

# A Study of LGBTQ+ Empowerment and Normative Dialogue in Chinese Social Media Platforms

Yuan Xu \*

College of Economics, Wuhan Donghu University, Wuhan, Hubei, 430212, China

\* Corresponding Author: xiongdian@wdu.edu.cn

**Abstract.** This study focuses on the empowerment and normative dialogue of LGBTQ+ groups in Chinese social media platforms, and explores its context and mechanism in the new media environment. With the popularity of social media, the LGBTQ+ community has transformed from passive receivers of information to integrated producers and participants of information, using this platform to achieve self-expression, community building, and participation in the discussion of social issues. However, there are also a number of norms in place on social media platforms that limit self-identification and expression within the LGBTQ+ community. Taking young female sexual minorities in China as an example, this study found that there are internal and external contradictions in the empowerment experiences of LGBTQ+ groups on social media. On the one hand, they achieve self-empowerment by obtaining information, expressing themselves and building communities through social media. On the other hand, they are bound by gay norms and hierarchies within the community. In response to this situation, the LGBTQ+ community has adopted a variety of resistance strategies, including rejecting identity labels, self-mockery and other ways to resist the restrictions of norms. However, these strategies also have some limitations and cannot completely escape the normative framework. Finally, this study proposes to continue gender practices in daily life and deliberately misquote norms in order to extend the boundaries of norms and provide more possibilities for self-actualization for LGBTQ+ communities.

**Keywords:** Social media platform; LGBTQ+ community; Empowerment experience; Normative dialogue; Resistance strategy.

## 1. Introduction

With the popularity of new media, social media platforms have become important venues for self-expression, community building, and social participation for LGour+ communities around the world. These platforms not only provide convenient access to information, knowledge and resources, but also provide a voice for others, thereby increasing their visibility in society. Across the globe, Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer (LGBTQ)+ groups present themselves and express themselves as "subjects" through social media platforms, and actively participate in online and offline communication and discussion of social issues. However, while social media has become a platform for the LGBTQ+ community to actively speak out, gay norms still affect the self-presentation and expression of the community. The rise of the global LGBTQ affirmative action movement, as well as the gradual recognition of group rights in Chinese society, has brought more and more people to express their concern and understanding of LGBTQ groups on social media. Under this trend, LGBTQ young people in China are more inclined to express themselves on social media and share their personal lives and emotional experiences. However, they often face internal and external contradictions in the process of self-presentation. On the one hand, they strive to change the public's perception of LGBTQ through positive images, trying to associate "gay" with the image of success, health, talent, etc., in order to gain social recognition; On the other hand, within the group, these stereotypes can become a form of oppression, seemingly ostracizing individuals who fail to meet the standards. This phenomenon is closely related to Duggan's argument about gay norms, and that this normative LGBTQ "politics" supports heterosexual hegemony, capitalism, and neoliberalism, thereby strengthening the power of heterosexual norms. While some studies have suggested that revealing a sexual minority identity tag is empowering, allowing individuals to express themselves

and connect with others, others have found that some bisexuals feel excluded and suffer from discrimination and stigma associated with gay norms after disclosing their identity tags.

Considering the limitations of Western research, this study aims to explore how sexual minority women present themselves on social media platforms and the significance of self-presentation in the context of Chinese culture and society. At the same time, the author will focus on their interaction and negotiation with gay norms during this process. The intersection of new media technology and empowerment theory has attracted much attention. With the rise of new media such as Weibo and wechat, the power structure of traditional media has changed, giving vulnerable groups more opportunities to speak out and improving their visibility in society. However, the research on the empowerment experience of sexual minorities in new media is still insufficient, and the existing research focuses more on other vulnerable groups. Therefore, this study will combine the theories of self-presentation and new media empowerment, and take homosexuality norms as the starting point to deeply explore the self-presentation ways of young Chinese sexual minority women on social media and the empowerment significance brought by such presentation, aiming to provide a new perspective for the study of social media's impact on society.

