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Abstract

Charitable fundraising, which often goes viral, has been flourishing on Wechat, the most popular social media site in China. It has given rise to a variety of forms of resistance. Silence among them is particularly evident. This study was conducted on three focus groups to unveil the hidden voices in the silent college students in an online charitable fundraising. Findings show that these voices demonstrate participants' reclaiming of authorship of private space on Moments, their endeavour to avoid creating stress in vulnerable others, and their questioning of the configuration of responsibility. These voices show negotiation with or resistance against the pervasive guanxi (a synonym for English "relationship") - oriented moral discourse and indicate the emergence of some new or distinct "ethical minds." We believe these findings suggest that pertinent stakeholders should critically examine the potential negative consequences brought to individuals by online charity, such as intruding into their private online space and exerting coercive pressure on their decision-making.

Keywords

Wechat, Guanxi, Silence, Charitable Fundraising, Resistance, Focus Groups

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Acknowledgements

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Charitable fundraising, which often goes viral, has been flourishing on Wechat, the most popular social media site in China. It has given rise to a variety of forms of resistance. Silence among them is particularly evident. This study was conducted on three focus groups to unveil the hidden voices in the silent college students in an online charitable fundraising. Findings show that these voices demonstrate participants' reclaiming of authorship of private space on Moments, their endeavour to avoid creating stress in vulnerable others, and their questioning of the configuration of responsibility. These voices show negotiation with or resistance against the pervasive guanxi (a synonym for English "relationship") - oriented moral discourse and indicate the emergence of some new or distinct "ethical minds." We believe these findings suggest that pertinent stakeholders should critically examine the potential negative consequences brought to individuals by online charity, such as intruding into their private online space and exerting coercive pressure on their decision-making. Keywords: Wechat, Guanxi, Silence, Charitable Fundraising, Resistance, Focus Groups

Compared to its rapid growth in economics, Chinese philanthropy lags far behind (Yan, Huang, Foster, & Tester, 2007). Some authors (see, e.g., Liu, 2015; Luo & Li, 2010) attribute this situation to the time-honoured culture of *guanxi*. In China, people's *guanxi* presents a web-like structure where he or she is in the centre and others are scattered around with different degrees of closeness. Traditionally, people's philanthropic actions are mainly based on close ties. To some extent, close ties construct the most important social reality for individuals and form the basis of charitable behaviour. Seen in this way, Liu (2015) laments that the *guanxi*-oriented tradition has made Chinese charity develop into a form of "acquaintances charity" (p. 188).

In the wake of emerging social media, online charity has become increasingly popular, especially among young people. In China, online charity is often called micro-charity. Compared to traditional charity which is often government-led, "micro" charity is mainly size-limited and focuses on a specific worthy cause. "Micro" in Chinese context also implies charity that is organized in and through social media, especially social networking sites. According to Yang's (2015) *Annual Report on China's Philanthropy Development*, micro-charity has become a remarkably innovative form of philanthropy in China. This is largely because of the low threshold for people's participation in charity online, that is, everyone is allowed to participate in micro-charity.

There are several famous micro-charity online platforms in China; Sina Weibo and, more recently and popularly, Tencent Wechat are particularly influential. In this study, we restrict our focus to Wechat because it has been winning over more and more users, especially young people, in its competition with Weibo (CNNIC, 2015). From the 20th to the 28th March 2016, we closely followed and observed college students' responses towards a charitable fundraising using Wechat initiated by a son for his father's terminal cancer treatment. We focused on some of his close classmates who kept unusually silent in this micro-charity. By drawing on the Foucauldian notion of resistance, we conducted a focus-group study with the

aim of listening to the silent voices of those who were seemingly indifferent to the micro-charity.

Wechat and Micro-Charity

Wechat is a free mobile-messaging application developed by Tencent, the Chinese internet giant. Since 2015, it has become the most popular social media application in China(CNNIC, 2015). Wechat enables users to keep connectionswith their friends and family, anywhere and anytime. Unlike Facebook and Twitter, Wechat is a semi-closed platform, allowing for more personalized communications. Its nature of being semi-closed is embedded in its key features, such as Moments, Friends Circles and, Share to. After users create their accounts on Wechat, they add friends. When doing so, users often deliberately categorize their friends into different "Friend Circles," such as classmates, family, colleagues, etc. These circles represent the different groups they belong to, and we believe these represent varying levels of relational closeness. Users are allowed to post their status and links to web page on Moments. As users post on Moments, they can control the access through the feature of "Share to," and make their postings visible to handpicked "Friends Circles" so that they can then receive their "likes" or "comments." The "likes" or "comments" are only visible to the those who belong to the same circle. On Moments, one's postings together with his or her friends' which are "shared to" him or her are listed in a chronological order. Moments in this sense is a private-public space based on strong-ties among users.

