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Liuhan Zhan Yongqiang Sun Nan Wang Xi Zhang

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Understanding the influence of social media on people's life satisfaction through two competing explanatory mechanisms

Influence of social media

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Liuhan Zhan, Yongqiang Sun and Nan Wang
Wuhan University, Wuhan, China, and
Xi Zhang
Tianjin University, Tianjin, China

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore how social media usage affects people's life satisfaction through two competing explanatory mechanisms.

Design/methodology/approach – An online survey was conducted to collect data. And the partial least squares method was used to examine the relationships among the usage of social media, social benefit, social overload and life satisfaction.

Findings – The results indicate that usage of social media can make people achieve social benefit, thus leading to enhanced life satisfaction. Unexpectedly, though usage of social media can bring the negative consequences (e.g. social overload), social overload cannot predict a decreased life satisfaction.

Originality/value – Concentrating on the outcomes of social aspects by using social media, this study proposes the double-sided role of social media instead of single effect.

Keywords Survey, User behaviour, Social media, Life satisfaction, Social benefit, Social overload

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

With the development of Web 2.0 technology, social media has permeated almost every aspect of people's lives. Especially in recent years, due to its own advantages, social media has been experiencing a rapid rise. Social media is becoming an essential part of people's daily life and a prevailing tool of developing and maintaining relationships (Elphinston and Noller, 2011). On the one hand, social media breaks the constraint of space and time, allowing individuals interact anywhere and anytime. Convenient and diverse forms of communication make people's social life more colorful, providing users various choices for connecting and getting familiar with friends, even strangers. On the other hand, there are more individuals becoming dependent on social media, which may induce numerous beneficial and detrimental outcomes of people's physical and psychological life (Porter *et al.*, 2012).

Most people are constantly pursuing high life quality, seeking an enhanced well-being. Life satisfaction is a cognitive and judgmental progress, which reflects a subjective and global evaluation of a person's quality of life (Diener *et al.*, 1985). The



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presence of social media has deeply changed people's life style, thus may change their attitude and judgment about life. Extant literatures have examined the effects of social media on people's life satisfaction, but the results are still ambiguous (Ang *et al.*, 2015; Best *et al.*, 2014; Kalpidou *et al.*, 2011). Some scholars contended that using social media could enhance people's life satisfaction (Liu and Yu, 2013; Nabi *et al.*, 2013), while some studies proposed negative relationship between using social media and life satisfaction (Brooks, 2015; Chou and Edge, 2012). To interpret the inconsistent findings, we postulate that the underlying effect mechanism may be double-sided, while what the previous studies considered is partial. Therefore, in this study we will put forward a more comprehensive set of hypotheses to address the research gap.

Compared with other media, social interaction is a principal component of social media (Wang *et al.*, 2012). Social needs are recognized as the dominant driving forces for individuals to use social media (Wang *et al.*, 2012). The usage of social media for social purpose is more pertinent to individuals' well-being than other purposes (e.g. information and entertainment) (Huang, 2010; Wang *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, the primary concern of this study is about the outcomes of social aspects by using social media. The present study focusses on two opposite outcomes of social media usage, i.e., social benefit and social overload specifically.

This study makes several theoretical contributions. Focussing on the social effects of social media, this study provides a new angle for scholars to better understand the relationship between social media and life satisfaction. Moreover, it proposes the double-sided role of social media instead of a single effect, which presents a more synthetic account of social media usage and life satisfaction.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. First, we review prior related studies and then present the theoretical foundation for this study, explaining the perspective of social benefit and social overload. Then we put forward the research model and develop the hypotheses. Next, we describe the research methodology and the analysis of the results. Finally, we discuss the results and give implications for theory and practice.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Related studies

Research on subjective well-being has achieved prolonged and in-depth studies in psychology and philosophy, while the exploration of life satisfaction has begun to attract scholars' attention only in recent years (Lim and Putnam, 2010). With the penetration of social media, it has been a heated discussion about how social media influences people's lives.