## 2. Literature References

According to Talento Sin Género (TSM) Group, Exolum has joined Red Empresarial por la Diversidad e Inclusión LGBTI (REDI), Spain's first diversified and inclusive network for LGBTQ+employees and advocates, highlighting the influence of social media on LGBTQ+rights, particularly in providing support and resources for youth [1].

The new research released by VA Canady shows that in today's social atmosphere, LGBTQ+youth are seeking social media and physical community mental health resources to respond to the COVID-19 and mental health crisis, which has triggered people's thinking about how social media can provide support [2]. D Edmondson pointed out that although there is a database of taboo language norms, there is a lack of resources specifically focused on defamation in taboo language, which has raised concerns about defamation targeting LGBTQ+groups on social media [3]. Researchers need to understand how social media platforms can address these issues.

S Craig used the SMBS scale to collect a large amount of LGBTQ+adolescent data, which helps the researcher understand the impact of social media on this group, especially their tendency to obtain support and information on social media, providing useful insights for studying the role of social media. Vargas found that there is harassment in the academic and medical fields based on gender, LGBTQ+identity, race, and departmental grouping, which has raised concerns about harassment and discrimination on social media platforms [4, 5]. It is necessary to understand how social media handles these issues and whether there are effective mechanisms to protect the rights of the LGBTQ+community.

FF Nova research found that social media poses challenges to social interaction among gender and sexual minority groups (GSM), but it is also a key platform for empowering and regulating dialogue [6]. S Mantell research found that the New York City youth shelter system supports LGBTQ+youth but faces insufficient funding, which is related to the impact of social support on their experience and rights protection on social media [7]. Social media can be used to expand support and address funding issues.

CN Group highlighted the contributions of LGBTQ+chemical scientists in C&EN Trailblazers, emphasizing diversity and innovation in the scientific field, inspiring researchers to delve deeper into how social media promotes empowerment and normative dialogue among LGBTQ+groups [8]. V Klimaj's research focuses on the neuroanatomical differences between heterosexual and homosexual individuals, providing insights into the impact of gender and sexual orientation on social media behavior [9]. Combining physiological and sociological perspectives can help to comprehensively understand the impact of social media on the LGBTQ+community.

M Cordes suggests that gender and sexual orientation may shape an individual's body image concept, reflecting the diversity of different sexual orientation groups in this regard. M Voracek's research revealed that heterosexual women have a higher aversion to same-sex infidelity than heterosexual men, providing a reference for exploring the dynamics of relationships within the LGBTQ+community [10, 11].

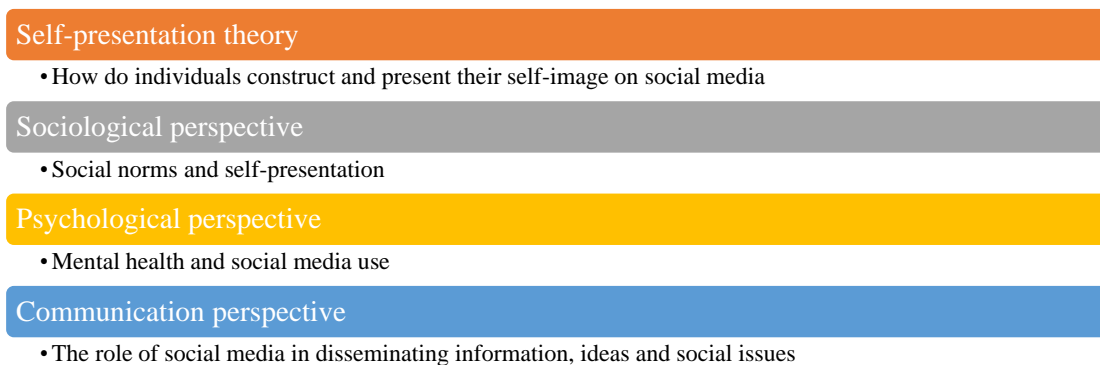
XLM Pan found that HIV in China is mainly transmitted through unprotected sexual behavior, which is closely related to homosexuality in public discourse, contributing to the formation of LGBTQ+ NGOs and providing an important platform for promoting their rights and social awareness [12]. HE Anaelom's research explored the relationship between sex, health, and disease, and proposed interdisciplinary pastoral doctrine theory, providing new ideas for understanding the challenges and needs of the LGBTQ+ community [13].

