

(Re)forming Collective Identity Through Slacktivism in Chinese LGBTQ+ Digital
Activism: The #IAmGay# Movement

Xing Huang

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

University of East Anglia
School of Politics, Philosophy, Language and Communication Studies

February 2023

This copy of the thesis has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognise that its copyright rests with the author and that use of any information derived therefrom must be in accordance with current UK Copyright Law. In addition, any quotation or extract must include full attribution.

Abstract

This thesis aims to critically engage with the slacktivist critique, a dismissive assessment of online political activity, through the lens of collective identity in the context of Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism. Through content analysis and digital ethnography, a mixed-method approach, it explores the case study of the #IAmGay# movement on Weibo. In doing so, this thesis makes two major contributions.

Firstly, it presents an overview of the debate surrounding slacktivism, comprehensively addressing its theoretical significance. The problematic slacktivist critique argues that minor forms of activism on social networking sites (SNSs) have zero impact on political causes and only serve to fulfil participants' ego, driving them away from participating in meaningful offline political activities (Morozov, 2009). This thesis proposes a new approach to understanding slacktivism by linking it with collective identity, a concept that has been developed in social movement studies to refer to a shared definition of 'we' amongst collective action participants (Melucci, 1989). It argues that slacktivism impacts movement and activist organisations as participants (re)form their collective identity through minor political actions on SNSs.

Secondly, from an empirical perspective, the thesis also bridges the gap between the debate of slacktivism and the concept of collective identity in western scholarship and practices of Chinese LGBTQ+ activism. China has a unique political environment where explicit and confrontational forms of LGBTQ+ activism are usually not allowed and often censored on SNSs. The environment creates specific opportunities and constraints for Chinese LGBTQ+ activism. Therefore, this thesis argues that under such circumstances, it is particularly important for Chinese LGBTQ+ individuals to participate in so-called slacktivism, as during the process they (re)form their collective identities and sustain their activism.

Access Condition and Agreement

Each deposit in UEA Digital Repository is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, and duplication or sale of all or part of any of the Data Collections is not permitted, except that material may be duplicated by you for your research use or for educational purposes in electronic or print form. You must obtain permission from the copyright holder, usually the author, for any other use. Exceptions only apply where a deposit may be explicitly provided under a stated licence, such as a Creative Commons licence or Open Government licence.

Electronic or print copies may not be offered, whether for sale or otherwise to anyone, unless explicitly stated under a Creative Commons or Open Government license. Unauthorised reproduction, editing or reformatting for resale purposes is explicitly prohibited (except where approved by the copyright holder themselves) and UEA reserves the right to take immediate 'take down' action on behalf of the copyright and/or rights holder if this Access condition of the UEA Digital Repository is breached. Any material in this database has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the material may be published without proper acknowledgement.

List of content

List of abbreviations	7
Acknowledgement	8
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	10
1.1 The #IAmGay# movement	12
1.2 Analytical framework and research methods	21
1.3 Contributions of this thesis	23
1.4 Structure of thesis	24
CHAPTER 2 DIGITAL ACTIVISM, SLACKTIVISM, AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY	26
2.1 Digital activism	29
2.1.1 The definition of digital activism	29
2.1.2 The role of technology in digital activism	31
2.1.3 The classification of digital activism	34
2.2 Slacktivism	37
2.2.1 The definition	37
2.2.2 Defending slacktivism	42
2.3 Collective identity	45
2.3.1 The definition	46
2.3.2 The analytical framework	50
2.3.3 Collective identity in digitalised collective action	52
2.3.4 Collective identity in Chinese studies	59
CHAPTER 3 LGBTQ+ DIGITAL ACTIVISM IN CHINA	62
3.1 The development of LGBTQ+ activism in China	65
3.1.1 The early history	65
3.1.2 The emergence of LGBTQ+ identities	67
3.1.3 The early stage, legislation, and HIV/AIDS activism	68