Extensive studies have examined the effects of social media on well-being, but the results were still mixed (Best *et al.*, 2014; Chan, 2014). Some studies proposed that using social media can positively impact individuals' life satisfaction (Ang *et al.*, 2015; Nabi *et al.*, 2013; Valenzuela *et al.*, 2009); but others found harmful effects of social media (Brooks, 2015; Chen and Lee, 2013; Chou and Edge, 2012) (see Table I). The controversial effects of social media may be due to the different influencing mechanisms. Everything has two sides, and so has social media. Social media can enhance people's life satisfaction through the benefits of increased social capital, perceived social support or increased self-esteem, etc. (Best *et al.*, 2014), while its detrimental effects may be depression, social anxiety, jealousy, etc. (Best *et al.*, 2014).

Several mainstream opinions have expounded the positive influences of using social media. Social support is one of the most common outcomes of social media, which is thought to be a predictive factor of well-being (Kim and Lee, 2011; Liu and Yu, 2013;

Literature	Context	Independent variables	Dependent variables	Interaction effects	Theory
<i>Positive effect</i>					
Ang <i>et al.</i> (2015)	Computer-mediated communication	Attitude toward online relationship formation (ATO) Internet habit strength (IHS) Online communication (OC) Online self-disclosure (OSD)	Psychological need satisfaction in online friendships (PNS) Life satisfaction (LS)	ATO → PNS IHS → PNS OC → PNS OSD → PNS PNS → LS	Uses and gratifications Self-determination
Nabi <i>et al.</i> (2013)	Online social networks	Number of Facebook friends (NFF) Perceived social support (PSS) Perceived stress (PS)	Physical illness (PI) Psychological well-being (PWB)	NFF → PSS PSS → PS PS → PI PS → PWB	Cognitive-phenomenological theory of stress
Valenzuela <i>et al.</i> (2009)	Social network sites	Intensity of Facebook use (IFU) Intensity of Facebook groups use (IFGU)	Life satisfaction (LS) Social trust (ST) Civic participation (CP) Political participation (PP)	IFU → LS IFU → ST IFU → CP IFGU → CP IFU → PP IFGU → PP	Social capital theory
<i>Negative effect</i>					
Brooks (2015)	Classroom task environment	Social media usage (SMU) Attentional control (AC) Multitasking computer self efficacy (MCSE)	Task performance (TP) Technostress Happiness	SMU → TP SMU × AC → TP SMU × MCSE → TP SMU → technostress Technostress → happiness SMU → happiness	Distraction-conflict theory
Chen and Lee (2013)	Social networking sites	The frequency of Facebook interaction (FFI) Communication overload (CO) Self-esteem	Psychological distress (PD)	FFI → PD FFI → CO CO → PD FFI → self-esteem Self-esteem → PD	na
Chou and Edge (2012)	Facebook	More involved with using Facebook (IUF) Including more strangers on Facebook (ISF)	Others have a better life (OBL) Others are happier (OH) Life is fair (LF)	IUF → OBL IUF → OH ISF → OBL ISF → OH ISF → LF	na

Table I.
Related studies on social media and life satisfaction

Nabi *et al.*, 2013; Oh *et al.*, 2014; Sarriera *et al.*, 2012). The usage of social media can help facilitate interpersonal relationships (Liu and Yu, 2013) and increase supportive interaction (Oh *et al.*, 2014), thus enhancing users' perceived social support. On the one hand, social support can reduce individuals' perceived stress (Nabi *et al.*, 2013) and

induce positive affect (Oh *et al.*, 2014), leading to an enhanced life satisfaction. On the other hand, online social support can reinforce individuals' offline social support, both of which can positively influence the perception of well-being (Liu and Yu, 2013). Besides, owing to the convenience for communication, using social media can promote social capital (Ellison *et al.*, 2007; Valenzuela *et al.*, 2009), enhance the degree of perceived connectedness and reduce the degree of perceived social isolation (Ahn and Shin, 2013), thereby obtaining a high life satisfaction.

