Queer Identity on Social Media: The Influence of Online Community on Identity Development of LGBTQ Youth in Contemporary China

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Abstract

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Purpose: The main purpose of this study has been to determine the how online communities influence the development of queer youths in the contemporary China. To achieve this purpose, this study has examined what it is like to be a queer in China, how LGBTQ youths in China use social media, and whether social media has a positive impact on LGBTQs in China.

Methods: To achieve the study objectives, PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Revies and Meta-Analysis) is used to identify the studies that met the research inclusion criteria. This resulted in 15 studies being selected based on the inclusion/exclusion criteria that was used.

Results: The studies that were selected provided critical insight to suggest that young queer in China use social media for various reasons. Studies indicated that young LGBTQ Chinese use social media to identify groups with similar views, find mates, and feel like they belong to a community, as well as collect information, which will help with their identity formation and maintenance. The findings also show that social media positively impacts LGBTQs in regards to their formation and maintenance of their identity.

Conclusion: Results obtained in this review have shown that in a country such as China where queers are still being marginalized despite their huge population, social media plays an important role in helping them develop and maintain their identities.

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Chapter 1 : Introduction

Social media has emerged as perhaps the most effective communication channel and appropriate way for people to establish virtual networks in the contemporary world. Edosomwan et al. (2011) have particularly noted that studying social media is difficult without the phrase social networking being mentioned. The evolution of social networking throughout the years began with networking over the telephone, email, and now over the internet through social media platforms (Edosomwan et al., 2011). The number of people using these media channels have increased tremendously. Statistics published by Kepios (2022), for instance, shows that as of April 2022, the number of social media users had increased to 4.65 billion, which is equivalent to 58.7% of global total population.

With the number of people on social media continuing to increase, it has emerged as a tool for influencing one's identity. Sirola et al. (2021) have particularly described social media as online communication tools that gather their users around social cliques that consist of individuals who are similar-minded and share identities. Most critically, however, is how social media tools are being employed by various individuals and groups to influence the identity development of lesbians, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and queer (LGBTQ) youth. Craig et al. (2021) argues that the popularity of social media sites provides critical opportunities for LGBTQ youth to enhance their well-being by exploring their identities, gain access to resources, as well as connect with their peers. Craig and McInroy (2014) have also noted that, when it comes to identifying development, LGBTQ minorities have come to realize that they can form a part of themselves online.

While social media continues to be effectively utilized by LGBTQ youth to develop their identity, Craig and McInroy (2014) have noted that significantly little is known about how social media influences the identity development of LGBTQ youth. This study uses the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) to understand the impact of social media the identity development of LGBTQ youth in contemporary China. This research is guided by the following questions:

1.What are the experiences of LGBTQ youth in China?

2.How do Chinese LGBTQs youth use social media for identity development?

3.Does social media positively influence Chinese LGBTQ youth and the development of their identity?

By effectively examining these questions, this study examines how online communities on social media influence the identity of LGBTQ young people in China. By using PRISMA, this study will show that not only the LGBTQ young people in China employ social media to develop strategies, but parents of queer young people also use social media to fight for the rights of LGBTQs in the society.

Chapter 2 : Literature Review

This chapter provides an overview of current literature on this topic. Literature focus has mainly been on how much studies have been conducted from China's perspective. This is especially when considering that one of China's social media, TikTok seems to have taken the world by storm. Observations made by Tien and Prodanovic (2022), for instance, have shown that while Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp continue to lead in terms of the number of users, with 2.74 million, 2,291 million, and 2 million users respectively, as of January 2021, TikTok, recorded approximately 689 million users and is likely to become the most important social media tool in a few years. According to Herman (2019), TikTok is changing how people are not only communicating but also expressing themselves on social media platforms. TikTok, along with other social media platforms, has ushered in an era where short videos can be used by users of social media to communicate their messages effectively.

Social Media and Communication Boundaries

One of the most important aspects that has been credited to social media is the ability of this technology to break communication boundaries. While Kalligas (2017) has identified this aspect of social media as perhaps the technology's dark side since it prevents people from having ultimate control of their information and the audience the information is intended for, other scholars have considered the positive side of this aspect. For instance, Dwivedi et al. (2018) have identified social media as technology, which is important for society. Social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have helped bring down geographic barriers, which once restricted communication, as well as have led to

the explosion of virtual presence, e-participation, and the development of online communities. Some of the advantages of social media as far as communication barriers are concerned are promotion of information sharing techniques, publicity, receiving and giving support, as well as advice (Dwivedi et al., 2018). TikTok provides its users with tools, as well as the ability to engage with other users through "response" videos or through "duets" means, as well as the ability to duplicate videos and add themselves alongside (Tien and Prodanivic, 2022).

One of the major advantages that is associated with social media's ability to break communication barriers is providing people with access to foreign materials. Examining this concept from a marketing perspective, Mazzucchelli et al. (2021) found out that companies in western counties are using social media tools such as Facebook to market their products and services to international providers and consumers to a create two way relationship, as well as improve on their own opportunities.

The Chinese seem to be particularly benefited significantly from social media's ability to make foreign materials more accessible. Liu (2019), for instance, noted that, for Chinese people, social media continues to open for them new spaces to interact with people from other regions. Basing their study on understanding how social media influences intercultural communication competency (ICC), Liu (2019) found out that Chinese people living in Sweden saw their ICC being influenced differently by social media due to their constant interactions with people in their home country. Liu (2019) also noted that, when it comes to social media interactions, people are cable of developing intercultural awareness, a concept that is largely associated with one's ability to see the existing differences and similarities between his/her own culture and the culture of others

in a critical viewpoint. Intercultural awareness on social media is very important given that it reflects on a person's consciousness of improving knowledge, attitude, as well as skills when interacting with people from other cultures (Liu, 2019).

Still on the subject of intercultural communication, Monika, Nasution and Nasution (2020) have observed that most people in the contemporary world are using social media to mainly gain knowledge, learn about the opinions of other people and issues, topics, and events perceptions, as well as to social with people who support similar views. Seo et al. (2016) also noted that Chinese people living or studying in the United States have always employed social media to maintain their cultural awareness, as well as maintain their cultural ties. In addition, social media platforms seem to have helped Chinese people to be effectively associated with cultural contexts, which are supported in other regions, but seem to be barred in their country (Seo et al., 2016).

LGBTQ Social Media Trends

Perhaps the trend, which has gained popularity on social media use, is the participation of LGBTQs. Berger et al. (2021) have observed that, while social media channels are not free from discrimination, LGBTQ people have identified these channels as a safe environment. Most LGBTQ youth are likely to join social media for relationships, wellbeing, and even identity support (Berger et al., 2021). Facebook is particularly being used by a significant number of LGBTQ youths as way of identifying and joining groups that either support queer sexuality or are made up individuals that are queer (Berger et al., 2021).

Fear-Smith (2022) has also noted that, with people affiliated with queer sexuality still living in fear, social media tools have emerged as perhaps the most important place for LGBTQs to participate in movements, such as the LGBTQIA+ movement, safely at home. Various brands including NYX, use social media tools such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram to develop safe communities, which can be used to promote conversations regarding self-identity (Fear-Smith, 2022). While the world still continues to stigmatize queer sexuality, NYX campaign, which in February 2022 featured engaging and familiar role models aimed to show consumers that engaged in the campaign using their social media feeds that role models exists that represent everyone (Fear-Smith, 2022). TikTok has gone to an extent of introducing a list of trailblazer creators, which can be used by members of the LGBTQ community to show their identity to the world.