Since Moments was launched on Wechat 4.0 in April 2012, it has become a suitable thriving place for micro-charity. At present, one of the most popular forms of micro-charity on Wechat is fundraising. In a typical online charitable fundraising, the initiator is required to authenticate his or her real name in Tencent Charity. Then he or she is allowed to upload charity related information to create a link of web pages, including pictures, texts and an authenticated bank account linked to the initiator for the potential donors' online transaction. This link of web pages can be re-posted on Moments. The whole process of charitable fundraising is strictly managed and audited according to certain laws and regulations. Figure 1 illustrates the web page of a recent charitable fundraising initiated by a male student from a department where the second author of this article is a faculty member. In this charitable fundraising, the student appealed for donations for his father's terminal cancer treatment, which would cost 300,000 RMB, a huge sum far beyond what his family could actually afford. The charitable information was explosively disseminated among his Friends Circles and his friends' Friend Circles. Four days after its launch, the sum raised reached 51,809 RMB and the number of participants totalled 4,129.

Figure1: A charitable fundraising for a father's terminal cancer treatment

Beside donations, participants' other online behaviours, such as liking, reposting and commenting are also important in virtual micro-charity. Among these behaviours, reposting is quite crucial for the success of micro-charity. In a typical fundraising situation on Wechat, the initiators' close friends tend to repeatedly repost the link of the micro-charity. When doing so, they always make it visible to their own Friends Circles to raise as much money as possible. In an online charity, as Lacetera et al.'s (2016) have observed, "broadcasting is positively associated with donations"(p. 202) and "broadcasting a pledge is associated with more pledges by a user's contacts" (ibid.), that is, the reposted information which carries people's charitable appeal will go "viral" in the social media. In China, charitable information going viral on social media is often romanticized as the "relay of love." According to Du et al. (2014), "relay of love" results in a shared vision on social media on helping those in need. According to Van Dijck (2011), "relay of love" reflects the power of connective popularity on Wechat.

Acquaintances Charity, "Relay of Love" and Silence

While some theorists(see e.g., Feng & Zhou, 2012; Zeng, 2014) hold optimistic views of micro-charity for a more progressive society in China, there are others who cautiously hold negative views. Cheng and Zhao (2015) have observed that the popularity of Wechat is mainly due to its semi-closed feature that accords with the Chinese-style circle culture, that is, Wechat, as a close-knit trusted network, is an ideal place for people to exercise, replicate and reinforce their *guanxi* in social life. Holmes et al. (2015) study also indicates that cultural events on Wechat in effect demonstrate and celebrate Chinese traditional collectivist values in which

guanxi is the primary component. In line with this thinking, micro-charity is an extension of traditional "acquaintances charity" which mainly involves a user's handpicked Friends Circle. In this sense, the flourishing of micro-charity does not necessarily represent social progress in China. Rather, it represents *guanxi*-oriented culture and in turn reinforces the associated traditional values.

In Chinese society, *guanxi* is not simply the interpersonal structure, but rather a moral framework for people's behaviours in their relation to others. Tan and Snell (2002) note, Chinese people's "moral behaviour varies according to a person's role, position, and relationship with other role-players in a highly differentiated and hierarchical social nexus"(p. 362). People tend to categorize others into certain groups such as family, friends and strangers according to relational closeness and distance. These categorizations serve as the basis for their social interactions. Not surprisingly, close personalities are of paramount importance. According to Yang (2009), these close ties construct Chinese people's concept of "us" within which they live an interdependent life and maintain high commitment and obligation to help each other. In a typical charitable fundraising on Wechat, close ties imply an intricate form of social pressure significantly influencing people's decision-making. More precisely, close ties establish the requirements for people to perform in a way according to the rule of "relational appropriateness." Seen in this light, micro-charity in effect carries the overwhelming power of a *guanxi*-oriented moral framework.