However, some researches contended that social media can negatively influence people's life satisfaction through some harmful outcomes. Brooks (2015) argued that using social media can bring technostress and decreased task performance, negatively related with happiness. Chen and Lee (2013) supposed that interaction on social media can result in communication overload and decreased self-esteem, then cause psychological distress. In addition, Chou and Edge (2012) claimed that social media users are more likely to compare their lives with others, so they are more likely to perceive a low life satisfaction.

It can be seen that the underlying mechanisms remain ambiguous, hence the relationship between usage of social media and life satisfaction still deserves research effort. Focussing on the two contradictory specific outcomes of social media usage, this study will explore the relationships among usage of social media, social benefit, social overload and life satisfaction.

2.2 Social benefit

Social activities are a necessary part of people's everyday life, especially in the internet environment. Social needs are the basic needs of human beings, and people are inclined to meet their needs and improve their satisfaction (Steverink and Lindenberg, 2006). In other words, people anticipate that they can acquire benefits from social activities.

Kuo and Feng (2013) contended that social benefit stems from developing and maintaining relationships with others such as friendship, intimacy and social support. That is to say, the benefits can be obtained from close relationships as well as from newly developed ones. When people gain social benefits, they have better communication and interaction with other people, and get a broader interpersonal network, and also perceive social support from others (Kuo and Feng, 2013). Moreover, social benefit can enhance individuals' sense of belonging (Kuo and Feng, 2013) and motivate their intentions to participate (Dholakia *et al.*, 2004). Viewing social benefit as a positive consequence of social media usage, this study will examine whether social benefit can have effects on people's life satisfaction.

2.3 Social overload

Social media have enriched people's ways of communication and interaction, making it simple and convenient to develop and maintain relationships. However, as an individual's social networks broadens, it increases the probability that the social media user will receive more social requests, which may lead to the emergence of social overload (Maier *et al.*, 2014). According to Maier *et al.* (2012, 2014), social overload describes the situation when social media users face too many others' social demands and feel that they provide too much social support.

Social overload is the negative product of using social media. As social media can facilitate easy interactions, asking for social support does not need much cost. Consequently, it increases individuals' disclosure of their lives online (Maier *et al.*, 2014).

Under this circumstance, out of the responsibility for friends, other users have to deal with these substantial social requests to maintain relationships (Maier *et al.*, 2012). Too much intrusion of social requests into individuals' lives would interrupt their routines (LaRose *et al.*, 2014), which can induce detrimental psychological and behavioral consequences (Maier *et al.*, 2014). Social overload might draw individuals into the situation of emotional exhaustion (Maier *et al.*, 2012, 2014), resulting in users' social media fatigue (Bright *et al.*, 2015) and increased intention of discontinuous usage (Maier *et al.*, 2012, 2014). What's worse, the status of social overload is recognized as the source of increased pressure and more frequent health problems, which can produce negative affect (LaRose *et al.*, 2014). It can be seen that social overload may influence people's normal life, thus this study postulates the influences of social overload on life satisfaction.

3. Hypotheses

Focussing on the outcomes of social aspects, this study proposes a research model to explore how social media influences individuals' life satisfaction. The research model is shown in Figure 1, and more explanations are presented as follows.

3.1 Usage of social media and social benefit

The development of technology, especially the emergence of social media, has dramatically changed the way people establish relationships (Sarriera *et al.*, 2012). Social media provide users with an interactive platform, where users can conveniently participate in a variety of social activities such as text messaging, vision sharing, content generation and so forth (Porter *et al.*, 2012). Its rich functionalities and applications make it easy for individuals to actively interact and communicate with others, deepening the influences on users' social life.