Based on the above research, various disciplines and fields have contributed to the empowerment and normative dialogue of the LGBTQ+community, exploring the diversity challenges and social cognitive issues faced by this group from physical image to emotional relationships, HIV transmission to moral responsibility. This provides a foundation for in-depth research on the empowerment and normative dialogue of LGBTQ+ groups on Chinese social media platforms, and also provides important reference and guidance for future research and practice, which helps to promote social recognition and positive development.

### 3. Theoretical Framework, Research Methods and Design

#### 3.1. Overview of Social Media Presentation and Image Construction

With the popularity of social media, the self-presentation and expression of LGBTQ+ groups on Chinese social media platforms have attracted much attention. Self-presentation theory points out that individuals shape their own impressions through selection, hiding and display in specific situations, and in social media, such self-presentation has a wider audience and influence. However, in the Chinese cultural context, social norms and traditional values have a significant impact on the self-presentation of sexual minorities, as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Theoretical Framework Construction

Sociologically, social media provides a free space for the LGBTQ+ community to express their identity, lifestyle, and social views. However, this freedom is also limited by social norms and expectations that can have limitations and effects on an individual's self-presentation. Psychological research has shown that social media use is strongly linked to an individual's self-esteem, sense of identity, and mental health, especially for the LGBTQ+ community.

In the field of communication studies, the popularity of social media provides a broad communication platform for LGBTQ+ groups, which helps to spread positive images and social issues of sexual minorities, and promote social understanding and support for them. However, there are also issues such as information overload and the spread of rumors on social media, which can drown out the voices of sexual minorities or fuel misunderstanding and prejudice against them.

Therefore, this study will focus on exploring the self-presentation and expression of sexual minority women on Chinese social media, as well as their process of dialogue and negotiation with social norms, as shown in Figure 1. By studying this issue in depth, researchers can better understand the experiences of LGBTQ+ people on social media platforms, and provide deeper understanding and understanding for promoting inclusion and understanding of sexual minorities in society.

### **3.2. Research Object**

The study was designed to delve deeper into young women who have publicly identified themselves as sexual minorities on social media. Unlike traditional research, the focus of this study is not limited to homosexuals, but also includes bisexuality and queer sexuality. This choice was made because the researcher believes that gender is crucial to the study of sexual minorities. This marginalization is particularly acute on social media, where women's voices are often ignored and their voice is weaker. Therefore, it is hoped that through this study, more understanding and attention will be given to the self-expression and presentation of sexual minority women on social media platforms.

Young women born after 1990 were chosen for the study because this generation has been exposed to the Internet since childhood and experienced gender awareness during their teenage years. They grew up in an era that coincided with the rise of mobile Internet and social media, which provided them with a wider space for information access and expression. At the same time, with the rise of the international gay rights movement, China's gay community has gradually gained more recognition, which makes young sexual minority women more courageous and motivated to show themselves and express their identity on social media.

Through this study, the researcher was able to explore how the self-presentation of young LGBTQ women on social media is influenced by gay norms. While gay norms primarily emphasize maintaining a cohesive, consistent identity and lifestyle, the researcher wanted to understand how sexual minority women find and shape their identities on social media under such norms, and whether they are influenced by gender, age, and sociocultural factors.