A research conducted by Zheng et al. (2022) shows that social media use by the LGBTQs in the contemporary world forced Weibo, one of China's largest social media platform to reverse its ban on queer content. According to Kuo (2018), a ban was implemented as a way of halting content that promoted bloody violence, pornographic implications, and homosexuality as a way of promoting a harmonious and sunny community environment. However, the ban was reversed after countless partners posted their images, rainbow emojis, comments, as well as complaints regarding the ban (Kuo, 2018). The ban on gay content on Weibo has also seen another social media queer trend emerging in China. This includes the Pink yuan online gay-friendly advertisements, which have resulted in a significant number of young Chinese people opening up and accepting the LGBTQ culture (Taylor, 2020). The 'Pink yuan' concept resembles the 'Pink dollar' concept, which in the 1990s was used to by western companies to consider the significance of the

LGBTQ market (Taylor, 2020). Pink yuan in this case, means that China is currently opening up the LGBT market. WeChat, a Chinese social media applications has also created gay community networks with the objective of advocating the rights of LGBTQs in the country (James, 2021).

Social Media, Identity, and LGBTQ in China

When it comes to social media, identity, and LGBTQ in China, Stasi (2019) has considered exposure to content on these media as perhaps the most important concept. This is because, while one may choose to view content exposure from an active perspective (i.e., what can be posted or not posted, and shared on their accounts, as well as accounts of others), it can also be viewed from a more passive perspective (i.e., what users do or do not access or see on social media) (Stasi, 2019). Significant attention needs to be given to content exposure, especially when considering that the information that people are exposed to on social media play an important role in their lives and particularly in supporting idea transmission, building identities in communities, as well as empowering people (Stasi, 2019).

Exposure to social media content particularly has a significant influence on people's identity as most people are likely to identify themselves with what they see online. Sirola et al. (2021) argue that the content, which is posted on social media is likely to influence the viewers' perception of themselves, as well as influence the viewers' behavior. Harwood (2020) has tried to explain the impact that social media has on identity using the social identity theory. This theory provides a framework, which can be used to explain the behavior of intragroup and intergroup communication using the inherent values that

people tend to place on social group memberships, as well as their desire to view their specific social groups in a light that is positive (Harwood, 2020). Social identity theory has proved effective in explaining the existing relations between social groups that are large by using the psychological processes that concern social identity – a person's sense in terms of belonging to a group, as well as negative or positive feelings, which are associated with the membership (Harwood, 2020). Based on this theory, Harwood has noted that individuals from marginalized groups such as the LGBTQs are more likely to turn to social media, which exposes them to content that will help improve their self-esteem, as well as feel like they belong to a certain community (2020).

The LGBTQ in China, the largest LGBTQ population in the world, have particularly identified social media as the most appropriate way of enhancing their self-esteem and a sense of belonging, given the continuous discrimination that LGBTQs in the country (Wang et al., 2020). As the LGBTQ young people in China continue to deal with societal prejudice, as well as state censorship, surveillance, and stringent laws, social media continues to have a strong influence on these people by providing them with content from other regions, which helps raise their self-esteem and provide them with a sense of belonging (Want et al., 2020). The influence of American pop music fans communities on social media seems to particularly have a significant influence on young queer identity on Weibo. Talbot (2020), for instance, noted that the growth of queer identities on China's Weibo is attributed to the exposure of LGBTQ youths to the content posted on the American pop music fans community on social media. Tan (2020) argues that, with more than 20% of people aged between 18 and 34 years on American pop music fan communities on social media identifying themselves as either lesbian, gay, bisexual,

transgender, or Queer, young people that are exposed to the content posted on the pages of these communities see their identities being significantly influenced. The actions and content of those within these fan communities have substantial effect on the identity of LGBTQ youths in China, as these youth tend to associate themselves with the content they are exposed to on these fun community social media pages (Talbot 2020). Therefore, when considering the arguments, which are made regarding the influence of social media and particularly American pop music fans communities on the identity development of LBGTQ youths in China, there is a need to develop a deeper understanding of the existing evidence regarding this issue.

While social media have proved in various instances to be hostile environments for LGBTQs as most of them have in countless times experienced hate speech, trolling, and online harassment, the fact that social media offers people various ways of managing their performances means that LGBTQs can use mechanisms such as privacy and security control to manage who they can identify themselves to and who they cannot (Talbot et al., 2020). To manage their performances on social media, LGBTQs tend to carefully monitor their self-expressions, manage their friendship networks, create different accounts, edit or curate their personal pictures, as well as ensure that the LGBTQ content that they post are limited to spaces which are anonymous (Talbot et al., 2020). This study, therefore, provides a systematic review, to examine how social media has affected the identity of LGBTQ Chinese youth.

Chapter 3 : Theoretical Perspective

This section uses the Theory of Performance and Digital Personhood Theory to understanding the influence of online community on the identity development of LGBTQ youth in the contemporary China. Social media platforms have, however, regarded as areas where LGBTQs can effectively manage their identity performance. Pullen (2015), for instance, LGBTQ people tend to use social media platforms to identify online communities, establish new friendships, as well as access information, which they cannot find offline (Pullen, 2015). Pullen (2015) also noted that, as compared to the real world, social media platforms provide LGBTQs with safe spaces to form their identities, as well as explore their identities. These two theories will be the theoretical lens in this study to examine how social media is influencing LGBTQ people's identity on social media by viewing online communities as an arena for performance and personhood..

Theory of Performance

The theory of performance, which was established by Cherniss and Goleman (1998) posits that, in a society, all individuals are required to put on a certain performance. Whether through the clothes that are worn by a person, the conversations people hold, or the food that people eat, all of these are performances, which have been designed in the form of a signal system to a person and others that exist around one's social group (Cherniss and Goleman, 1998). Performance reinforces the identity of a person in the community by implicitly requesting one's observers to seriously consider the impressions which are being fostered before them (Talbot, 2010).

Social media platforms have, however, regarded as areas where LGBTQs can effectively manage their identity performance. Employing the theory of performance, Talbot et al. (2020) found that social media can be used to either diminish or enhance the experiences of LGBTQs. LGBTQ people find it difficult disclose his/her identity because of the anticipation of negative emotions or changes in relationship, the belief of stigmatization, uncertainty of one's identity, fear rejection, and the need to maintain the perceptions of other people (Talbot et al., 2020). Being unable to freely express one's identity can severely affect a person's intimate relationships, as well as social interactions (Pullen, 2015). This can result in mental health issues that are disproportionately high among the LGBTQs.

Theory of Digital Personhood

According to Lesley and Clare (2020), the theory of digital personhood is largely related to the formation of identity by being present online and interacting with others around a theme that is common. There is a close link between the theory of digital personhood and the theory of networked individualism, which is used to explain the increasing significance of personal networks Lesley and Clare (2020). Personhood has been described by Ford (2020) as the ability to provide everybody with unchallengeable digital participation rights, which are independent of their identity, including projection of people against their democratic rights erosion through the loss of identity, coercion, theft, and even fakery.

Talbot et al. (2020) argue that the theories of digital personhood can be used to explore online identity performances, while the theory of self can be used to examine how people

try to tailor self-performances to a certain audience. Performances that have been tailored for certain audiences can be valuable to individuals that are marginalized, and have noted that developing multiple facades can be used to offer relief, as well as empower the marginalized individuals (Talbot et al. 2020). Maintaining such identities can help marginalized individuals to find support and acceptance in certain communities while others continue to shun them. However, Gay (2007) argues that managing different facets on social media platforms can be significantly challenging, especially in situations where some of the environmental cues are stripped out and where the social media platforms may not be able to fully differentiate between the audiences. For instance, social media tools such as Twitter, which remove context, can make it extremely difficult to for an individual to manage one's identity effectively and selectively (Gay, 2007).