Ellison *et al.* (2007) examined the relationships between the usage of Facebook and the formation and maintenance of social capital, validating that Facebook usage can not only help develop bridging social capital, but also can strengthen bonding and maintaining social capital. In other words, usage of social media can contribute to maintain the existing relationships with relatives and friends, meanwhile can broaden people's social networks. Moreover, social media enables users to present themselves in an online community. Posting comments and clicking the "like" button can be seen as the concern and support from other online friends. In addition, prior research (Liu and Yu, 2013; Oh *et al.*, 2014) found that interaction with friends of social media can help

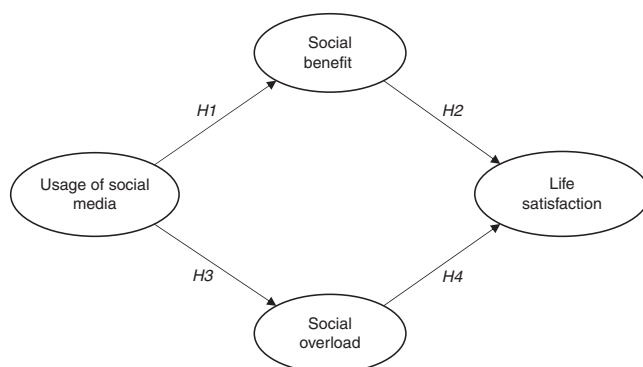


Figure 1.
Research model

users obtain positive affect and simultaneously make them feel more social support. Therefore, we expect that the usage of social media can bring users more social benefit. Hence we hypothesize that:

H1. Usage of social media is positively associated with social benefit.

3.2 Social benefit and life satisfaction

Individuals who have higher quality of friendships and extended social group may also have higher well-being about their lives (Best *et al.*, 2014). The usage of social media can bring users a closer relationship and a broader social range, thus their affection is to be fulfilled by the feeling of decreased loneliness and the perception of love, understanding and acceptance (Steerink and Lindenberg, 2006). Likewise, Ang *et al.* (2015) examined the relationships between computer-mediated communication and life satisfaction, demonstrating that friendships obtained online and online communication will meet individuals' psychological needs and positively predict life satisfaction.

In addition, the presence of perceived social support can also be beneficial to people's life satisfaction (Nabi *et al.*, 2013; Oh *et al.*, 2014; Sarriera *et al.*, 2012). Sarriera *et al.* (2012) argued that perceived social support has a positive association with adolescents' personal well-being. Similarly, Oh *et al.* (2014) validated that perceived social support is the predictive factor of life satisfaction. Further, Nabi *et al.* (2013) claimed that social support can enhance well-being by reducing the feeling of stress.

Therefore, this study assumes that social benefit can bring individuals the feeling of respect and support, leading to a more positive attitude toward their lives. Hence we hypothesize that:

H2. Social benefit is positively associated with life satisfaction.

3.3 Usage of social media and social overload

Every coin has two sides. Though social media has brought a lot of convenience to people, it has also led to quite a few annoyances. As the usage of social media can facilitate easy information disclosure and social interaction, more individuals tend to present their living conditions in the online community, which call for other users' praise or assistance. As thus, users have to confront plenty of others' social requests when they log on social media. Out of the responsibility for friends, they may compel themselves to deal with the massive social requests to amuse or sympathize others (e.g. click on the like-button, comment on postings) (Maier *et al.*, 2012). Besides, individuals who have more online friends and use social media more frequently would encounter and handle more social demands (Maier *et al.*, 2014). When a person gives too much social support, he or she would feel overburdened or strained, which matches the description of social overload (Maier *et al.*, 2014).

From the above, the usage of social media may disrupt people's normal social life, thus social media seems to be a kind of source of social overload. Hence we hypothesize that:

H3. Usage of social media is positively associated with social overload.