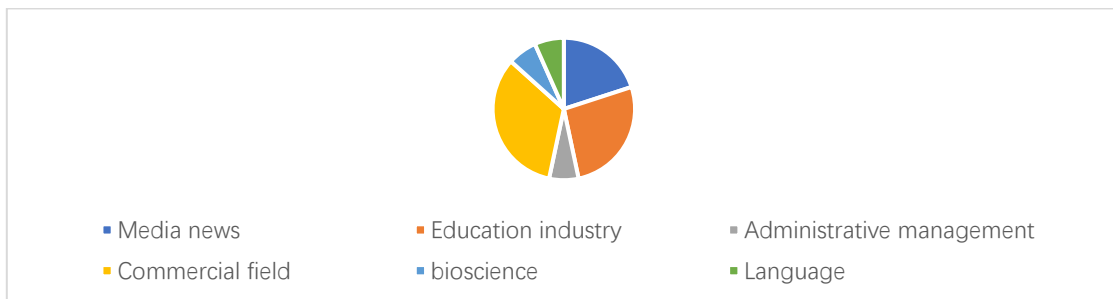
### **3.3. Research Methods**

This study will use semi-structured interview and discourse analysis methods to deeply study the self-presentation and expression of sexual minorities on social media. First, a series of semi-structured interview questions are designed to explore the current behavior of respondents on social media platforms, including the content topics they choose, target audiences and platforms they use. The purpose of this stage is to deeply understand the behavior patterns and motivations of sexual minorities on social media, so as to provide rich material and deep understanding for subsequent analysis.

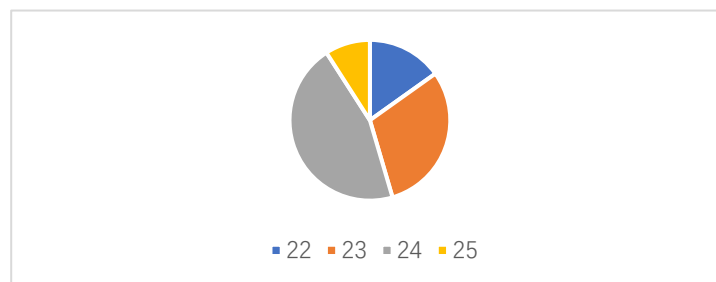
The study will focus on the personal empowerment of sexual minorities on social media, with in-depth analysis from the self-level, interpersonal level and social participation level. Through in-depth interpretation and discourse analysis of the interview content, the research will reveal how sexual minorities present themselves in social media, and explore their perception and pursuit of their power in society. This study will also explore the manifestation of gay norms in social media presentation, and explore its impact on the self-presentation of sexual minorities through comprehensive literature review and interview analysis. Specifically, the study will delve into the embodiment of gay norms in the body image, lifestyle, interpersonal communication and values of sexual minorities in order to fully understand the mechanisms of their influence on social media.

**Table 1.** Basic Data Survey of Research Objects

Serial number	Career field	Age	Appetence	Emotional status
1	Media and News	24	queer	singlehood
2	Educational circles	24	Double sexuality	singlet
3	Administration and management	25	Double sexuality	singlet
4	Commercial field	23	queer	singlet
5	Commercial field	24	Double sexuality	singlet
6	bioscience	24	homosexuality	singlehood
7	philology	24	Double sexuality	singlehood
8	Art and design	23	Double sexuality	singlehood
9	Commercial field	24	Double sexuality	singlet
10	Medical science	22	Double sexuality	singlehood
11	philology	22	homosexuality	singlehood
12	Medical science	25	homosexuality	singlet
13	Computer science	23	queer	singlet
14	Commercial field	25	queer	singlehood
15	Commercial field	23	Double sexuality	singlet