From a Foucauldian (1980) perspective, the *guanxi*-orientated moral framework is the dominant discourse working on people and framing their perceptions, feelings and decision-making in micro-charity on Wechat. According to Foucault's theory of discourse, micro-charity could be considered as an arena where there are multiple discourses co-existing with one another. The intersection of diversified and even contradictory discourses opens up avenue for people to "develop alternative, different and even opposing meanings and conduct on the margins of dominant discourses" (Armstrong & Murphy, 2012, p. 317). Resistance here means to adhere to norms, ideas or values in a way different from those advocated by the dominant social structure. In this sense, resistance does not simply involve collective, explicit and concrete activities, but rather links to the disguised, small-scale and subtle actions. In Scott's (2008) words, these are "everyday forms of resistance" (p. 33). Such forms of resistance are meaningful, and they contribute to development of new knowledge, as suggested by Thomas and Davies (2005).

In a charitable fundraising on Wechat, like the aforementioned one, there is always a torrent of information created by the enthusiastic and compassionate participants who are mainly the close friends of initiator. Meanwhile, there are always reluctant people who are close Friends Circle of initiator. They choose to keep silent on Wechat. It appears that their silence can be explained in terms of "lack of voice," which is a manifestation of powerlessness. However, Tannen (2001) points out that "silence alone is not a self-evident sign of powerlessness" (p. 158). Silence involves a certain personal choice. In other words, silence is essentially the active exercise of power because it is "deployed as a tool to resist the very discourses that imposed the silence in the first" (Bhattacharya, 2009, p. 360). Therefore, silence here cannot be simply reduced as indifference or selfishness, but rather as a form of sophisticated resistance against the dominants (Erevelles, 2002).

Based on this consideration, we acknowledge there are voices waiting to be heard in the silence of those who were seemingly indifferent in connection with fundraising. Silence, like other forms of resistance, might be the very place for alternative knowledge emerging which, as Weedon (1987) argues, will gradually increase people's social power. However, silent people are in minority and their voices are often neglected and marginalized when compared with all of others engaging in online charity fundraising with enthusiasm. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to bring these voices front and centre. The significance of

sharing the findings of this study may hold for pertinent stakeholders, including charity initiators/organizers, policy makers and scholars. Particularly, against the backdrop in which online charity is often romanticized as a promising innovative to traditional charity, the voices of the silent may provide an alternative position for the pertinent stakeholders to critically reflect upon the inadvertent consequences in their future investigations and practices.

Methodology

This study examined the hidden voices of silent college students in the aforementioned online charitable fundraising initiated by a son for his father's terminal cancer treatment. This fundraising received huge support from the initiator's classmates. The second author of this study is the head teacher of these students. This relationship gave him the opportunity to access the students' performance in this online fundraising. His casual observation before the study was formally undertaken inspired his interest in the topic. This interest encouraged conversation with the first author who was then working in another department and had little personal relationship with these intended students. These conversations helped to specify the focus and the rationale of the current study.

We conducted three focus groups in this study. We acknowledged that these silent students were a minority compared to those who had collectively and enthusiastically engaged in this event. They were under huge social pressure from their peers and their voices were covered and largely neglected. Focus group, as a method that involves discussions with or amongst participants, is most helpful for these silent individuals to express themselves because it is suitable for eliciting self-disclosure on a specific issue (Ivanoff & Hultberg, 2006). According to Krueger and Casey (2014) group dynamics facilitate participants' thinking and verbal contributions and thus create a synergistic effect. Compared to individual interviews, focus group interviews allow access to richer and deeper experiences (Rabiee, 2004).

Participants

In this study, we draw on a purposive sampling method in recruiting participants. According to Denzin and Lincoln(2011), purposive sampling involves identify in individuals whose contributions could be most useful for addressing the research questions and providing insight into the phenomenon of interest. In this study, we closely followed and observed students' responses in the aforementioned charitable fundraising for a father's terminal cancer treatment. We identified some silent students who never reposted the link of the charitable fundraising and performed little or no interactions (such as commenting and liking) with others. All participants were close classmates of the initiator. They were easily identifiable because their silence was quite unusual when compared with others who were engaging with enthusiasm. These students were the participants for our study.

Participants were recruited through letters of invitation which were distributed by the second author of this study through Wechat. In the letter of invitation, we addressed our research goal which was to investigate their views and perceptions on online charitable fundraising. We also gave them information relating to procedures involved in the research and possible risks and discomforts. We specifically emphasized that their participation was voluntary and their refusal to participate would not result in any negative/adverse consequences for them. By doing so, we assured them that we did not use the second author's influence over the intended students to compel them to participate in this research. In the end, 17 students agreed to participate. We followed Krueger and Casey's (2014) suggestion and divided the participants into three groups, named FG 1, FG 2 and FG 3. Each group had five to six members from the same class and they knew each other well.