Chapter 4 : Methodology

In this study, a Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) was used to collect data, which needed to be analyzed and facilitated for discussion. The review was conducted according to the systematic review guidelines of PRISMA. PRISMA helps the researcher to explore a certain research phenomenon by synthesizing a number of studies, thus enabling efficient and increased access to evidence (Gopalakrishnan and Ganeshkumar, 2013). Using this research method, this study has examined the impact online communities on social media have on the identity development of LGBTQ youths in China. To effectively address this question the following sub-questions are considered.

1.What are the experiences of LGBTQ youth in China?

2.How do Chinese LGBTQs youth use social media for identity development?

3.Does social media positively influence Chinese LGBTQ youth and the development of their identity?

PRISMA was selected for this study due to the amount of available literature on this subject. Wang et al. (2020) noted that, with China possessing perhaps the world's largest LGBTQ population, a significant number of scholars have been significantly curious regarding how these queer individuals manage to maintain their identity in a society, which endured intense criticism for its confusion traditions. A similar observation was made by Wu, Choi and Chau (2021) in a study, which was based on O'Malley and Arksey' Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis extension

for scoping reviews (PRISMA-ScR). Wu et al. (2021) found out that, with a significant amount of literature currently existing on this topic, it is easier to use data obtained in these studies to examine the topic effectively.

The PRISMA systematic review guidelines

PRISMA can be described as a 27-item checklist, which is used by researchers that employ systematic review as their research methodology to improve the systematic review's transparency (UNC University Library, 2022). The items that are associated with PRISMA cover all the manuscript's aspects and include the title of the study, abstract, the introduction, methods, discussion, results, and even funding (UNC University Library, 2022). This method results in the development of a flow chart diagram, which is used to depict the flow of information through the systematic review's different phases. The flow chart also helps to map out the number of records that have been identified, excluded and including criteria, as well as why some of the studies have been excluded (UNC University Library, 2022).

Search Criteria

In this review, studies were identified initially by searching a number of databases, which could be accessed online. These included JSTOR, EBSCOHost, Sage Journals, Proquest, OpenDOAR, Education Resources Information Centre, Social Science Research Network, Google Scholar, and CORE. Initially, there was a significant desire not to use Google Scholar as the main search engine given the amount of information that is contained and can be accessed using this form of search engine. However, after conducting a number of searches, Google Scholar was identified as a viable option for

identifying studies to be reviewed in this study because it does not limit articles, which can be accessed through it to journal articles that are peer-reviewed, but allows one to access a significant number of articles. It can also lead one to other journal databases.

In addition, the researcher needed to continuously alter the search term for different databases due to the format that are required by different databases in order to access articles that are stored in them. The search terms that were mostly employed are: “Queer sex AND China”, “LGBTQ AND China”, “Queer identity + Weibo”, “LGBTQ China AND Social media influence”, “America pop fun music community + LGBTQ China”, “Queer OR LGBTQ in China”, “Queer personality OR Identity in China social media. Contrary to these terms other phases were employed during the search period in order to acquire more data, which to be used to examine the research topic.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

During this study, it was important to note that, while a significant amount of research has been conducted on LGBTQ and queer identify in China, only the most relevant articles needed to be used to explore this subject. As such, employing inclusion and exclusion criteria during the systematic review helped to set the boundaries of the type of articles selected, time frame that the studies were published, and in regards to the research methodology used. The following inclusion and exclusion criteria were used.

1. Only studies that are peer reviewed are reviewed in this study.

2. Studies reviewed should have data, which has been collected empirically using survey, interview, observation or other form of collecting primary data.

3.Studies reviewed should follow the required research standards.

4. Only studies which were published after 2015 were reviewed in this study.

5. Only studies which considering queer identity and LGBTQ on social media or Weibo were included in this study.

One of the main reason for setting the time frame to studies that are not older than 2015 was to ensure that the studies that were used in this review were time conscious. This also helped to examine how social media influence on LGBTQs has changed with time. In addition to, it was important to ensure that the studies selected were focused on LGBTQ identity of the Chinese and not people from other parts of the world. The information selected also needed to consider the role that social media played during the selected period.

It is also imperative to note that PRISMA studies have been conducted to examine how social media affect the identity of LGBTQs in China. However, this study can be examined specifically how online communities positively influence the identity development of LGBTQ youths in contemporary China. While the inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to set limits regarding the studies that needed to be reviewed, no limits where set in regards to the type of social media that young LGBTQs in China use, how they use it, and the impact that this has on the development of their identity. This study carried out with the assumption that existing studies on how social media

influences the identity of young Chinese LGBTQs can be used to provide critical insight regarding three aspects: what is it like to be an LGBTQ in China, how LGBTQs in the country use social media such as Weibo, and whether social media positively influence Chinese LGBTQs people.

Selection of Studies

The studies were selected based on five stages, which as shown below:

1. Study identification from databases, reviews, and bibliographies

2. Title screening

3. Abstract screening

4. Review of the full study

5. In-depth review

An in-depth review of the studies was required to ensure that the studies, which were selected for this systematic review had all the information that make the study relevant to the research topic. Figure 1 provides the selection process that was used to select studies. In total, more than 1,500 studies were obtained through the different database searches. The studies were filtered based on their topics (step 2) resulting in 900 studies being rejected. Among the remaining 600 studies, 450 studies were rejected after the abstract of the studies were carefully reviewed (step 3). This resulted in 150 studies remaining. In step 4, the remaining studies were reviewed in details resulting in 135 studies being rejected. This resulted in only 15 studies remaining for the final review in step 5.