**Figure 2.** Survey of Respondents' Occupational Fields



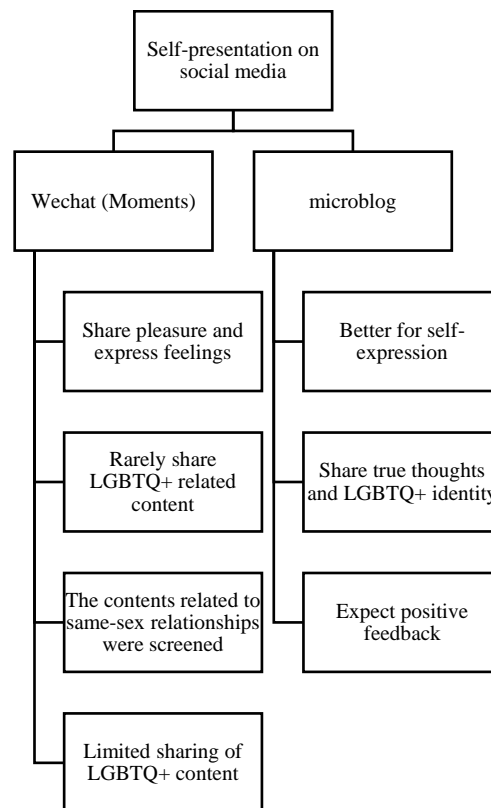
**Figure 3.** Age Ratio Statistics of Respondents

In the selection of research objects, the snowball sampling method is adopted to ensure the representativeness and diversity of the research. The industry area and age distribution are shown in Figure 2 and 3. This step will be supported by a network of sexual minorities on social media platforms and relevant institutions to obtain respondents with different sexual minority identities, occupations and emotional statuses, whose basic profiles are shown in Table 1, to support a comprehensive analysis of social media self-presentation. Using these methods, this study aims to deeply explore the self-expression and presentation of sexual minority groups on social media, and reveal its psychological mechanism, social influence and cultural significance. The research object is defined as LGBTQ+ users in Chinese social media platforms.

## 4. Research Findings and Analysis

### 4.1. Overview of Respondents' Social Media

The choices of respondents on social media are closely related to their self presentation and personal identity. They mainly choose Weibo and WeChat as platforms for self presentation, and a few also use other social media applications. Wechat moments are seen as a space for sharing pleasures and jokes about life, including food, scenery, selfies, and challenges in work and life. However, most respondents rarely share content related to their sexual orientation in their moments of friendship. When it comes to photos of same-sex couples, some choose to filter and post photos that look like they're hanging out with their girlfriends, while others use permission Settings to avoid being seen by family, colleagues, etc. Unlike wechat, Weibo is seen as a more suitable platform for self-expression. Followers on Weibo are often close friends and become an important human bond between generations. In addition, the "anonymity" of microblogs makes respondents more willing to share their true thoughts and show their homosexual identity. On Weibo, respondents share a variety of content, including daily life, romantic relationships, jobs, etc., and look forward to positive feedback from friends. However, despite the greater freedom given by Weibo, respondents still seem to be influenced by a certain norm and are more inclined to show their good image and happy relationship in order to gain higher social recognition.



**Figure 4.** Impact of Self-presentation on Social Media Platforms

Overall, respondents' self-expression on social media was influenced by the characteristics and social norms of different platforms. Figure 4 shows the different strategies and influences of self-presentation related to LGBTQ+ identity on social media platforms (such as wechat moments and Weibo), including content sharing, audience interaction, and the impact of social norms on presentation. In wechat circle of friends, they adopt two main strategies: one is to hide their true selves by grouping, and the other is to post little or no content related to sexual minority identity. On Weibo, respondents are more willing to share their true thoughts and show their gay identity, but still follow certain norms for "role playing" to a certain extent. This suggests that social media is not only a platform for self-expression, but also a place for interaction between social norms and personal identity.

## 4.2. Empower Experience and Normative Dialogue

### 4.2.1. Interviewee Overview.

The respondents mainly showcase themselves on platforms such as Weibo and WeChat, and there are also a few who use QQ, Douban, and specialized female minority dating apps. They seem to have not fully displayed their true selves, but have entered a virtual environment where they play specific roles according to certain rules. Perhaps it is because social media often encourages people to be more inclined to present their good image and happy life, hoping to receive more recognition and praise. This also reflects the influence of social media on personal image construction, as well as people's pursuit of social recognition in virtual space.