We acknowledged that the influence of pre-existing relationships might restrain their honest and spontaneous expression of views and feelings in focus group interviews, however, as suggested by Kitzinger (1994), pre-existing groups could be beneficial because the familiarity among participants allows them to feel comfortable talking about personal ideas or feelings. The use of pre-existing groups is particularly advantageous in the exploration of sensitive and personal issues. Therefore, it was appropriate for us to use pre-existing groups in the current study.

Although there was no local research ethics committee, we strictly followed the general ethical guidelines(Miller, Birch, Mauthner, & Jessop, 2012) for qualitative studies throughout the whole research process. The first author has finished several qualitative research projects in her academic career and the second author of this study has received his PhD with a qualitative study. Both of us have a rich experience in ethical and quality control. Before we started interview sessions, we first obtained informed consent from each participant. The consent letter clearly addressed the important information, which mainly includes the goal of the study, participants' rights (their right to withdraw from the study at any time was highlighted in the consent letter), the use of digital recorder for recording, our promise to protect their privacy and confidentiality and the relevant contact information. Particularly, the interviews might have the potential to raise anxiety, embarrassment and other negative emotions for participants. This was also clearly addressed in the consent procedures. Pseudonyms have been used in this article to protect the identities of participants.

Procedure

Fromthe1st to the 4^{th,} April 2016, we conducted focus group discussions. Each discussion lasted approximately two hours. During the discussions, participants were asked to talk about their response to charitable fundraising. A set of guidelines was developed for the facilitator which included opening questions and some possible probes designed to re-focus the discussion (see Table 1).

Table 1. Focus group guidelines for exploring the silence of college students in a charitable fundraising

Opening Question

What is your response towards online "relay of love" in the charitable fundraising for the classmate's father's terminal cancer treatment?

Further Questions

Why did you refuse to join in the "relay of love," that is, why did you not repost the link and share it with your friends?
Do you think you are an indifferent bystander in this event?
[If yes, why? What is your feeling and perception about the social pressure?]
[If not, why? What did you do for the charitable fundraising?]
What did your silence matter to you?
What is your opinion on such a form of micro-charity initiated by an individual for a personal cause?

In focus group studies, the facilitator is crucial in managing the pre-existing relationship and creating a suitable environment for participants' discussion (Krueger & Casey, 2014). A

facilitator should be vigilant with regard to his or her influence on the group dynamics. In order to cultivate naturally occurring interaction in focus groups, the facilitator's interference with the discussion was kept to a minimum. Considering that the second author of this article is a head teacher of the participants, we decided that it would be inappropriate for him to be the facilitator because his role might foster an authoritative pattern of leadership in the focus groups (Thomas, MacMillan, McColl, Hale, & Bond, 1995). Therefore, the first author of this article played the role of facilitator during all the sessions.

Data analysis

With the participants' permission, the focus group interviews were audio recorded and fully transcribed verbatim by the first author. Observational notes were used to help identify the speakers and hard hear comments in the transcription phase. Inspired by Rabiee (2004) and Corbin and Strauss (2008). Two authors independently conducted an open coding on the verbatim transcriptions. During the process, attention was paid to the area of consensus and disagreement, as well as to any unique or unusual perspectives (Frankland & Bloor, 1999).Utterances that account for or point out the participants' perceptions of the online charitable fundraising were identified. These utterances were coded based on a strategy that relied on the properties of examples of participants' words. Codes were given in the margin of the transcript. There were inevitably differences in coding between two authors. For example, Cen in FG1 claimed that "Well… the Friend Circles for me are the dormitories where I live together with close others. I like to disclose personal information with them." This statement was coded as "concerning privacy" by the first author and "stressing personal space" by the second author. These differences were discussed to ensure the stability of coding scheme. In addition, during the coding process, we acknowledged that the interview questions were not a determinative reference. Similar expressions might appear in different places as the discussions went on. Therefore, same codes were assigned to these similar expressions. At the end of the coding process, a code list was generated and checked in terms of synonymy. Similar codes (such as "personal space," "privacy") were combined. These codes in the list were then reviewed and the related codes were grouped together under a broader theme. After the preliminary themes were established, we also searched for further evidences from the transcript and the other sources of data including audio-taped interviews, observational notes to confirm and disconfirm the themes.

It is also worth mentioning that the focus group discussions were held and the analysis was written in Chinese. The final analysis was later translated into English. In order to further ensure validity and trustworthiness of translation, some measures were taken, such as back translation and consultation.