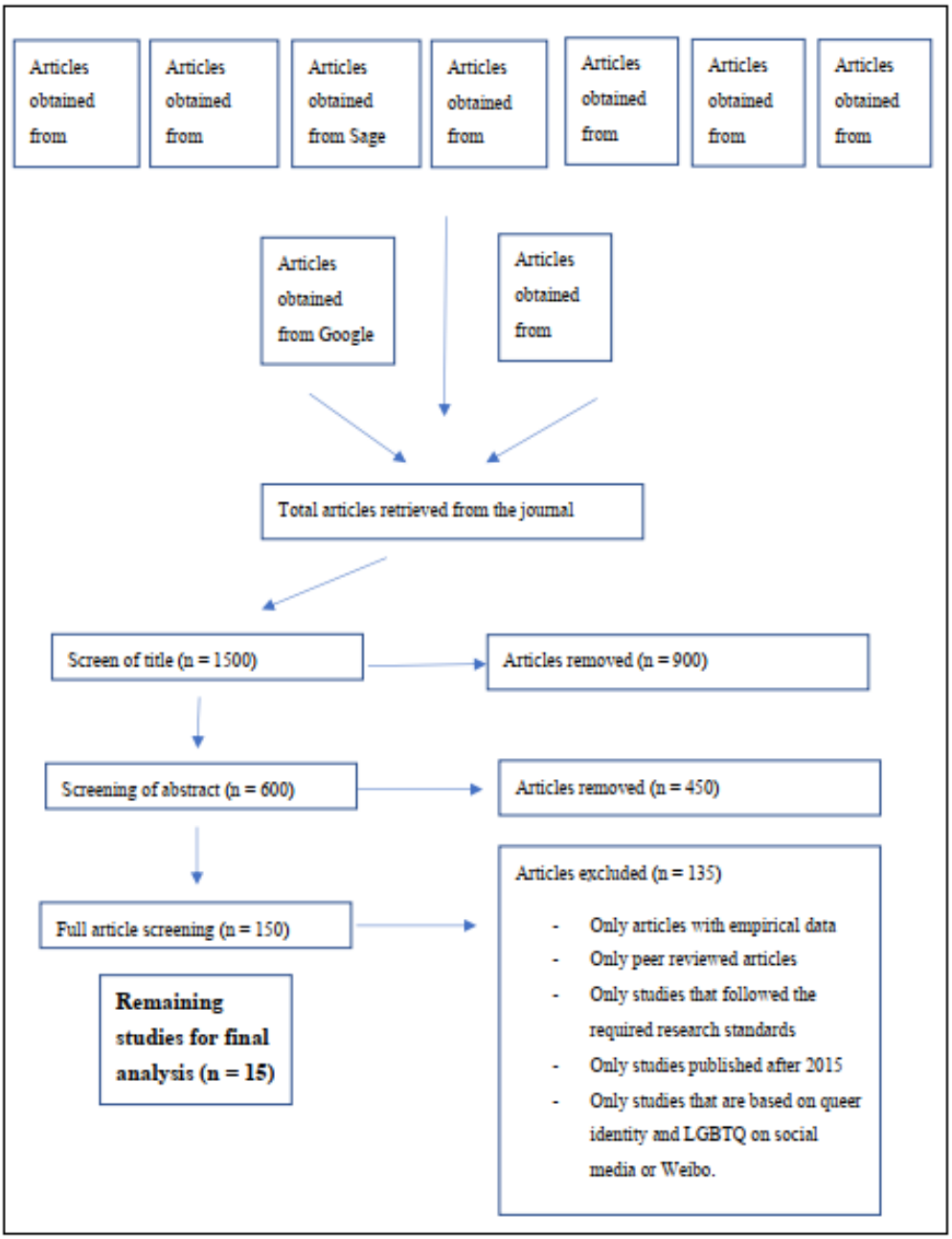

Figure 1: Search strategy for the study

Extraction and Analysis of Data

Two different tables were used to extract and analyze the data collected from the different studies. Table 1 was used to compare the characteristics of the studies. Based on this table

the characteristics that were used to extract the studies are research design, date published, location it was conducted, and findings of the study. Table 2 was used to analyze what the studies said about the influence of American Pop fun communities on social media to LGBTQ personality in China. Using different research key words and phrases, it was possible to identify a significant number of studies, which provided insights of how American Pop fun communities on social media affected LGBTQ personality in China.

Limitations of Methodology

There are many limitations of the research.

1. One of the major disadvantages of this paradigm is that the researcher is mostly relying on experience as knowledge's valid source. While a lot of important and basic concepts such as time, cause, and space are not necessary based on cause (Decrop, 2006).

2. Owens (2021) has also noted that systematic reviews are associated with the risk of bias, particularly selection bias, attrition bias, inadequate blinding, and selective outcome reporting. For instance, the researcher may choose to only select those studies that have published results, which are in line with his research objectives, significantly ignoring studies that do not meet the demands of his/her research objectives and aims.

3. Conclusions made in this study are based on the findings, and conclusions reached by other researchers. As a result, there is nothing new that the study is proposing in regard to the topic being studied. As such, systematic reviews play an insignificant role in expanding the literature on the topic that is being studied.

4. The study may be associated with all the errors that were associated with the studies that are being reviewed. It is difficult to identify these challenges, limitations, and issues when conducting a systematic review. Owens (2021) has also noted that given that a systematic review is a complex undertaking that requires reviewing a significant number of articles, the research only reviews sections of the articles and comes to a conclusion. This may also affect the quality of the review given that the articles are not reviewed completely.

Chapter 5 : Results

This section provides the results that were obtained from the studies that were reviewed. The main focus of this section is to dissect the selected studies to identify the study characteristics based on the published date, the focus of the study, the method employed, as well as the conclusion that were drawn by the researchers in the various studies.

Characteristics of the Studies

The results shows that a significant amount of literature already exists on how social media influences the young people LGBTQ identity in China. Another important characteristic that has been identified in this study is that most of the studies have been conducted by Chinese scholars. This may also signify the significance of LGBTQ identity among the scholars in the country. While this study required collecting data from studies that were published from 2015 to 2022, most of the studies that were used in this research were published between 2019 and 2022. Very few studies that have been used in this research were published in 2015. This may be an indication that the issue of LGBTQ identity on social media in China has just recently been regarded as an important research topic. To acquire more studies on this subject, the researcher needed to employ more keywords and key phrases that the ones that had been provided in the study. This is because the specified keywords failed to produce enough data to critically examine this research topic.

However, one may see from the articles selected that only one study considered Weibo as part of the study. Despite searching through various journal databases, there were no studies which were conducted based on Weibo. Identifying studies carried based on

Weibo was important given that it is one of the most used social media in China. The lack of studies on LGBTQs identity development and management on Weibo, however, affects this study given that it limits the amount of literature on how Chinese social media sites are influencing this issue.

Research Methodology of Selected Articles

From the results, some characteristics of the studies can be learned. The study characteristics of the 15 research studies that were selected for this study shows that while all the studies selected contained data, which was collected empirically, most of the studies employed qualitative research design, as seen in Table 1. Table 1 shows the 15 studied research studies, including their topics, author sand dates, research designs, databases, locations conducted and their findings. Seven (46.7%) studies used qualitative research design due to its ability to acquire data that is more informative from the research participants. Two (13.3%) studies highlighted that the main objective was to collect data based on the researchers' own opinions about social media use and LGBTQ identity. Another important characteristic that was identified in this study is that 10 of the researchers conducted their study in China. This may have perhaps proved to be an important aspect for the research studies given that the main research subjects were young Chinese LGBTQs people.

Table 1: Characteristics of the research studies explored

No	Research Study	Author and date	Research design	Database	Location conducted	Finding

1	Social media and social capital of LGB in Hong Kong	Chong et al., (2015)	Quantitative research design using structural equation modelling	Google Scholar	China, Hong Kong	The researchers found out that social media fan groups that support LGBT identity can help young LGBTQ and queer people to avoid issues such as mental health, and stigma in the society.
2	Research on the impact of LGBT culture in social media on Chinese LGBT community	Hu et al. (2022)	Qualitative research designed using interview	Google scholar	China	The impact of LGBT culture in social media on LGBT groups is less that was expected. However, the widespread of LGBT culture on social media will eventually have an effect on young people's social identity.
3	Performance, fantasy or narrative: LGBTQ + Asian American Identity through K-pop media and fandom	Kuo et al. (2020)	Qualitative research design based interview method	Sage Journals	America	The researchers found out that pop culture associated with American fan groups' online and K-pop function as sources that most Queer persons and LGBTQs identify themselves with.
4	A queer "socialist brotherhood" : the Guardian web series, boys' love fandom, and the Chinese state	Ng & Li (2020)	Qualitative research design using interview method	EBSCOHost	China	Findings obtained in this study shows that since the Chinese government started censorship of the "Guardian" young Chinese people have turned to social media fan groups that supports their Queer identities.
5	Chinese gay men pursuing online fame: erotic reputation and internet celebrity economies	Wang (2020)	Qualitative research design, involved interview method.	CORE	China	In this study, the researchers found out that online American fan communities on social media is transforming how gay Chinese men thoughts regarding online fame and their erotic reputation as internet celebrities.
6	What happens	Han et al. (2019)	Quantitative research	OpenDOAR	China	Findings obtained shows that LGBTQs with a long

	online stays online? Social media dependency, online support behaviour, and online effects for LGBT		design using online survey			history of using Weibo are likely to be less dependent on social media for their identity, require less support from social media, and a have an offline psychological wellbeing that is better.
7	Coming out in mainland China: A national survey of LGBTQ students	Wei & Liu (2017)	Quantitative research design using questionnaire	OpenDOAR	China	Results shows that social media fan communities helped a significant number of LGBTQ students to come out in mainland China regarding their queer identity.
8	A virtual gender asylum?	Chang, Ren & Yang (2016)	Qualitative design (in-depth interviews)	Social Science Research Network	China	Findings obtained shows that fan based communities on social media help Chinese female LGBTQs identify with their sexuality online in the Chinese confusion society.
9	Doing ethnography on social media: A methodological reflection on the study of online Groups in China	Wang & Liu (2021)	Qualitative research design (interview)	Proquest	China	Findings obtained shows that most LGBTQ and Queer young people in China were more likely to be active in their social media groups that offline.
10	Jack'd, double group, and Feizan.com, The impact of techno-practice on Chinese gay male experience	Zhou (2018)	Mixed method (online survey and online observation, and semi-structured interviews)	Education Resources Information Centre	China	The researcher found out that queer techno-practices such as queer groups on social media contribute to self-representation of Chinese gay male offline.
11	Rainbow parents and the familial model of	Wei & Yan (2021)	Qualitative (Interviews)	Google Scholar	China	The researchers found out that a significant number of Chinese parents use the activities of social media