**Table 2.** Behaviors and Strategies of Respondents on Different Social Media Platforms

Social media platforms	Main Content Theme	Do you share content related to sexual orientation	Self presentation strategy
WeChat Moments	Pleasure and roast	Rarely shared	Group hiding, underposting, or not posting relevant content
micro-blog	Diverse content	More willing to share	Authentic expression and display of homosexual identity

After statistics, researcher found that, as shown in Table 2, in the WeChat circle of friends, they mainly share content about pleasure and roast, but rarely share content related to sexual orientation. To cope with this situation, they adopted two main strategies: one is to hide their true selves through grouping, and the other is to share less or no content related to sexual minority identity. On Weibo, respondent is more willing to share various contents, including daily life, romantic relationships, work, etc., and is more open to showcasing their homosexual identity. In contrast, respondent believes that Weibo is more suitable for self presentation, as followers on Weibo are usually close friends who can more authentically showcase themselves. The anonymity of Weibo also makes respondents more willing to share their true thoughts and showcase their homosexual identity.

**Table 3.** Motivation of Respondents to Post Information on Social Media

Respondents	Publish content	Main motivation
A	"I went to college", "I graduated"	Inform elders and teachers of one's current situation
B	I just got a certificate and I will send it out. I hope my potential clients can see it	Announcement nature, showcasing one's achievements, attracting potential customers
C	The content of playing football should be recorded after a game is over	Record important events in work, study, and life, with a sense of necessity
D	Group photos and chat records during dating	Freedom to express one's own ideas and life
E	Love photos, tags, sweet conversations	Record romance, express emotions, and express dissatisfaction
F	When it comes to dating, chasing stars, playing games, and other small things, it's easy to think of them.	Free expression of various interests, hobbies, and life trivia
G	I want to show off something related to my girlfriend	Showcasing a happy romantic relationship
H	Post photos of yourself playing basketball, related to your girlfriend	Show off your handsomeness, express your love and pride for your lover

After research, Table 3 shows the main content and motivations of different respondents on social media. The motivation of respondents to post messages can be mainly divided into three categories: recording, confiding, and sharing. From the words of the interviewees, it can be seen that their posts on WeChat Moments and Weibo cover various aspects of personal life. On WeChat Moments, some respondents are more inclined to share personal achievements, work and study, as well as daily life details, such as informing their elders about their recent situation and showcasing their achievements to potential customers. On Weibo, respondents are more free to share various contents, including interesting life stories, sweet moments in romantic relationships, trivial work and study matters, as well as personal interests and hobbies. Their motivations are also different. Some people want to record important moments in life, some tend to express emotions or complaints, while others want to show off their romantic relationships or personal charm. These statements reflect the diverse self presentation and sharing motivations of respondents on social media.

#### **4.2.2. Analysis of Empowerment Experience and Normative Dialogue.**

In depth analysis of self identification and social interaction of sexual minorities in the Internet era. The rise of the Internet has changed the way people socialize, especially for sexual minorities. In this virtual space, individuals build community through shared interests and desires, thus compensating for the sense of isolation in real life and providing new channels for identity. This social shift is closely related to theories of group identity and social support in social psychology. For example, social homogeneity theory, which shapes individual identity, emphasizes how individuals form their identities through social interactions, while social support theory emphasizes the importance of community to an individual's mental health.

However, the Internet space also brings new challenges and pressures. Interviewee A maintains complete confidentiality towards acquaintances in real life on Weibo, and although she pays attention to protecting personal privacy, she still feels somewhat constrained. Taiwanese scholar Zhao Yanning proposed the concepts of "identification" and "identification", pointing out the existence of a distinction between public and private in social media platforms. In the private domain, interviewee A forms a private domain with close relationships with netizens she meets on Weibo, but in the more public domain, her self presentation is subject to certain constraints. Even if the interviewee's expected audience is only close friends, it is inevitable that strangers will watch and comment. This phenomenon is likened to performing on stage and facing the gaze of onlookers. When publicly releasing information or participating in topic discussions, respondents may consider the opinions and comments of strangers, thus feeling restricted in their expression. This phenomenon is referred to as "appearing" in the Taiwanese context, where sexual minorities openly express their sexual orientation, but this behavior may lead to objectification by dissidents. Interviewee J also stated that even if it's just publishing information, one may feel restricted in their expression. Therefore, the self presentation of sexual minorities on social media is limited by both external gaze and internal community expectations. This is closely related to self-identity theory in social psychology, especially the study of social comparison and self-identity. Individuals tend to compare themselves to others to determine their place and worth in society, and this comparison often leads to feelings of instability and anxiety about self-identity.