Findings

From the statements of participants in focus group interviews, we identified participants' experience of silence in online charitable fundraising clustered around the following three themes: protecting the Moments as private space, avoiding creating stress in vulnerable others, and questioning configuration of responsibility.

Protecting the moments as private space

"Private space" as a keyword occurred across the three focus groups. For college students, their Moments are not only a platform for them to post personal information with friends, but rather a dormitory-like private space where they reside together with their friends.

Many of the participants perceived the possible negative influence of the link of fundraising on their relationships with their other close friends on Moments. For this consideration, they choose some strategies to protect the private space.

> Moments is my private space, my back garden. I consciously choose my friends and provide them access to the garden. I don't want this kind of information invading the garden and disturbing my friends. I do not mean that micro-charity is unacceptable by my friends. I just do not want my private space opening up for it. (Hu, FG1)

Hu's view was supported by some of participants in the first focus group. However, it was also a little bit provocative. Jian proposed a question: "But what if everyone held the same belief? I mean, is that a cool-blood world?"

Chen responded Jian in this way:

> I don't think so. Everyone chooses and does what he or she thinks is right. We need diversity in the world. Moreover, many of us have done something for the fundraising. …As for me, I have transferred a little money for it. But I didn't repost the information on my Moments.

Like Chen, others in Group 1 also shared their ideas or feelings on their concern of private space. In Group 2, the idea of protecting their online private space was overwhelming. This was largely due to Zhen's strong arguments. He elaborated:

> Yes, as I was exposed to the explosive information about this fundraising, I figured out there's some fridge horror (in Chinese buzzwords, it is called *xisijikong* which in English literally refers to "when something becomes scary after the fact") right there, that is. I can't even find any shelter to hide myself from such an information bomb. There seems no boundary among public and private space. This event has invaded my private place as more and more classmates reposted the link on Wechat. I can't do this anymore because I don't want my other friends' private spaces invaded by my repostings.

Zhen's argument is widely agreed to by the other participants in FG 2. Particularly, his use of the buzzwords "*xisijikong*" caused a bit of stirring that drove everyone in the group to interrogate the possible risks of the blurring boundaries between public and private space as it is evident in the "relay of love" in the charitable fundraising. Not surprisingly, all of the participants expressed their intention to resist such a trendy blurring of boundaries and this became one of the key reasons for them to choose not to repost the link of fundraising on their Moments. In Wang's words: "For most of my friends, Wechat is only used for personal and private messaging among friends. They would be outraged at the advertising or other similar intrusions into their private spaces."

In FG 3, some participants' claim of private space protection gave rise to a debate which mainly involved the ethical legitimacy for people concerning more private space than a father's cancer treatment. The key question was: "Is it a selfish response to block the repost?"

There was no common agreement among participants; however, Ju's argument seemed persuasive. He said:

> It can't be simply labelled as "selfish." Moments is my private space. Undoubtedly, it is integral in defining my right to privacy. Privacy vs.

philanthropy! Which one is more important in our online social life? I am not quite sure. Everyone has his or her own priority. For me, in this situation, I chose privacy.

Across the three focus groups, many of the participants had a clear awareness of the boundaries among private and public space and held a firm belief to protect their private space on Moments. In Ting's (FG 3) words, "This is a private space in my pocket, and, it is also the harbour for my friendship with others." Although there was always some scepticism or criticism emerging in the discussions, the majority of participants tended to emphasize the importance of their actions in private space protection.

Avoiding creating stress in vulnerable others

When participants expressed their concern on the "relay of love" blurring boundaries among public and private space, they also shifted their focus on other friends, especially those vulnerable ones in their Friends Circles. Participants acknowledged the potential interruption or disturbance their repostings of the fundraising link might have brought to their friends. Such an acknowledgement, be it seemingly strange and weird, was widely agreed by participants across the three focus groups. Shu in FG 3 put it in this way:

> When you repost the link, you are collaborating with the initiator and the other supporters to diffuse the awareness of responsibility to the other friends in Friends Circles. I mean that we are expected to help him (the initiator). The more you repost, the more you are appealing others' engagement. However, sometimes, this benevolence-driven plea might hurt someone else. For example, it may remind him or her of something unpleasant or a traumatic memory and thus disturb his or her life.

Wu agreed with Shu and helped to make Shu's arguments more precise: "It does not mean that everyone in my Friends Circles will be impacted by such an arousal fundraising. We should acknowledge the potential, especially with regard to the vulnerable ones."

