"Follow" on a social media platform, an interesting button to use

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Abstract: *The intriguing aspect of social media platforms lies in the engagement between users and their friends, where they discuss topics of mutual interest. Different social media platforms adopt distinct strategies to attract users. For example, Twitter employs popular trends to capture users' attention, while TikTok predominantly utilizes short videos as a medium for documenting daily life experiences. Consequently, this video-centric approach appeals to a substantial user base interested in such content. As this model continues to be promoted, an increasing number of users are joining these platforms. Recognizing the efficacy of this approach, social media platforms are witnessing a gradual surge in user participation. Because of this, this paper will pay attention to this phenomenon, and divided into different views to discuss.*

Keywords: *social media, participation, following, sharing*

1. Introduction

An interesting phenomenon is that the various social media platforms prefer to connect people through 'following' rather than in other ways. As Crary(1999) [3] puts it, "the way we listen, watch, or pay attention to something is deeply historical in character". He points out that how we pay attention and what we pay attention to is constantly changing, with new forms of viewing, listening and interacting emerging alongside new forms of display, communication, recording and playback technologies. Today, such ways of making social connections are mainly done through social media platforms. According to scholar Fuchs (2014)[5], the function of social media is mainly emphasized as individuals create and post on social media platforms for sharing, collaboration and opportunities. As more and more users flock to social media platforms, these platforms will also increasingly emphasize the rights of their users. In addition, social media platforms have access to more information: users provide detailed information about their interests and backgrounds, and they provide clues about who they are interested in by choosing whose posts they read and reply to. Meanwhile, some of the social media platforms that currently have a large market share have begun to allow users to spend money on their platforms, and some merchants have begun to enter social media platforms. This article identifies some common characteristics of Twitter, Youtube and TikTok and argues that there are some changes in the identity of users of social media platforms, who are not only participants but also creators, while the same topics attract a lot of attention and the same content creation attracts a lot of attention, but with a lot of similarities. Users' habits are changing, the way they socialize is changing, and it is because of these trends that we are trying to summarize these interesting phenomena.

2. Social media platform and their users

2.1. Participation: From 'log in' to 'Following'

In 2006, YouTube emerged as a prominent social platform, offering conventional features for video uploading and sharing alongside a distinctive "broadcasting yourself" program. Around the same time, Twitter introduced users to share daily updates with friends by answering the question "What are you doing?". However, it was not until 2018 that TikTok revolutionized the landscape of short video social media platforms by enabling users to capture captivating content through concise video recordings. This innovative platform transcends static images and text, allowing participants to visually share their experiences in real-time with other users. Moreover, users can not only log in but also follow others on these platforms, fostering engagement among individuals who discuss topics of mutual interest - an

aspect referred to as "who our friends are, what they have done, and how many of them there are" (Bucher, 2012)[2]. In addition to Twitter and TikTok, other social media platforms also employ different strategies to attract users. For example, Instagram focuses on visual storytelling through photos and videos, allowing users to share their daily moments in a visually appealing way. This approach appeals to individuals who enjoy capturing and sharing their experiences with others. Facebook, on the other hand, emphasizes connecting people from all over the world by providing a platform for communication and networking. It offers various features such as groups, events, and pages that cater to different interests and communities. By fostering connections between individuals with similar hobbies or backgrounds, Facebook creates an inclusive environment where users can engage in meaningful discussions. these diverse strategies employed by various social media platforms cater to different user preferences and interests. Whether it's leveraging popular trends like Twitter or documenting everyday life experiences through short videos like TikTok, each platform aims to provide engaging content that resonates with its target audience.

In general, these platforms facilitate the rapid dissemination of hot news and trending topics. Simultaneously, they have transformed the mode of mass communication from passive reception via radio and television to active information-seeking by users who prioritize their own interests. This paradigm shift has led "sharing" to become a pivotal keyword in communication, as highlighted by scholar Williams (1983)[13]. The growth and evolution of social media platforms have significantly influenced user engagement and creativity, particularly in terms of interaction and participation. Notably, despite the existence of diverse social media platforms, all emphasize individual users ("you"). Consequently, this transformation enables users to freely create and share content while providing ample opportunities for showcasing talents and fostering creativity. Overall, the dynamic changes in social media platforms offer enhanced avenues for user engagement and creation through active interactions with other users as well as unrestricted content generation.