3.4 Social overload and life satisfaction

When individuals perceive the stress from social activities, they have got into the state of social overload. It has to take an amount of time and energy to passively maintain

the mutual relationships with friends (Kim and Lee, 2011), which may trigger negative emotions and disaffection with the status quo. Besides, social overload can result in affective fatigue and exhaustion (Maier *et al.*, 2012, 2014, 2015). Scholars (Maier *et al.*, 2012, 2014, 2015) validated that social overload will be harmful to people's mental health, such as emotional exhaustion and decreased satisfaction of their social activities. Furthermore, individuals will be tired and dissatisfied with their social condition after experiencing the stress and exhaustion, leading to a series of adverse effects on living and working (Charoensukmongkol, 2015). Therefore, this study posits that social overload will reduce people's life satisfaction. Hence we hypothesize that:

H4. Social overload is negatively associated with life satisfaction.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research setting

To test the research model of this study, an online survey was conducted to collect data. WeChat users in China were chosen as target population. WeChat is one of the typical applications of social media. Its basic function is interacting with others. Besides text messages, users can also send voice messages, videos and pictures to one or more friends. At the same time, users can make new friends through location-based plug-ins such as Shake, Look Around and Drift Bottle. In addition, the function of Moments allows users to share their lives and emotions, which can also help promote interaction with others. Furthermore, it also provides functions like Public Number and News Feed, which can basically meet users' needs for communication and obtain information.

By the first quarter of 2015, over 90 percent of smartphones had installed WeChat app, and monthly active users had reached 549 million[1]. WeChat has become an indispensable social tool in people's daily lives, and using WeChat has become people's habits and customs. WeChat has covered a broad range of population in China and profoundly influenced users' social life, thus it is suitable to implement this investigation.

4.2 Measurement

All the measurement items were adapted from extant literatures. To fit the particular research context, some terms were slightly changed. The items used in this study are shown in Table AI.

Specifically, the scales for usage of social media were adapted from Ellison *et al.* (2007). This instrument includes six reflective items, measuring the extent to which the users were emotionally related to WeChat and the extent to which WeChat was integrated into users' daily life. Social benefit was assessed drawing on the instrument from Kuo and Feng (2013). This instrument consists of three reflective items, which reflect the improvement of friendship and intimacy. To assess social overload, we used the scales adapted from Maier *et al.* (2015). Six reflective items can reflect users' negative perception of WeChat usage when they feel that they are giving too much social support to others. The scales for life satisfaction were adapted from Diener *et al.* (1985). This instrument reflects individuals' global assessment of their quality of life and it is measured through five reflective items. All items were measured using a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

To ensure the face validity of the measurement items, four graduate students were invited to check the initial set of items and give suggestions for revision. As the respondents were from China, we translated all the items into Chinese. Then the four

graduate students reviewed and revised the improper expressions to help ensure that respondents can understand the questionnaire.

4.3 Data collection

The samples were obtained by using the service of an online survey platform, which was hosted on Wenjuanxing (www.sojump.com). The survey spanned two weeks, during which a total of 312 WeChat users participated in this investigation. After deleting the unqualified responses (e.g. multiple responses from the same IP address, responses missing information and including the same values), 263 valid samples were retained. Table II shows the demographic information of the respondents. Most respondents were female (68.44 percent) and aged 18-25 years old (74.14 percent). In terms of usage experience, most respondents had used WeChat for over 12 months (82.89 percent). Besides, most respondents had less than 100 WeChat friends (49.43 percent) followed by respondents with 100-200 WeChat friends (31.94 percent).

5. Data analysis

The partial least squares (PLS) method was chosen to examine the research model. First, as one of the structural equation modeling technique, PLS can estimate the parameters for relationships between measures and constructs and the relationships among constructs at the same time (Hulland, 1999). Second, PLS does not have rigorous restrictions on variable distributions (Wang *et al.*, 2015). Additionally, it is applicable for models with small as well as large samples, and formative as well as reflective constructs (Hair *et al.*, 2011). For all the reasons above, PLS seems suitable in this study. Thus, SmartPLS was used to conduct data analysis.