Incidentally, there was such a "vulnerable one" in FG 1, Lin, an impoverished student from a rural family. During the discussion, she shared her personal experience as she was exposed to the overwhelming information of fundraising on Moments. She said:

> Yes, everyone has his or her own stories. For example, I am a destitute student, born in a poor rural family. I heavily rely on a small financial support provided by the university. Each time I am exposed to the explosive information of charitable fundraising, I feel distressed. This kind of information puts me into a dilemma, a moral dilemma. It is quite difficult for me to donate to such causes. Even though the link often stresses "try your best to help," I have no idea about what the exact meaning of "best" here is. I think what I'd better do is to keep silence. I pray for his (the initiator) father.

"But you could repost for him (the initiator) in this event, couldn't you?" Cen asked Lin. Lin responded. Cen:

> Of course, I could. But I didn't. There are others like me in my Friends Circles. I didn't want them to experience the same dilemma as I did. Confucius said:

> "What you do not want to happen to you, do not do it yourself to others." This is my motto in life.

Lin was echoed by other participants. For example, Zhang stated:

> It is complicated to define what is good or bad. When you do something good for one, you may unwittingly do something bad for another. In this fundraising, if I repost the link, yes, I'm a good guy to my classmate (the initiator). However, I'm not a one-dimensional person living only within the Friends Circle of my classmates. I am also living with friends in other Circles.

In FG 2, as mentioned earlier, Zhen's arguments based on "*xisijikong*" had led participants to interrogate the possible negative impact of the "relay of love" on their online social life. Not surprisingly, they finally reached a conclusion, which was clearly summarized in Dong's words:

> In this event, many of us were just following the torrent of information, the so-called "relay of love." I observed that few of us have been vigilant to acknowledge the potential of the event in blurring the boundaries between the public and private space. The majority of participants are blinded by their enthusiasm and compassion in helping a close friend. Yes, emotion might be the root of morality, but I think the "relay of love" has further exacerbated the blurring boundaries. Some vulnerable friends in my Friends Circles might feel somewhat uncomfortable or experience anxiety. Yes, it is a bit of shame that I refuse to join this "relay." Nevertheless, I don't want to be complicit in making the situation worse.

Dong's word "complicit" might be a contestable expression of people's actively joining in "relaying" the link of the fundraising on Moments, however, it suggested that enthusiastic supporters' blind transmission might bring some negative side-effects to some friends in their private online spaces. For this consideration, many of the participants in the focus groups refused to join in the event of "relay of love."

Questioning the configuration of responsibility

The third theme involves a complex process of understanding as well as questioning the configuration of responsibility in charitable fundraising. Participants asked some thought-provoking questions: "Whose responsibility is his (the initiator) father's terminal cancer treatment?" "Why should we take the large part of the responsibility? But if it was not their own fault, why didn't they purchase health insurance?" These questions gave rise to some fierce debates among participants in the focus groups.

In FG 1, Luo argued:

> As his (the initiator) friend, I had done enough for him. I didn't feel shame or guilt as I stood by the "relay of love" on Moments. I think he should resort to more powerful institutions or organizations, for example, the Red Cross Association or the civil department of the local government, but he didn't. Why? Later I got to know that the father refused to resort to local civil department because by doing so he would lose his face. It is ridiculous, isn't it?

Zu disagreed with Luo. He emphasized that it was reasonable for the initiator to ask for help from classmates and friends. He said:

> For me, the true problem is: there are too many charitable fundraisings on Wechat. On an average, I receive one or two every week! They are initiated by my friends or my friends' friends. I am just a college student. I do not have much money for it. I am repeatedly exposed to this kind of information and thus have learnt to be indifferent and apathetic. The textbook says this is "learned helplessness"… I would like to know how much responsibility I should take for the others.

Similarly, in FG 2, the configuration of responsibility is also the focus of the discussion. Yu held a radical attitude towards the flourishing information of charitable fundraising on Wechat:

> It seems a "relay of love," however, it also the relay of coercing. "Coercing" here might be a little exaggerating or biased expression. Yet, this is what I was experiencing when I was fed up with the numerous links of charitable fundraising. Thus 'relay of love' is in effect laying endless responsibility for other's tragic situations on me.

Zhang echoed Yu's thoughts and added his own experience. He said:

> This has made me so uncomfortable. More precisely, I felt anxious or even guilt. I had done what I should. However, their (his classmates) repeated repostings on Moments are reminding me to do more. Where is the end? I'm not sure. Therefore, I had to bring it to an end on my Moments! I quit!