The reality that the voices of sexual minorities in the Internet environment are monitored and controlled also deserves attention. This is related to the theory of power and discourse in communication. On social media platforms, the distribution of the right to speak is not equal, but is affected by social status, economic ability and other factors. This further reflects the power structures and inequalities that exist in society. As a result, the voice of sexual minorities in cyberspace is limited, which is closely related to gender and sexual orientation discrimination in society. Groups that used to rely on offline urban space are gradually turning to the use of new media to build social networks, meet like-minded friends through social media platforms, and show themselves. However, their expressions are more entertaining and depoliticized than in the past, focusing more on shared interests rather than emphasizing sexual minorities. At the same time, some group members gain intimate relationships within the community through online campaigns and public welfare organizations, and

discuss social issues in community activities and pay attention to community movements. However, in the face of the restrictions of China's political environment, social movements of sexual minorities are often manifested as non-confrontational and turn to consumerism. Trends are not only influenced by commercial capital, but also reflect the self-censorship and negative attitude of community members to political and social pressures. To sum up, understanding and solving the social interaction and identity problems of sexual minorities in the Internet era requires comprehensive consideration of various knowledge and perspectives such as sociology, psychology and communication, in order to promote social inclusion and progress.

In today's era of new media, personal narrative is flourishing in cyberspace, and has become a universal trend from blogs and websites to social platforms such as Weibo and wechat. This narrative mode not only promotes the enhancement of self-identity and resistance consciousness within sexual minorities, but also narrates the distance between sexual minorities and the public to a certain extent, promotes the understanding of the diverse real life status of sexual minorities, and helps to eliminate negative stereotypes and stigmatized narratives. Key Opinion leaders (Kols), in particular, who have a voice on the Internet, further contribute to this trend through active self-presentation and empowerment.

However, the social media presence of Kols has also brought some normative reinforcement. These norms often exist in a subtle, imperceptible way, not directly expressed, but through the final presentation effect. In the respondents' attention to sexual minority female KOL, it can be seen that it is mainly divided into several categories such as opinion output, fashion personality and loving couples. These Kols usually have some kind of "human system", which conforms to specific social norms, and further strengthen these norms by implying and imitating the norms, and win the respect and love of more people. This norm has also been challenged to a certain extent. Some radical feminists have criticized the gender performance of T's character, arguing that it excessively mimics traditional masculinity and even introduces patriarchal culture into sexual minorities. In this criticism, it also reflects the questioning and challenge of gender norms.

## 5. Conclusion

This study provides an in-depth analysis of the relationship between self-presentation and norms of LGBTQ+ groups on Chinese social media platforms, revealing a series of far-reaching findings. Young sexual minority women are more likely to express their true thoughts and gay identity on Weibo, present positive content and expect positive feedback. New media provides them with space for self-expression and community connections, but it also brings with it the pressure from the gaze of others and the surveillance of platforms, which often leads them into anxiety and self-censorship. The self-presentation of sexual minority women in social media is influenced by the discourse of heterosexual hegemony, and they pursue images that conform to mainstream norms, but at the same time, they resist and challenge themselves by disagreeing with identity labels and self-mockery. However, there are still several issues with the research. This study only focuses on a few media platforms, and in reality, the research subjects use multiple social media apps and their presentations are also different. The analysis of the connection between social phenomena and cultural background in research still needs to be deepened. Future research should delve deeper into the details of Chinese sexual minority groups in media practice and survival status, in order to enrich the understanding of this field.

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