5.1 Measurement model

The measurement model is assessed by examining the reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity. The criteria of reliability were proposed as composite reliability (CR) of 0.70 or above and indicator loadings of 0.70 or above (Hair *et al.*, 2011). As shown in Table III, the CR of each construct ranges from 0.907 to 0.938, all above the recommended threshold. Besides, from Table IV, we can see that all item loadings are

Variables	Category	Distribution	%
Gender	Male	83	31.56
	Female	180	68.44
Age	Under 18	6	2.28
	18~25	195	74.14
	26~30	41	15.59
	31~40	6	2.28
	Above 40	15	5.70
Usage experience	Under 3 months	11	4.18
	3~6 months	9	3.42
	6~12 months	25	9.51
	Above 12 months	218	82.89
Number of WeChat friends	Under 100	130	49.43
	100~200	84	31.94
	200~300	34	12.93
	Above 300	15	5.70

Table II.
Respondent
demographics

Construct	Item	Mean	SD	CR	AVE	Influence of social media
Usage of social media (USM)	USM1	5.48	1.427	0.938	0.716	
	USM2	5.38	1.398			
	USM3	5.50	1.493			
	USM4	4.64	1.719			
	USM5	4.79	1.600			
	USM6	5.10	1.628			
Social benefit (SB)	SB1	4.78	1.291	0.911	0.775	
	SB2	5.08	1.258			
	SB3	4.48	1.345			
Social overload (SO)	SO1	3.72	1.400	0.907	0.620	
	SO2	3.97	1.369			
	SO3	3.57	1.385			
	SO4	4.00	1.386			
	SO5	4.65	1.414			
	SO6	4.25	1.539			
Life satisfaction (LS)	LS1	4.63	1.125	0.918	0.694	
	LS2	4.57	1.133			
	LS3	4.57	1.196			
	LS4	4.33	1.282			
	LS5	3.35	1.608			

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Table III.
Psychometric properties of measures

Notes: SD, standard deviation; CR, composite reliability; AVE, average variance extracted

	USM	LS	SB	SO
USM1	0.835	0.250	0.404	0.335
USM2	0.820	0.279	0.449	0.371
USM3	0.893	0.328	0.425	0.388
USM4	0.815	0.201	0.452	0.521
USM5	0.881	0.260	0.520	0.464
USM6	0.830	0.198	0.486	0.419
LS1	0.286	0.831	0.243	0.175
LS2	0.290	0.899	0.301	0.143
LS3	0.293	0.913	0.273	0.117
LS4	0.208	0.851	0.254	0.194
LS5	0.111	0.644	0.146	0.124
SB1	0.490	0.265	0.912	0.544
SB2	0.546	0.309	0.910	0.515
SB3	0.373	0.203	0.816	0.507
SO1	0.361	0.066	0.437	0.800
SO2	0.452	0.159	0.501	0.785
SO3	0.362	0.162	0.441	0.857
SO4	0.336	0.162	0.510	0.800
SO5	0.450	0.128	0.420	0.761
SO6	0.362	0.160	0.474	0.715

Table IV.
Loadings and cross-loadings of measures

Notes: USM, usage of social media; LS, life satisfaction; SB, social benefit; SO, social overload

higher than the threshold of 0.70 except LS5 (0.644). Considering that only one loading is slightly lower than 0.70, it was still retained for sound theoretical reasons (Hulland, 1999). Thus we may say that the measurement model satisfies the requirements of reliability.

The convergent validity and discriminant validity were evaluated using confirmatory factor analysis. For an adequate convergent validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) should be higher than 0.50 (Hair *et al.*, 2011). As shown in Table III, all AVE values of each construct are greater than 0.50, indicating a good convergent validity. The discriminant validity was assessed by examining whether the square root of AVE for each latent variable is higher than the correlation between the latent variable and any other latent variable (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). According to Table V, all square root of AVE values exceed the correlations, demonstrating the adequacy of discriminant validity. In addition, from the results of Table IV, each item loading is highly correlated with the intended constructs and greater than all of its cross-loadings, justifying the good convergent validity and discriminant validity (Hair *et al.*, 2011).