Over time, various social media platforms have gained acceptance and usage among users. Users find pleasure in this novel form of social interaction, particularly TikTok, which has emerged as one of the most popular social media platforms in recent years. With a focus on this platform, users upload videos that are typically under one minute in length. Notably, even if a user does not post their own video, they will still be presented with videos related to their specific interests. The content pushed to users is generally tailored based on their preferences and offers recommendations for similar video content. Consequently, the content delivered to users tends to be homogeneous. However, Bourdieu (1991)[1], an esteemed scholar, argues that the power of constructing reality lies in the active participation of users on social media platforms; it breaks down barriers between individuals and allows for discussions centered around topics of interest regardless of location or time constraints. All these observations seem to suggest that social media constructs a realm of false reality within our real world. Nevertheless, amidst such developments, it appears that user interest remains paramount as recommended content proves beneficial.

From one perspective, social media platforms also play a crucial role in connecting individuals and fostering communities. These platforms provide users with the opportunity to engage in meaningful discussions and share their thoughts on various topics. For example, Twitter allows users to participate in hashtag movements such as #MeToo or #BlackLivesMatter, enabling them to raise awareness about important social issues. Additionally, social media serves as a platform for creative expression and talent discovery. Many aspiring artists, musicians, and content creators have gained recognition through platforms like TikTok or Instagram. These platforms offer a space for individuals to showcase their skills and gain a following that they may not have had access to otherwise. Furthermore, social media has become an essential tool for businesses and brands to reach their target audience effectively. Companies can utilize these platforms for marketing purposes by creating engaging content that resonates with their customers' interests. Social media analytics also provide valuable insights into consumer behavior and preferences, allowing businesses to tailor their strategies accordingly. Moreover, during times of crisis or natural disasters, social media has proven instrumental in disseminating information quickly and efficiently. Platforms like Facebook or WhatsApp enable people to connect with loved ones during emergencies when traditional communication channels might be disrupted. In conclusion, while there are concerns about the negative aspects of social media such as misinformation or privacy issues, it is undeniable that these platforms have revolutionized how we discover content, express ourselves creatively, connect with others globally, and even respond collectively during significant events.

2.2. Surveillance technology: it seems natural

It is intriguing to observe the paradox that users consistently engage in sharing their personal experiences and viewpoints on social media platforms, while simultaneously expressing concerns

regarding the data collection and surveillance practices employed by these platforms. This phenomenon highlights the complex relationship between individuals' desire for self-expression and their growing awareness of privacy risks. Lyon (2018)[10] also posited that individuals readily sacrifice their privacy within a surveillance-driven world. In today's digital age, where technology permeates every aspect of our lives, it has become increasingly difficult to maintain complete control over our personal information. The convenience and connectivity offered by social media platforms often outweigh the potential risks associated with data collection and monitoring. Furthermore, this paradox can be further expounded upon when considering the motivations behind user engagement on these platforms. Users are driven by a variety of factors such as seeking validation from peers, staying informed about current trends or events, or simply enjoying the sense of belonging that comes from being part of an online community. These motivations often overshadow concerns about privacy as users willingly participate in activities like following or liking content without fully comprehending the extent to which they are being monitored. In this constructed digital environment, users may not always realize that their actions leave behind a trail of data that can be analyzed and used for various purposes. Social media platforms employ sophisticated algorithms to track user behavior patterns, preferences, and interests in order to deliver personalized content and targeted advertisements. While some users may find this customization beneficial as it enhances their overall experience on these platforms, others may feel uneasy knowing that their every move is being recorded.

From another perspective, social media platforms have indeed revolutionized the mode of interpersonal communication. It is noteworthy that users tend to take for granted the sharing of personal information on these platforms, while simultaneously expressing concerns about privacy breaches. This apparent contradiction can be attributed to users' persistent usage of social media without considering uninstallation; instead, they readily download and utilize different types of social media platforms. As Lyon (2018)[10] argues, users willingly sacrifice their privacy as a consequence of choosing to engage with social media, thereby accepting surveillance as an inherent aspect. Furthermore, this phenomenon can be further elucidated by the influence of desire, wherein public users are inclined to join a particular platform due to its popularity among friends. Subsequently, participants in these platforms frequently share personal updates on their profiles – such as engaging in interesting activities – through pictures, videos, texts etc., often accompanied by self-promotion and content-sharing boasting. The recognition received from others reinforces this behavior and motivates continued participation in subsequent activities for further content sharing. This repetitive pattern deepens user engagement and consequently leads them to relinquish personal privacy protection willingly in order to share content on public platforms.