	tongzhi (LGBT) activism in contemporary China					fan communities in the US to advocate for LGBTQ rights for their children.
12	Queering the rise of China	Wei (2021)	Qualitative (Online questionnaire)	OpenDOAR	China	Findings obtained shows that the activities of social media fan groups of other countries such as the US are driving the rise of LGBTQs in China.
13	Can social media participation enhance LGBTQ+ youth well-being?	Craig et al. (2021)	Quantitative (Online survey)	EBSCOHost	China	Findings obtained show that young people in China were more likely to employ social media for their identity benefits as compared to older youth.
14	Red is not the only colour of a rainbow.	Liu (2020)	Qualitative (interview method)	CORE	China	In this study, the researchers found out that young LGBTQs in China used social media fan groups to feel as part of the community.
15	Looking for interesting people: Chinese gay men exploration of relationship development on dating apps	Wu & Ward (2019)	Qualitative (in-depth interview)	Google Scholar	China	Findings shows that users of gay dating apps in China also uses social media to identify partners.

It is imperative to note that while all the studies employed either a quantitative or qualitative research design, the method of data collection that were employed by the selected studies also did not vary. Interviews (10 studies), online surveys (5 studies) emerged as the most dominant method of data collection that were employed in most of the studies that were reviewed in this study. Interviews were the main method of data

collection for most of the studies that employed qualitative research design, whereas interviews and online dominated the studies that used quantitative research design.

Interview may have been favored as a mode of collecting primary data in qualitative studies due to its ability to acquire more data from the research participants, studies which employed quantitative. In their study, for instance, Hu et al. (2002) needed to understand how the LGBTQ culture on social media is affecting the identity of Chinese LGBTQs in the society. He et al. (2022) found out that using interviews to collect data from heterosexual groups and LGBTQ groups helped them to acquire detailed insights from the research participants. Kuo et al. (2022) found out that interviews made it possible for them to acquire more details from the research participants given that the method allowed the participants to speak their minds and provide their opinions, which proved effective in examining the research subject.

When examining the impact of social media on the identity of LBGTQs, collecting data, which is mainly based on the research participant's opinions is very important since the researcher gains insights that are based on the research participant's opinions. While such opinions are significantly subjective, they proved effective in most of the studies. The use of quantitative research methods, such as online surveys, on the other hand, may be based on the researcher's need for a lot of data that can be quantified from the research population. This is evidenced by the large number of research participants that were included in most of the quantitative studies. For instance, Chong et al. (2015) used a sample of 233 Chinese LGBT individuals in Hong Kong to develop equation models that are structured, in order to prove their research hypotheses. On the other hand, Han et al.

(2019) used an online survey to collect data from approximately 1390 LGBTs that were recruited in China.

Based on these studies, acquiring a lot of data when using quantitative research methods is important since it helps minimize bias in the results, as well as increase the reliability and viability of the research findings. Han et al. (2019), for instance, noted that acquiring data from a larger population enabled them to effectively explain how social media mechanisms affected the offline lives of LGBTQs in China including their wellbeing in the society. Contrary to that, one study employed the mixed method as a form of data collection.

Table 2: Conclusions made from the selected studies

No	Research study	Direction used by the researcher	Conclusion made
1	Social media and social capital of LGB in Hong Kong	Researchers chose to consider how social media is used as a source of information exchange medium for LGBTQs	The researchers came to the conclusion that information posted by fan groups that supports on social media, which seems to support LGBTQs is considered to be significantly important in terms of supporting the identity of young people that engage with these fan groups' social media pages.

2	Research on the impact of LGBT culture in social media on Chinese LGBT community	The researchers chose to consider this topic from the LGBT cultures that are developed on social media such as BL Novels, CP culture, and television dramas and how they affect the identity of LGBTQs in China.	The researchers concluded that the various cultures on social media, which are largely associated with LGBTQs do not have significant impact on LGBTQs identity as expected. Despite that, the researchers also noted that these cultures will perhaps impact LGBTQs identity development in the future.
3	Performance, fantasy or narrative: LGBTQ + Asian American Identity through K-pop media and fandom	The researchers focused on how the lived experiences of LGBTQs, as well as their identity are affected by Asian American LGBTQ groups on social media.	The researchers came to the conclusion that LGBTQs are more likely to align their identity with pop culture groups that are developed by Americans on social media. The researchers also concluded that K-pop also plays an important role in terms of helping queer young Chinese develop their identity.
4	A queer “socialist brotherhood”: the	The researchers chose to consider how development	Based on the research studies, the researchers came

	Guardian web series, boys' love fandom, and the Chinese state	of social media pages for Chinese series such as the Guardian influences the identity of Chinese young LBGTQs on social media	to the conclusion that developing social media pages that support queer TV programs such as the "Guardian" have helped young Chinese people to turn to social media for support.
5	Chinese gay men pursuing online fame: erotic reputation and internet celebrity economies	In this study, the researchers chose to focus on gay men in China use social media content to improve their identity and even make themselves famous online.	Based on their findings, the researchers concluded that gay men in China look towards social media communities that are developed by American fans to develop their identity online and even their online fame.
6	What happens online stays online? Social media dependency, online support behaviour, and online effects for LGBT	In this study, the researchers chose to pursue how dependency on social media affects the offline activities and identities of LGBTQs in China	Based on their findings, the researchers found out that LGBTQs that spend a lot of time on social media such as Weibo do not depend on these media for their identity, as well as do not require support for psychological wellbeing.

7	Coming out in mainland China: A national survey of LGBTQ students	Based on the experiences of LGBTQ students in mainland China, the researchers chose to consider whether social media fan groups help these students to come out regarding their sexuality.	Based on the findings of their research, the researchers concluded that students look towards social media groups to help them develop their sexual identity in the community.
8	A virtual gender asylum?	In this study, the researchers chose to use the critical discourse framework to analyze how social media is used by queer young people as an asylum.	Conclusions made from this study shows that Chinese young LGBTQ women in particular uses social media as an asylum.
9	Doing ethnography on social media: A methodological reflection on the study of online Groups in China	In this study, the researchers chose to examine the engagement of young LGBTQs in China on social media as compared to offline activities.	The researchers came to the conclusion that most of the young LBGTQs in China are more likely to engage more on social media groups that support their course than offline activities.
10	Jack'd, double group, and Feizan.com, The impact of techno-	This study focused on how gay male in China are	Conclusion made from this study is that most Chinese gay male are mostly

	practice on Chinese gay male experience	affected by social media gay communities	influenced by queer techno-practices. These practices extend to their offline self-representation.
11	Rainbow parents and the familial model of tongzhi (LGBT) activism in contemporary China	In this study, the researchers examine how Chinese mothers use social media fan groups to develop their offline activist groups to support the rights of their queer children.	Conclusion from this study shows that social media fan groups that post content that supports LGBTQs are favored by the parents of LGBTQ children and are used to develop offline activist groups to support the rights of LGBTQ children.
12	Queering the rise of China	In this study, the researchers focused on examining how LGBTQ groups on social media are causing the rise of queer young people in the country.	Based on the research findings, the researcher concluded that the LGBTQ activities of other countries posted on social media are causing an increase of LGBTQs in China.
13	Can social media participation enhance LGBTQ+ youth well-being?	The researchers in this study focused on developing a Social Media Benefits Scale to examine how social media helps	Conclusion from this study shows that young LGBTQs in China use social media

		young Chinese LGbTQs to develop their identity.	because it helps them enhance their identity.
14	Red is not the only colour of a rainbow.	In this study, the researchers examined how social media help gay men respond different to their classification as “men who have sex with men”.	Conclusions from this study shows that, given that social media help LGBTQs in China to feel as part of the society, gay men are less concerned about being classified as men who have sex with men.
15	Looking for interesting people: Chinese gay men exploration of relationship development on dating apps	In this research, the researchers examined how social media activities of LGBTQs on different social media applications help young Chinese gay men to find their partners	Based on the research findings, the researchers concluded that gay men in China that find dates on dating applications are also likely to use social media to identify their partners.