5.2 Structural model

The PLS results for structural model are shown in Figure 2. As is shown, usage of social media has a significant positive effect on social benefit ($\beta = 0.543, p < 0.01$), supporting *H1*; social benefit has a significant positive effect on life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.299, p < 0.01$), supporting *H2*; usage of social media has a significant positive effect on social overload ($\beta = 0.499, p < 0.01$), supporting *H3*; no significant relationship exists between social overload and life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.003, p > 0.05$), thus *H4* is not supported. Besides, 29.5 percent of the variance in social benefit is explained by usage of social media; 9.0 percent of the variance in life satisfaction is

Table V.
Correlation matrix
with the square
root of the AVE
in the diagonal

Variable	USM	LS	SB	SO
USM	0.846			
LS	0.296	0.833		
SB	0.543	0.300	0.880	
SO	0.499	0.179	0.591	0.788

Notes: USM, usage of social media; LS, life satisfaction; SB, social benefit; SO, social overload

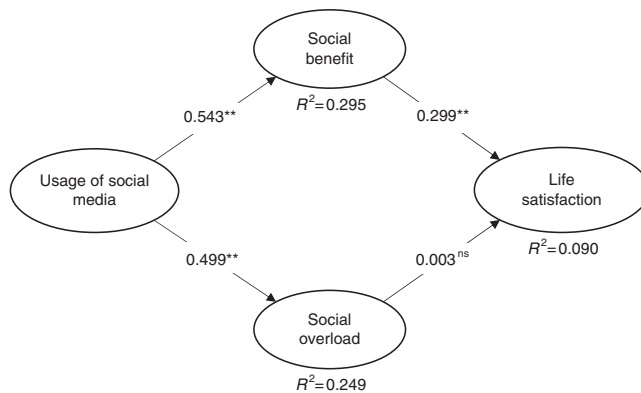


Figure 2.
Results of the
research model

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; ns= $p > 0.05$

explained by social benefit and social overload; and 24.9 percent of the variance in social overload is explained by usage of social media.

6. Discussion and Implications

6.1 Discussion

This study aims to examine the influence of social media usage on individual' life satisfaction. The results reveal some interesting findings.

First, the results show that the usage of social media positively influences social benefit, indicating that by using social media, users can maintain relationships with friends. At the same time, they can make new friends and obtain an expanded social circle. Besides, they can perceive more social support than offline. Second, social benefit has a positive effect on life satisfaction, suggesting that benefits obtained from social media can make individuals have a favorable evaluation of their lives. Third, there is a positive relationship between social media use and social overload. This finding reveals that people's social life does not become relaxed through social media. On the contrary, receiving too many social requests and giving too much social support make individuals feel stressed. Unexpectedly, social overload does not show a significant influence on life satisfaction. The results indicate that the pressure from social overload is not enough to reduce people's evaluation of their lives. There could be several reasons for the insignificant influence: some moderators may impact the relationship between social overload and life satisfaction, for instance personal traits (Hao *et al.*, 2014), self-esteem (Best *et al.*, 2014) or social skill (Chan, 2014). Besides, as social media has become a part of daily life, individuals may have been used to the condition of so many social requests.

6.2 Theoretical implications

This study has several implications for research. First, focussing on the outcomes of social aspects, this study explores how social media influences people's life satisfaction. Though studies on the relationships between social media and well-being have attracted scholars' attention, prior studies mostly considered the effects such as usage frequency (Chen and Lee, 2013; Oh *et al.*, 2014), number of friends (Kim and Lee, 2011; Oh *et al.*, 2014) and personality (Chan, 2014), and so forth. While social need is necessary, this study contributes a better understanding of outcomes of social media and tries to clarify the issues related to the mixed findings in extant literatures. Thus this study provides a new perspective to study the influences of social media on life satisfaction.

Second, this study takes into account the positive effect as well as negative effect of social media usage on life satisfaction. It proposes that using social media could bring people with different feelings of their social life. Serving as a complement of well-being studies, it attempts to discover multiple influencing mechanisms at the same time instead of partial explanation. The proposed research model highlights that the relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction can be either positive or negative depending on which route is more salient. In our study, although we find both positive and negative consequences of social media usage, the positive consequences dominate the overall impact.