Academic Meikle (2016) [11]argues that online sharing constitutes a novel form of community and visibility, as well as an avenue for exploitation and surveillance among social media participants. Presently, popular social media platforms predominantly feature lighthearted and entertaining content, which tends to garner more attention. However, there is controversy surrounding the notion that such content is subject to monitoring. This claim aligns with Habermas' (1989)[7] assertion that leisure behavior represents a new frontier of privacy invasion. Users often log onto social media platforms under the assumption of browsing for relevant information or engaging content; however, unbeknownst to them, their activities are being collected and analyzed in real-time. These unconscious behaviors include metrics like duration of platform usage, following specific bloggers who share content, or time spent browsing overall. Consequently, these behaviors gradually erode our privacy without our conscious awareness. Despite users unwittingly relinquishing their privacy rights through these actions, they willingly immerse themselves in the environment created by social media platforms for relaxation or accessing textual information, images, short videos or engaging in leisure and entertainment activities. Under this influence, users develop habitual patterns of browsing platform content extensively over prolonged periods while also actively following other users – ostensibly driven by personal preferences towards certain types of content shared on the platform – thereby further substantiating Meikle's (2016)[11] argument regarding the emergence of a "surveillance network" within this digital landscape.

The increasing mainstream presence of visual platforms in people's daily lives has revolutionized the way information is gathered and consumed. In the past, scrolling through textual content was the primary means of accessing information. However, with the evolving functionality of social media, contemporary platforms now offer a much richer compatibility of information. One significant aspect that sets modern social media platforms apart is their ability to collect valuable data from users, whether they are actively engaging or passively browsing. This data collection allows for personalized recommendations and tailored content delivery based on individual preferences and interests. By analyzing user behavior patterns and interactions, these platforms can curate a more relevant and engaging experience for each user. Moreover, social media platforms not only act as intermediaries that recommend content to users but also facilitate a reciprocal utilization of information among users themselves. Through sharing posts, commenting on others' updates, or participating in online discussions, individuals contribute to creating a broader market where ideas are exchanged freely. Visual platforms have also given rise to new forms

of expression and creativity. Users can now share photos or videos instantly with their followers or even broadcast live events in real-time. This accessibility has empowered individuals to showcase their talents or document important moments in ways that were previously limited by traditional media channels. Furthermore, businesses have recognized the immense potential offered by visual platforms as marketing tools. With billions of active users worldwide spending hours on these platforms every day, companies can reach vast audiences with targeted advertisements and sponsored content. The interactive nature of social media allows for direct engagement between brands and consumers through comments sections or private messaging features.

2.3. Investment: Digital material

Fuchs (2016)[6] concludes that research on the political economy of internet communication primarily focuses on three dimensions, one of which is 'control'. The Internet has a profound impact on individuals' daily lives, and the advent of social media has given rise to a novel business model (John, 2013)[9]. Meikle (2016)[11] characterizes this phenomenon as the emergence of a 'sharing industry' within social media. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter provide users with an opportunity to share content at any time, resulting in the creation of extensive databases. Similarly, Google, an advanced technology company, offers various solutions such as search engines, operating systems, and user-based software systems. These solutions enable significant control over data including user information and even participant behavior (van Dijck, 2013)[12]. Several scholars have also supported the notion that sharing not only represents user behavior but is also part of the commodification process (supported by Meikle 2016[11]; van Dijck 2013[12]). Furthermore, it can be argued that prolonged use of shared social media platforms leads to users inadvertently providing relevant data to companies. Based on this data collection practice by commercial entities, they develop and sell related products aligned with users' habits instead of solely focusing on understanding their preferences.