Zhang continued:

> Actually, it was quite some time I had wondered why I had become such a tough guy. Later, I thought that it might be a kind of mechanism of self-protection. Now, I think I did the right thing. In other words, I deserve it, I mean, to restore a peaceful life!

Compared to FG 1 and FG 2, FG 3 had a distinct perspective on the issue of responsibility. Basically, they put their focus on the fact that the father's cancer had already been diagnosed as "terminal stage" and he himself had a strong willingness to give up the treatment because he felt ashamed of being a burden to the family. For this consideration, many of them took a utilitarian perspective and contended that it was a futile effort to appeal for donation from more friends. For example, Li elaborated:

> More treatment means more torture he will be suffering. It is not worthy spending 300,000RMB for a few more days' life, more precisely, a few more days' suffering and painful life. Several years ago, my grandma underwent the same torture from terminal cancer and she begged us to bring an end to her life. For her, it would be a relief for everyone.

Zhou echoed Li's words while at the same time she proposed some other concerns. She stated:

Honestly, I think it is impossible for us to make too much difference. Yet, this is not the reason for me to be silent to the "relay of love" on Moment. My key consideration is: The obvious futile effort will drain people of their benevolence and generosity which are forms of limited resources or capital.

When it came to the participants' responsibility in charitable fundraising, the three focus groups seemed unable to reach a consensus. As it involved how to distinguish right and wrong, each participant had his or her own opinion. These different opinions, when expressed and heard during discussions, centred on their questioning the configuration of responsibility which had already been slightly, but significantly changed by the flourishing online media technology like Wechat.

Discussion and Conclusion

We undertook this study to unveil the hidden voices in these silent people in an online charitable fundraising. The study findings reveal that the most powerful one among these voices was participants' reclaim of authorship of personal space in Friends Circles. According to the *guanxi*-oriented moral tradition, people with close ties are given high responsibility and commitment with each other, which often suggests a self-other merging among them (Kagitcibasi, 2005).The poorly-defined self-other boundaries inevitably violate people's private space. In this study, however, the overwhelming "relay of love" provided participants with the opportunity to reflect upon the boundaries between public and private space. They tended to take actions to protect their private space even at the cost of being marginalized or criticized by the majority of other classmates. Such an endeavour sometimes thwarts the development of online public space (Tierney, 2013), nevertheless, in the study, the awareness of boundaries between private and public space had specific meaning in helping young people to examine and to understand their relationship with others, especially those others with whom they are close and live an interdependent life.

More importantly, their reclamation of authorship of the private space also reflected the emerging notion of privacy in their online social life. Traditionally, privacy remains a largely foreign concept for most Chinese people (Yao-Huai, 2005) and has never been regarded as integral in adolescents' moral development. Adolescents' "right to privacy," which is frequently invoked to protect sensitive personal information, is often neglected in social life. For many of the participants in this study, privacy was viewed as an integral component in defining their ethical life. In addition, privacy was also given new meaning as it was suggested in Ju's negotiation between privacy and philanthropy in the charitable fundraising. Privacy was not solely about hiding or protecting certain information, but rather carefully managing its disclosure. Participants tended to deliberately think over questions like: "What is shared? Who can access? How is it presented?" By doing so, as suggested in James et al.'s study (2010), they were unwittingly contributing to creating a "culture of disclosure" which included a distinct set of beliefs, norms and practices related to their online lives on Wechat. Seen in this light, there were new, or at least distinct, ethical meanings emerging under participants' silence against the backdrop of the overwhelming "relay of love" on Moments.

Participants' awareness of the private-public boundaries also enabled them to realize the possible negative effects created by compelling charitable fundraising in their vulnerable friends. In this sense, their silence presented their empathy towards the vulnerable others in their Friend Circles. This is particularly evident in Jiu's experience. It is also suggested that as participants reclaimed authorship of their online private space, they also learned to respect and encourage ethics of privacy in others, as illustrated in Jiu's motto: "What you do not want to happen to you, do not do it yourself to others."

Participants' awareness of public-private boundaries also enabled them to question the configuration of responsibility, which has been largely reshaped by the pervasive power of media technology. In the case of charitable fundraising, the information going viral also implied the redistribution of responsibility among people. Specifically, the use of mobile phones coupled with convenient access to the internet have afforded ubiquitous connectedness and placed the initiator and his friends and friends' friends in an "always-on" state of potential responsibility taking in this event. In this sense, Moments turned out to be a place of responsibility which seemingly allowed no exit for people to escape. To some extent, this was a new form of exploitation, as is suggested in Yu's word "coercing." Moreover, some participants were concerned that such a distribution of responsibility might ultimately drain people of their benevolence and generosity. Therefore, their silence was legitimated as a reasonable and meaningful response in the event.

