relationship, they will add them as a friend since the content of the confession will often contain the confessor's contact information, usually a WeChat or QQ account. A09 comments that these contacts are mostly "small numbers" and are intended for strangers. A09 says that these contacts are mostly "side accounts", used for contact with strangers specifically.

The relationship-building phase can also be broadly divided into two stages: the online chat and the 'face-to-face' phase. Chatting online is the first step in getting to know each other and determines whether or not the relationship will move to the next stage. There are two kinds of outcomes here. One is that they find each other incompatible in the chatting stage, after which they may just become friends on the list or, as A04 often does, he deletes the friend. A11 said: "*this is a vital sign of initial acceptance*".

4.3.2 Offline Meeting and Impression Confirmation

If both parties feel comfortable during the WeChat chat, the relationship will progress offline. Virtual community interactions are frequently accompanied by the uncertainty of identity (unless the user actively discloses their true identity on their profile) due to their de-territorialization and anonymity. Compared to *MoMo* and *Tan Tan*, examples of stranger social apps, the confession wall can bring users a sense of authenticity and safety when making friends. At G University, this physical space marks student identity. This student identity brings a sense of certainty to the virtual community of interactions. As A01 and A03 note, it is difficult to determine the authenticity of the information on *Tan Tan* and *MoMo*. However, confession wall users are all university students, and the social process is relatively less dangerous. "*It doesn't matter to try to get in touch. After all, they are students. There is no risk to property or persons from contact on campus*", said A13, whose quote represents what most users believe.

Interacting parties typically construct an imagined scenario during online interactions based on pertinent social cues that are actively or unintentionally disclosed during the social process. This imagination might falter when you meet in person because there is less uncertainty offline than it is online. A09 said: "I*'m 6'6" and then wanted to find someone who was 5'8". After posting a message on the 'wall', a few people added me. One of them asked to go for a walk that night. Once we met, I was baffled. He was as tall as me. It's not normal for the top of my head to reach the other person's mouth or chin. The two of us were particularly embarrassed to see each other. After the walk, we didn't contact each other again.*"

Users usually get into a relationship quickly if they recognize each other when meeting. "*Because the use of a confession wall is supposed to be to fall in love*", says A12. This is how A21 and her current girlfriend met. He said: "*I saw her messaging on the wall that she wanted someone who was 5'8. I am 5'8" so meet her demands. Then I wanted to meet, and after meeting a few times, we soon got together. Fate is so wonderfu*l!"

Of course, some become ordinary friends after meeting or become online friends only. "*This type belongs to the offline meeting after one party does not see the other party romantically but is happy to remain friends*", says A14.

4.3.3 Confessions Risk and Benefit Control

Throughout the whole process, from the embarrassing confession at first sight to the establishment of an offline relationship, users of the confession wall flexibly regulate the risks of emotional expression through the flexible coordination of online and offline social accessibility, in an attempt to maximize benefits. In the beginning, this was expressed as "*I can't confess my love at first sight, as it's not polite and will make people embarrassed*" (A16); in the stage of confessing through the wall as "*confessing anonymously*" and "*using a side account for contact information*" (A11); in the stage of establishing a relationship as gradually disclosing richer information according to whether there is a good feeling, and finally deciding whether to meet or not; after meeting, users then decide whether to continue the relationship based on our offline impressions or not.

One of the final aspects of this confessional practice is breaking up after a relationship has been established. Here, some of the interviewees spoke of the ability to "*facilitate breakups*" with strangers (A04). A01 explained the reason for this more directly:" *to put it bluntly, I don't want to fall in love with acquaintances or friends of acquaintances. I just want to find a suitable breakup.*" Since the interpersonal networks of the two people in a relationship overlap due to the

"proximity" of physical space, a breakup can be awkward. This is the reason why A01 and A04 said they are not ready to find a boyfriend/girlfriend in the same class as them or with the same major while in college.

5. Conclusion

With the development of new media technologies, the mediating factor in people's interactions is increasing, and embodied relationships are increasingly giving way to mediated relationships. The traditional local communities are in a precarious position in the face of the trend of disembedding (Giddens, 1991) and virtual communities(Rheingold, 2000) brought about by modern technology. However, "community informatics" (Taylor, 2004) sees digital media as an essential means of reconstructing local communities. In this vein, this study discusses the spatial structure of communities and the social accessibility of community members in community informatics, using the confession wall as a case study. This study attempts to advance research related to community informatics.Specifically in this study, in semi-acquainted communities, how to safely express emotions becomes a crucial issue for community participation as well as for stimulating community dynamics. In a process of spatial networking, geomedia combine the physical and digital into commua single entity. A deterritorialization of the local community is made possible by how digital media is incorporated into the physical space of the traditional local community, which also exhibits a porous state. Under this perspective of convergence, the boundaries between the distant and close, the public and the private, the digital and the embodied become blurred, and the social distance and accessibility between community members are adjusted as a result. This paper examines this phenomenon using the case study of confession walls in domestic universities. As a local community social media, confession walls integrate the dual logic of online and local and debug the social accessibility of college students in terms of campus emotional confessions. Both the confessor and the person to whom the confession is intended are revealing personal information and adjusting their relationship with strangers on demand by combining face-to-face and mediated social accessibility, lowering the cost and risk of interaction with strangers, and maintaining themselves in the relatively "safe" situation. This compensation for social accessibility also reflects the value of digital media, especially geo-mediated community social media, in stimulating community dynamics and promoting community public life.

This paper focuses on college students confessing their emotions on the confession wall. Using this as a case study, we can explore the subject further in two aspects: first, the discussion of the confession wall as a platform can also be extended to community social media such as owners' WeChat groups; second, the confession of emotions discussed in this paper can be extended to include love and hate, attitudes and thoughts about the people and things seen and heard in the community. Social media platforms and content priorities, however, resemble a confessional. For instance, owners can talk to each other privately in their WeChat group. Many issues affecting the residential neighborhood are posted in the WeChat group for discussion for either private or public purposes. In the practice of community interaction mediated by this WeChat group, we can still see the docking and reciprocation between public and private, distant and close, and virtual and real. In this process, community public life and interaction emerge in a new form, which reflects the value of networked communities in modern community participation and governance. This study emphasizes the importance of neighborhood social media in regulating cross-community social interactions and energizing neighborhood dynamics. Of course, the discussion in this study excludes factors like platform operators and community managers, and pertinent issues require further investigation.

Note

1. The "tree hole" is a metaphor for a hidden space where people can reveal their hearts. In the pre-internet era, people would often carefully choose a physical "tree hole" to keep their secrets. With the development of network technology, various network "tree holes" such as tree hole websites, tree hole microblogs and tree hole apps have become new channels for people to open their hearts and confide in each other.

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