Another crucial aspect is the exponential user growth observed on video platforms like YouTube, Netflix, iQiYi, and Tencent Video. These platforms possess the capability to predict users' preferences for specific genres of films, series, or entertainment programs. For instance, research reports indicate that 75 percent of Netflix subscribers engage with content-driven videos (Cui et al., 2014)[4]. The Tencent Video apps also incorporate this feature, highlighting a significant facet of the recommendation system employed by these video platforms.

The primary challenge faced by video platforms is how to engage users for extended periods of time (Zhou et al., 2015)[14]. Research indicates that Tencent Video boasts over 10 million daily interactive users and generates approximately one billion user actions each day (Huang et al., 2016)[8], suggesting that media programs uploaded onto the platform are highly appealing to viewers. Furthermore, Tencent Video requires users to log in with their Tencent QQ number or WeChat account (Zhou et al., 2015)[14], enabling rapid access to data and personalized content recommendations. Additionally, subscribers of Tencent Video membership can enjoy specialized services such as access to Hollywood movies.

Indeed, van Dijck (2013)[12] argues that that cultural products possess three dimensions: reproduced goods, subscription fees, and advertising. The internet has revolutionized the way virtual products, such as digital music downloads from iTunes, are monetized. In addition to traditional methods, new approaches have emerged that capitalize on user engagement and content creation. One example of this convergence is seen in Tencent's video platform, where users can pay subscription fees to become members and gain access to additional opportunities like voting. This creates a win-win situation for both users and advertisers. Advertisers act as sponsors whose products are frequently mentioned and promoted within the program, increasing brand exposure and potential sales. On the other hand, short video platforms take a different approach by inspiring a large number of users to create similar content that generates hot trends. These trends encourage more users to follow suit and contribute their own videos. Within these videos, some creators with numerous followers strategically include commercial products or endorsements seamlessly into their content. This form of influencer marketing allows brands to reach a wider audience through authentic recommendations from popular creators. Moreover, watching these videos often leads viewers to engage in consumption behaviors related to the featured products or services. For instance, after seeing an influencer using a particular skincare product in their video tutorial, viewers may be inclined to purchase it themselves. This integration of advertising within user-generated content blurs the lines between entertainment and commerce. As a result of these evolving monetization strategies on various online platforms, we witness the gradual integration of subscription fees alongside advertising revenue models discussed earlier. This fusion creates a new consumption model where consumers not only pay for exclusive access but also indirectly support creators through ad views or purchases influenced by their content.

3. Conclusions

Sharing information has become a prevalent practice among social media users, with platform selection being primarily driven by their respective features. With the advancement of Internet technology, user activities within these platforms are recorded as data and transmitted to the platform. However, it is crucial to note that user data is collected and sold to advertisers during this process. This situation exemplifies the reciprocal influence between users and the platform; while attracting new users, the platform also leverages active users to generate substantial value.

All behaviors influence the patterns of social media users, particularly in terms of user data sharing. Users may perceive themselves as simply browsing or engaging as ordinary users while logged into the platform; however, even these seemingly casual activities leave behind traces of information that can inadvertently be recorded and impact overall social activity. This seemingly inconspicuous connection often generates significant economic benefits.

This paper delves into the intricate web of interconnectivity that exists among users, social media platforms, and active data recording. In today's digital age, social media platforms have become an integral part of our lives, shaping how we interact with others and consume information. These platforms not only serve as a means for users to connect with friends and family but also act as powerful tools for businesses and organizations to understand their customers' needs. One aspect highlighted in this paper is the utilization of recorded data by social media platforms. This data is often used to enhance user experience by providing personalized recommendations or targeted advertisements based on individual preferences. Additionally, some of this data may be shared with other users in order to foster connections and facilitate engagement within the platform's community. However, it is important to recognize that a portion of the recorded data goes beyond serving immediate user needs. It is transformed into production data that external businesses or organizations can tap into for market research purposes. By analyzing this aggregated information, these entities gain valuable insights into consumer behavior patterns and trends which enable them to better comprehend their customers' needs. While users may believe they are actively selecting their preferences based on personal requirements when using social media platforms, it is crucial to acknowledge the potential influence of passive factors within this integrated context. The algorithms employed by these platforms play a significant role in curating content tailored specifically for each user's interests and preferences. As such, individuals may unknowingly be exposed to certain ideas or products due to algorithmic suggestions rather than solely through conscious decision-making processes.

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