Based on table 2, the conclusions that were made by the researchers of the selected studies vary significantly. In the first study, for instance, the researchers came to the conclusion that fan social media groups, which support LGBTQs play an important role in terms of supporting the identity of young LGBTQs in China. In this study, the researchers found out that most LGBTQs in China seem to engage more with social media fan groups that they believe support their course.

Zhou (2018), noted that the use of both interviews and questionnaires to collect data enabled him to collect data that is both objective and subjective in nature, thus making the data collected more relevant to the study. This is because while the data that was collected quantitatively was used to prove the research hypotheses, the data that was collected qualitatively was used to support the data that was collected quantitatively. Another important aspect to note about the study that used mixed methods is that its data was both statistical and textual. The studies that used quantitative methods only collected data that is statistical in nature, while studies that favored qualitative methods were only textual and based on research participants' opinions. Zhou's (2018) study incorporated both in its mixed method approach, which used three methods: online survey, online observation, and semi-structured interviews. Data obtained from the interviews was, therefore, used to justify the data that was obtained quantitatively using online surveys and online observations.

Apart from the research methods, it is evident from the study results that the researchers approached this subject from different perspectives. One of the studies, for instance, approached the topic by considering how LGBTQ young people's identities in Hong Kong are affected by social media fan groups and communities. Another researcher approached the topic by considering how the LGBTQ culture on social media affects the LGBTQ identity of Chinese young people. One of the studies considered the impact that K-pop media and fandom on social media influences the identity of LGBTQ identity of young Chinese people. Another study focused on how social brotherhood on social media, which is constructed by American pop music fans affects the identity of LGBTQ young Chinese people.

Conclusions that were made by each of the researchers based on their findings are provided in table 2. One of the aspects noted about the conclusions made from the studies is that they vary significantly. This may however be due to the fact that the researchers approached the research subject from different directions. Findings obtained from Chong et al. (2015) study, for instance, made the researchers to conclude that social media fan groups that support LGBT identify play an integral role in helping young LGBTQ people in China with their identity development, as well as with the ability to fight issues such as mental health and stigma in the society .

Based on table 2, the conclusions that were made by the researchers of the selected studies vary significantly. In the first study, for instance, the researchers came to the conclusion that fan social media groups, which support LGBTQs play an important role in terms of supporting the identity of young LGBTQs in China. In this study, the researchers found out that most LGBTQs in China seem to engage more with social media fan groups that they believe support their course. How social media activities of American fan groups affected the identity of young gay male in China particularly in terms of causing to seek online fame was also examined in another study. Contrary to that, there are studies, which examined how Chinese people use social media groups to develop activist groups' offline that help to fight for the rights of LGBTQ people in China.

In the second study, the researchers came to the realization that fan cultures on social media do not have a significant impact on the identity of LGBTQs as first expected. However, the researchers also noted that these cultures may start impacting the identity of LGBTQs young people in the future. Researchers in the third study noted that most

LGBTQs are likely to align themselves with pop culture groups that are developed by Americans on social media. The research also noted that K-pop has started becoming popular among the LGBTQs young people in China due to the amount of LGBTQ content that K-pop fan pages have started to post on their pages.

Considering China's ban on various LGBTQ and queer TV programs, the fourth study found out that fan pages on social media that support these programs (i.e. the "Guardian") were favored by LGBTQs. LGBTQs associate themselves with these fan pages mainly because they help them to enhance their personality. Social media was also identified as a media, which most gay men to find communities, which they can associate with. Most significantly, findings from one of the studies noted that most gay men were fond of fan social media pages that have been developed by American pop fans. Most of them have based their fame on them.

In the fifth study, the researchers found out that LGBTQs and particularly gay men in China identify social media as the most appropriate place for them to find their fame particularly among social groups that share similar interests with them. Contrary to that, findings obtained in the fifth study show that not all LGBTQs that spend significant amounts of time on social media do it for the purpose of developing their identity or to help them with psychological wellbeing. Based on findings obtained in the seventh study, however, most of the Chinese LGBTQ students that spend significant time on social media may be doing it purposely to develop their sexual identity in the community.

A similar argument can be made regarding the Chinese young LGBTQ women given that based on the eighth study, they tend to use social media as an asylum. The same

conclusion was made by the researchers in the ninth study, which denotes that most of the young LGBTQs in China are more likely to engage more on social media groups that support their course as compared to participating in offline activities. Similarly, researchers in the 13th study seems to have come to a similar conclusion, but this time in regards to young LGBTQs in China. However, when considering the conclusions made in the tenth study, the queer techno-practices that are performed on social media seems to influence most Chinese gay men. The researchers also noted that most of the practices were likely to extend to the Chinese gay men's offline-representations.

Based on the conclusion made in the 11th study, people in the community (i.e. parents of LGBTQs) also tend to use the content that has been posted on social media fan groups to develop offline activist groups that support the rights of their children. It also noted based on conclusions obtained in the 12th study that the experiences and identities of LGBTQs in China are largely influenced by the activities of other countries social media fan groups. Researchers in this study also found out that the activities of LGBTQs of social media fan groups on social media was the main reason for the increasing rate of LGBTQs in China.

According the conclusions made in the 14th study, Chinese gay men seems to have gained self-esteem as well as the confidence to accept themselves in the society. This is especially when considering that the researchers in this study found out that gay men were found to be not concerned with being classified as men who have sex with men. In addition to, findings from the 15th study led to the conclusion that social media has emerged as online tools for gay men to meet their partners.

Themes Extracted from the Studies

The themes are based on the research questions.

Experiences of LGBTQ Youth in China

Results obtained in this study provides different perspectives on what is it like to be LGBTQ in China. However, majority of the studies reveal that being an LGBTQ in China may not be considered in a positive light, which is arguably the reason why most queer young people prefer maintaining an online identity of presence. In their study, for instance, Chong et al. (2015) found out that, most young LGBTQs in China found social media to be an area where they can truly be themselves. Based on data, which was collected quantitatively, the researchers found out that, LGBTQs in China are more inclined towards social media fan groups, which tend to support their identity, as well as help them avoid issues such as mental health and stigma in the society. Findings obtained in this study shows that, while China may be a home to perhaps the highest LGBTQ population, LGBTQs continue to be victims of discrimination and violence.

These findings have been reinforced by Mavraj (2016) who believe that the Chinese LGBTQs continues to be victims of discrimination and violence not only from people in the society, but also from their families. Mavraj (2016) has also noted that in China, gaining access to social services and justice such as counselling, health care, and even legal aid can be significantly hard for LGBTQs. Social media, therefore, remain their main hope of establishing and maintaining their identity, as well as an environment where they can achieve some form of support. Findings obtained from Ng and Li (2020) study

has also supported this claim. Being an LGBTQ in China means not receiving the same privileges as heterosexual people (Ng and Li, 2020).