To conclude, participants' voices in silence reflect their life, including their moral domain and have become increasingly complicated with the development of social media. This was evident in the negotiation with and resistance against the pervasive "relay of love" in the charitable fundraising which carried the dominating *guanxi*-based moral discourse. Obviously, participants in this study were not passive recipients of this discourse. Rather they "performed silence" as resistance, which allowed them to extricate themselves from the pervasive "relay of love" and integrate their own experience with respect to participation, empathy, benevolence, privacy, goodness and so forth. Particularly, their reclaiming of personal space and privacy and their concern about the potential for coercion through fundraising, which were seldom studied in previous academic works, have been brought to the forefront. These voices from a minority provide us an alternative position to critically reflect upon the pervasive voices which mainly emphasize the potential of the internet as a tool or platform (see, e.g., Ingenhoff & Koelling, 2009; Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009) to increase the fundraising effectiveness. According to James at al. (2010, p. 219), the voices unveiled in this study reflected new "ethical minds" which were merging in the youth's digital life. The newly minted thoughts represent a set of not-yet-developed moral discourses. The point here is not to make judgment on which one is the best among the different discourses, but rather to acknowledge that the coexistence of the minority's voices with the pervasive traditional and mainstream voices in effect create a discursive "transitional space," which refers to "a relational space, overlapping and competing discourses [that] make possible twists and detours of subjectivity, fissures in our self-fictions, and emergence into other spaces as we reinterpret the stories of our lives."(Phillips, Harris, & Larson, 2009, pp. 1457-1458), As illustrated in the study, such a "transitional space" opened up a venue for participants to enunciate, act, and reflect upon themselves and their relations with others. Despite this "transitional space" might bring them confusion and raise more questions than answers, it has in essence enriched participants' life experiences as well as their moral thinking.

Limitations and Implications

This study presents some limitations. The participants were recruited from a class in which the second author is the head teacher. The relationship between participants and the second author might imply some potential risks in data generation. For example, some participants might feel uncomfortable to disclose their personal perceptions as the interviews would be accessed by their head teacher. In addition, the participants were recruited based on a case of online charitable fundraising on Wechat and the sample size was relatively small. These restraints could be problematic for this study to reach data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The second limitation is that this study was conducted by referring college students' performance in charitable fundraising on Wechat. As mentioned earlier, the semi-closed feature

of Wechat conditioned people's response toward charitable fundraising. This means the findings of this study may not be generalized and fully transferred to people's experience in open platforms like Facebook and Twitter. The third limitation is linked to the "translation" of the participants' voices. There were three layers of translations from the audio-taped interviews to the verbatim transcripts and to the excerpts in this article. Moreover, these voices were finally translated from Chinese into English. These translations were not just a technical matter but also an interpretative process. This inevitably leads to a series of complex epistemological and methodological challenges that might bias and impoverish our interpretation of the participants' views on online charitable fundraising.

Despite these limitations, this study provides important information for pertinent stakeholders, including the investigators, initiators/organizers and policy makers, from both indigenous Chinese culture and cross cultural contexts. From an indigenous perspective, the voices unveiled in this study reflected the possibility of certain not-yet-developed moral discourse with respect to a variety of issues in Chinese people's online social life, including but not limited to participation, privacy, relationship, empathy and responsibility. In the specific context of China, where the *guanxi*-oriented moral tradition allows little private space for people's self-determination (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), these voices are particularly important – they are not simply antagonistic to the pervasive tradition, but rather facilitators of new moral discourses and associated with a social life that is closely intertwined with the increasing power of online media technology.

The findings of this study also benefit the stakeholders pertinent to online charity from different cultural contexts. The majority of these stakeholders may tend to pay attention on how to promote people's engagement in online charity. In doing so, however, they are likely to neglect some potential negative consequences brought to the possible individuals. As addressed in this study, the charity related information, which often goes viral and romantically presents itself as a "relay of love," might intrude into individuals' private online space like Moments on Wechat. Moreover, charity-related information is often compelling so that it has the potential to exert coercive pressure on individuals' decision-making. Seen in this light, online charity might inadvertently turn out to be a threat for people's personal relationships and their privacy. The future online charity investigations and practices should pay specific attention on how to protect individuals' online private space like Moments and minimize the potential for coercion and exploitation in the name of "relay of love."

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