6.3 Practical implications

According to the results of this study, usage of social media can positively influence social benefit, thus leading to an increased life satisfaction. Social networking is

people's primary demand, and most people expect to establish comfortable and stable social relations. With the popularity of the internet and an accelerated life rhythm, face-to-face communication is unable to meet individual's social needs. Hence social media can serve as an appropriate platform for interaction. Users are inclined to choose the most suitable social media for themselves. As the existence of more alternatives, it is a challenge for social media providers to keep users. Service providers should constantly optimize their products to improve the quality of user experience so that they can retain the existing users and attract new users.

On the other hand, though the negative effect of social media is insignificant, social overload can produce some adverse outcomes. Maier *et al.* (2012, 2014) found that social overload will induce emotional exhaustion and decrease users' satisfaction of social media, which can cause users' discontinuance intention or switch to alternatives. To prevent users' discontinuance, service providers should take measures to reduce the condition of social overload. They can improve the information screening technology, letting users easily filter the information they do not want to see. In addition, users should reduce the usage time when they perceive social overload. They can move their attention to offline activities to relieve the online stress.

6.4 Limitations and future study

In spite of its implications, several limitations should be noticed. First, the generalizability of the results may be a problem, as only Chinese WeChat users were involved in the investigation. Future studies should include other types of samples and different contexts of social media. Second, the measures are self-reported, thus possibly existing biases may make the results less convincing. Multiple methods should be utilized in the future studies. Moreover, the lack of correlation between social overload and life satisfaction is unexpected and limits the significance of this study. In future studies, the negative effects of social media should be continuously concerned. In other words, research on social media and life satisfaction still deserve attention.

Well-being and life satisfaction have always been the focus in the field of psychology and sociology. Social development should not only satisfy individuals' material necessities, but also enhance their mental satisfaction. As social media has penetrated into people's lives, service providers should concern users' needs and attempt to create a media that makes people feel real happiness.

Note

1. http://baike.baidu.com/link?url=BvGwpW6l6uVlfYzMt961-z49ava_UPrQA8FedCuGuvFEEPHjXKIuPO7_me-VjdLbcRoGAbiccqrZgMuGrk05LdEaqmYXe0uhyNF0V_0eAa (accessed October 29, 2015).

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Variable	Item	Measurement
Usage of social media (USM) (Ellison <i>et al.</i> , 2007)	USM1	WeChat is part of my everyday activity
	USM2	I am proud to tell people I'm on WeChat
	USM3	WeChat has become part of my daily routine
	USM4	I feel out of touch when I haven't logged onto WeChat for a while
	USM5	I feel I am part of the WeChat community
	USM6	I would be sorry if WeChat shut down
Social benefit (SB) (Kuo and Feng, 2013)	SB1	I can expand my social network through participation in WeChat
	SB2	The WeChat helps strengthen my connections with other members
	SB3	I can make friends with people sharing common interests with me in WeChat
Social overload (SO) (Maier <i>et al.</i> , 2015)	SO1	I take too much care of my friends' well-being on WeChat
	SO2	I deal with my friends' problems too much on WeChat
	SO3	My sense of being responsible for how much fun my friends have on WeChat is too strong
	SO4	I am too often caring for my friends on WeChat
	SO5	I pay too much attention to posts of my friends on WeChat
	SO6	I congratulate WeChat friends as a consequence of the birthday reminder, although I would not congratulate them in real life
Life satisfaction (LS) (Diener <i>et al.</i> , 1985)	LS1	In most ways my life is close to my ideal
	LS2	The conditions of my life are excellent
	LS3	I am satisfied with my life
	LS4	So far I have gotten the important things I want in life
	LS5	If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing

Table A1.
Measures of
constructs

Corresponding authors

Yongqiang Sun can be contacted at: syq@mail.ustc.edu.cn

Nan Wang can be contacted at: nanwang@whu.edu.cn

Xi Zhang can be contacted at: jackyzhang@tju.edu.cn

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