Based on the findings that were obtained from Han et al. (2019) study, it is evident that discrimination and violence acts towards LGBTQs is the reason why people that affiliate themselves with these sexual orientations heavily rely on social media applications such as Weibo to maintain their identity. While findings obtained from Han et al. (2019) study shows that LGBTQs that rely heavily on Weibo may be less dependent on these media for their identity and require less support from social media, they find it easy establish their true identity online as compared to offline given that social media help them maintain a psychological wellbeing that is better. Perhaps the most difficult challenge for young LBGTQs in China is announcing one's queer identity in the public. Basing their study on data that was collected quantitatively from Chinese students, for instance, Wei and Liu (2017) noted that most LGBTQ students in the country find it difficult to express themselves in public. The researchers found out that most of these students use social media as tools to express their true queer identity.

A similar argument can be made regarding Chinese LGBTQ women, who according to Chang, Ren and Yang (2016) have identified social media as an asylum. Chang et al. (2016) noted that the Chinese confusion society was significantly cruel towards female LGBTQs thus leaving most of the women with very little choice but to effectively express their identity through social media. In addition, it is evident from the findings of this systematic review that due their lack of confidence in the public, LGBTQs in China are more likely to be active online as compared to offline. This aspect was examined in details by Wang and Liu (2021) in a methodological reflection on the study of online

groups in China. In this study, the researchers noted that in China, most LGBTQs participate more in their social media groups that in offline activities.

Researchers were particularly concerned about the entertainment industry in China and how limited it is for LGBTQs. The Chinese government has, for years been censoring entertainment programs that present queer content such as the "Guardian" with the aim of perhaps discouraging the existence of queer people in the Chinese society. Based on Ng and Li's (2020) findings, this has resulted in most of the queers in China to identify other ways that they can access content that support their identity, which has always been social media applications.

Contrary to that, it is also evident from studies that being queer or an LGBTQ in China affects one's chances to gaining fame offline. Based on Wang (2020) study, for instance, gay men in China look towards social media, and particularly towards online American fan communities to identify ways that they gain fame online, as well as develop their erotic reputation as internet celebrities. There are a number of studies, which were not used in this systematic review, which support these findings. Kwon, Wu and Shardlow (2013), for instance, argue that the attitude towards gay and lesbians in Chinese communities is very negative. People with Christian believes are especially the one, who are likely to hold significantly negative attitude towards gay and lesbians, thus making it significantly difficult for queer people to maintain their queer identity in the Chinese society (Kwon et al., 2013)

Furthermore, Ning and Guo (2022) found out that, in China, those that idenitifed as lesbian and gay are faced with significant challenges that are associated with living in a

society that heteronormative. Ning and Guo (2022) argue that Chinese lesbians and gays are faced with the pressure to get married to people of the opposite sex, as well as the challenges of aligning themselves with the social values. These challenges make most of the queer and LGBTQs in China feel like they are not part of the community. Findings obtained from Liu's (2020) study particularly reinforced this argument by showing how social media help LGBTQs in China feel as part of a community. Wu and Ward (2019) also reinforced with their findings, which provided prof that Chinese gay men that mostly used dating applications also considered social media as one of the best places to find their partners.

The findings of these studies shows that being an LGBTQ in China is not something that is acceptable in the society. Critically, while research has shown that China is the country with the largest LGBTQs population in the world, findings obtained in the studies that have reviewed in this shows that most LGBTQs find it difficult to manage their identity in the real world. Social media, therefore, has emerged as an escape route, as well as world where most LGBTQs in China can be themselves.

Social Media and the Identity development of Chinese LGBTQ Youth

Based on the findings that were obtained from the 15 articles that were reviewed in this systematic review, it is evident that in China LGBTQs use social media applications in various ways. The findings in particular shows that a significant number of young Chinese LGBTQs tend to use social media to identity social fan groups, which support their identity, as well as provide them with mental health issues support. Chong et al. (2015), for instance, found out that most LGBTQs in China are more likely to engage

with social media fan groups from America, which are supportive of their identity. The researchers found out that affiliating themselves with social media fan groups from America was favored by most young Chinese LGBTQs due to the amount of information that is provided on these social media fan group pages that is helpful to their identity management. Based on data obtained in their study, Kuo et al. (2020) found that young Chinese LGBTQs are fond of the pop culture that most American fan groups associate with given that the pop culture does not discriminate people based on their sexual affiliation.

It is also evident from the findings obtained by studies that were reviewed that most of the LGBTQs in China use social media purposely to develop and maintain their queer identities. For instance, Wei and Liu (2017) found out that social media helps LGBTQs students in China to come out and openly express their sexuality. Similar findings were obtained in Chang et al. (2017), which noted that social media was particularly used by Chinese LGBTQ women to express their identities online. Because social media helps LGBTQs in China to develop and maintain their identity, one may also argue based on Wang and Liu (2021) study that social media provide LGBTQs with an environment that they can be more active. In addition, social media may also have a positive influence on how LGBTQs represent themselves online as compared to offline. This is particularly true when considering the findings that were obtained in Zhou's (2018) and Craig et al. (2021) studies. For instance, Craig et al. (2021) found out that most young Chinese LGBTQs were likely to use social media for identity benefits. The researchers found that young Chinese LGBTQs found it easy to express their identity on social media mainly because their identity was not disclosed in the real world.

Social media also seems to be used in China by LGBTQs to develop or join a culture, which suits their sexual affiliation and identity. Based on the findings obtained from Hu et al. (2022) study, for instance, most LGBTQs in China seem to use social media to identity groups which help promote the LGBTQ culture both online and offline. The researchers in particular found out that while the LGBTQ culture on social media is less than expected, it is something that is likely to develop in the future, thus having a significant impact on LGBTQs and the formation of their identity. Most LGBTQs in China are fond of the pop culture that is associated with American fan groups online, with the K-pop fan pages on social media also slowly becoming more important to LGBTQs in the country (Kuo et al., 2020). Based on the findings provided by these studies, most LGBTQs in China seem to associate themselves with the social media culture that is developed by both the American pop fan groups and K-pop fan groups due to the amount LGBTQ content that are posted on these pages. This help them effectively develop and manage their identities on social media.

Contrary to the development of culture, it is also evident that Chinese LGBTQs have identified social media as a place where they can consume queer media that the country's government continue to prohibit. Based on Ng and Li (2020) study findings, for instance, young Chinese queer and LGBTQs engage with programs such as the "Guardian" mostly on social media. Ng and Li (2020) found out that, with the Chinese government censoring these problems mainly to prevent the growth of LGBTQs population in the country, social media has remained the most appropriate media for LGBTQs to consume these media. The researchers noted that, with social media such as Facebook and Instagram allowing people to post almost all forms of information, it has been easier for LGBTQs to

watch factions of these queer films and TV shows that are posted online. Ng and Li (2020) also found out that the consumption of queer content has started taking in Weibo, even though the consumption is not as intensive as compared to Facebook and other western media.

Social media has also emerged as one of the most appropriate environments for LGBTQs to pursue online fame. Wang (2020), for instant, found that Chinese gay men seem to be using social media extensively to pursue their online fame. This aspect is, however, mainly influenced by the American online fan communities on social media, which publish queer content on their pages with the aim of gaining fame and becoming internet celebrities. Chinese gay men have, therefore, found the content of these social media sites to be particularly beneficial in their pursuit of online fame. Despite that, Han et al. (2019) noted that not all LGBTQs use social media to develop or maintain their identity. The researchers noted that this is true especially for LGBTQs with a history of using social media sites such as Weibo. This, however, may be due to the fact that, by using social media for a significantly long time, most LGBTQs with a history of using social media have managed to effectively develop their identity on these media.

A similar issue was noted with queer women and gay men in the country. Chang et al. (2016) found out that women in China identify social media as a virtual gender asylum. Chang et al. (2016) found out particularly for women, features such as information privacy, confidentiality, and the ability to share content with only a select number of individuals have proved to be particularly effective in terms helping them manage their identity. This study shows that LGBTQs and particularly Chinese gay men have identified social media as one of the most appropriate environments to identify their

partners. These were the findings of Wu and Ward's (2019) study, which was conducted to examine how gay Chinese men used social media to develop meaningful relationships with fellow gay men. The researchers found out that most of the gay men that used dating application to find their partners were also likely to use social media application such as Weibo for the same purpose.

The content posted on queer social media pages has also proved effective in terms of developing offline activism campaigns in Mainland China. Wei and Yan (2021) found out that even parents of LGBTQs that have accepted their LGBTQ children for who they are visit these social media sites to acquire useful information that they can use in campaigns to help the society accept LGBTQs for who they are. Wei and Yan (2021), however, found out that, while there is important information that can help fight against the discrimination of LGBTQs in the country, many people prefer using content posted on American and other countries queer social media pages. This is evident in Wei (2021) study, which found out that LGBTQs in China were more attracted to the activities of social media fan groups of other countries. Findings from Wei (2021) study also shows that activities conducted by fan groups of other countries on social media is the reason why there is a significant increase in LGBTQ population in China. This is because by following the activities of these social media fan groups, most LGBTQs in China, not only feel a part of the community, but also find it easy to engage with the content of these media group pages.

This study shows that social media play an important role in terms of helping LGBTQ students in China to come out and embrace their identity. This use of social media is evidenced by findings, which were obtained by Wei and Liu (2017) in a study, which was conducted to examine how social media helps LGBTQ students in mainland China to express their identity. The researchers noted that, with a significant number of LGBTQs in China experiencing discrimination and violence due to their sexual affiliations, it has become significantly difficult particularly for students to express themselves in their societies. Social media, therefore, has become a safe haven for most of the LGBTQ students in this countries.

Social Media's Positive Influence Chinese LGBTQ youth's Identity

A significant number of studies, which were reviewed shows that while social media can have a detrimental effect on LGBTQs people in China, these online socialization media can also positively influence these people. Findings obtained from the studies have shown that, most of the queer and LGBTQs in China find social media an environment, which they can both develop and maintain their identities (Wei & Liu, 2017; Chang et al., 2016; Wang & Liu, 2021; and Zhou, 2018). In Wei and Liu (2017) study, for instance, social media was found to have a positive impact on the identity development of LGBTQ students in China. This is evidenced by the fact that most of the research participants in the study identified social media as an environment that allowed them to express their identity.

Another way in which social media positively influence Chinese LGBTQs and queer people in China is through the development of a culture that these people can easily associate with. Kuo et al. (2020), for instance, found out that most LGBTQs in China are likely to associate themselves with the American pop fan groups in social media, as well as the Kpop fan groups due to the non-discrimination culture these groups tend to create on social media. Similar argument was made by Hu et al. (2022) in their study. Contrary to that, social media seems to provide LGBTQs in China with an environment to not only express themselves, but also gain fame. Based on the findings obtained from Wang (2020) study, this proves to be a positive influence of social media to gay Chinese men who find it significantly difficult to express themselves in the real world.

Another reason why social media should be viewed as socializing tools that positively influence LGBTQs people in China is because of how active these people are on these media. Wang and Liu (2021) particularly noted that most Chinese LGBTQs were more active on social media compare to the real world. The positive influence of social media on LGBTQs Chinese people also extend to the availability of information, which is used by these groups to develop offline campaigns. Based on Craig et al. (2021) and Liu (2020) studies, these media also seems to provide LGBTQs people with a significant identity benefits. In addition to, social media seems to have helped most LGBTQs people in China express their identity in the public, thus making the LGBTQ population in the country more noticeable.

Chapter 6 : Discussion

All the studies reviewed produced outcomes, which suggest that social media has a significantly positive influence on LGBTQs in China. This is evidenced by the fact that LGBTQs people in China use social media to conduct activities, which help them either develop or maintain their identity. Social media has emerged as a place for Chinese LGBTQs to not only create and develop their identity, but provide them with a sense of community. The ability to create their own identity, maintain, and even hide it from the real world allow LGBTQs in China to be free and interact with each other without the fear of being stigmatized.

As the theory of performance states that in a society, all individuals are required to put on a certain performance (Cherniss and Goleman, 1998), social media allows its users to put on a performance. Social media alleviates most of the reasons that prevent LGBTQs from disclosing their identity, such as negative emotions, stigmatizing attitude, and the need to maintain the perception of other people in the society (Talbot et al., 2020). Therefore, they are able to create an identity which influences their digital personhood. The formation of identity by being present online and interacting with others (Lesley and Clare, 2020) allows LGBTQ people to be themselves and empowers them (Talbot et al., 2020). LGBTQs are likely to develop and maintain their identity on social media due to the mechanisms that are provided in these media, which allow them to share their profiles with particular audiences (Talbot et al., 2020). Social media does not require LGBTQs to maintain multiple facets as in the real world.

Future studies should focus on how social media platforms in China impact the identity of LGBTQs helps to improve the lives and wellbeing of these people offline. This is because China has proved to be not only one of the countries with the largest population, but also a country with a significant number of social media applications such as Weibo, WeChat, and even TikTok. Examining how these social media applications affect the LGBTQs' identity in the country, therefore, can provided a clear indication of how far social media in the country has come in terms of promoting freedom of expression online. Future studies may consider aspects such as selection of audiences, joining of groups with similar affiliations, as well as how the ability to develop multiple profiles help LGBTQs maintain their identity on social media.

Limitations of this Review

Critically, while this systematic review has proved effective in examining how the identity of LGBTQs youths in contemporary China is influenced by social media, there are limitations. For instance, results from the 15 studies that were included in this review revealed several study variations, which significantly impacted their interpretations. Majority of the studies were qualitative and employed interviews, which was perhaps identified as the most significant method of data collection due to its ability to collect subjective data. None of the studies employed data collection methodology that involves observing the behavior of young Chinese LGBTQs people on social media. In the future, more studies, which examine this aspect should be included to better understand how social media influences the identity development and management of Chinese LGBTQs in these media.

In addition, given that some of the studies employed quantitative methods while others employed qualitative methods, this created problems in terms of how findings from the studies were interpreted in this systematic review. This is especially when considering that how social media influences the Chinese LGBTQs in China was examined on different aspects and scales. Apart from different research design, it is also imperative to note the existence of variation in the study location, measurements, analysis methods, and outcomes. While the variations in the analysis methods that were used in the study reflected the study designs that were used in the different studies, as well as the purpose of the studies, they made comparisons of the study findings significantly difficult.

Lastly, there were only 15 studies that fit the search criteria. This arguably added to the difficulty in terms of drawing the most appropriate conclusion, as well as establishing a generalization regarding the relationship between social media and LGBTQs identity development and management in China. In addition, one may argue that the diversity in the researcher's backgrounds working on this topic may have also affected the results of the studies. This is because researchers from other regions might consider the topic from a different angle, while Chinese researchers may have considered it from a different angle, thus affecting the findings of the studies.

Conclusion

This study shows that there is an overwhelming positive relationship exists between social media use and LGBTQs identity. Results obtained from the different studies have shown that LGBTQs in China seem to be more active on social media as compared to offline. They also tend to use social media differently. For instance, while some LGBTQs use social media to join or develop groups of people that share the same views, others use social media to acquire information, which they believe is important for their identity formation both online and offline. Other also use social media mainly because it provides them with the feeling of being part of a community, while others use it as a safe haven due to the identity benefits that it offers them.

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