3.1.4 The digital era	71
3.2 The political and cultural opportunities for LGBTQ+ digital activism in China	73
3.2.1 Dissent spurred by censorship	74
3.2.2 The government's ambiguity	77
3.2.3 Increasing public acceptance on SNSs.....	79
3.3 LGBTQ+ digital activism in China and the slacktivist critique	80
CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGY	82
4.1 Case study	83
4.2 Research methods.....	85
4.2.1 Content analysis.....	89
4.2.2 Digital ethnographic observation	92
4.2.3 Interview	94
4.2.4 Limitations	96
4.3 Research ethics.....	99
4.3.1 Public or private?.....	99
4.3.2 Sensitive data and risk of harm	101
4.3.3 Anonymity	102
4.3.4 Informed consent	103
4.4 Positionality.....	104
CHAPTER 5 THE #IAMGAY# PROTEST: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS	107
5.1 Potential soft leaders	108
5.2 Keywords.....	109
5.2.1 A relatively high inclusion of gender and sexual identities	109
5.2.2 A wide range of potential antagonists.....	110
5.2.3 Common goals of LGBTQ+ activism.....	111
5.2.4 A limited call for action	112
5.2.5 A general positive tone	112
5.2.6 Two influential participants	116
5.3 Potential antagonists	118
5.3.1 Weibo.....	118
5.3.2 The society.....	119
5.3.3 The world.....	120

5.3.4 The state.....	120
5.3.5 Corporations	121
5.4 Conclusion.....	122
CHAPTER 6 THE #IAMGAY# PROTEST: QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS	124
6.1 The collective identity in the #IAmGay# protest	125
6.1.1 The inclusive ‘we’	125
6.1.2 The antagonists	138
6.1.3 The broad audience.....	149
6.2 Risk assessment.....	151
6.3 The online and the offline	157
6.4 Conclusion.....	160
CHAPTER 7 THE POST-PROTEST PERIOD OF #IAMGAY#: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS	163
7.1 Collective uses of #IAmGay#.....	164
7.2 Keywords.....	167
7.2.1 Gender and sexuality	168
7.2.2 Everyday social life	171
7.2.3 Oppressions and issues	174
7.3 Conclusion.....	176
CHAPTER 8 EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES AND THE IDAHOTB IN THE POST- PROTEST PERIOD OF #IAMGAY#	180
8.1 Everyday activities.....	181
8.1.1 The #IAmGay# super-topic community and social activities	183
8.1.2 Everyday activism	193
8.2 The IDAHOTB: 13th and 17th May 2018.....	198
8.3 Conclusion.....	200
CHAPTER 9 CONCLUSION	204

9.1 Framing collective identity in Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism	204
9.1.1 The ‘we’	205
9.1.2 The antagonist.....	206
9.1.3 The audience.....	208
9.2 Slacktivism as a necessity in Chinese LGBTQ+ activism.....	209
9.3 Collective identity (re)formation through slacktivism	210
9.4 The #IAmLes# protest.....	211
9.5 Other findings and suggestions for future research	213
Appendix	216
1. Tables.....	216
2. Semi-structured interview questions.....	237
3. Coding sheets	238
4. Participant information sheet.....	240
5. Consent form.....	244
Bibliography	247

List of abbreviations

AIDS:	Acquired immune deficiency syndrome
CCTV:	China Central Television
CFA:	China Film Administration
CNSA:	China Netcasting Services Association
CPC:	Communist Party of China
HIV:	Human immunodeficiency virus
ICT:	Information communication technology
IDAHOTB:	International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia
LGBTQ+:	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other marginalised gender and sexual identities
MSM:	Men who have sex with men
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PDCPC:	Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China
PRC:	People's Republic of China
SAPPRFT:	State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television
SNS:	Social networking site
UNDP:	United Nations Development Programme

Acknowledgement

This PhD thesis would not be completed without many people's help and support. First of all, I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr Ben Little and Dr Marina Prentoulis, who provided me with so much guidance on conducting the research and writing the thesis. Ben and Marina have shown me what it means to be an academic – it is not simply an occupation in the vacuum but life-long dedication and attempts to understand an often-problematic society. Ben, in particular, has been my mentor of life, constantly reminding me of self-care. I would also like to thank Dr Eitan Tzelgov who helped me with quantitative research methods and Dr Alex Williams who as my probational review examiner, gave me valuable suggestions on improving my research at an early stage.

I would like to thank my thesis examiners, Professor John Street and Dr Hongwei Bao, who gave me such constructive feedback on improving the thesis and suggestions for publishing my work. Since I first met John as one of his master's students, he has been a role model to many of us. Hongwei's work on Chinese queer communities has been a tremendous inspiration to me. I felt truly honoured to discuss my research with John and Hongwei.

I am also grateful to other staff in the department of Political, Social and International Studies (PSI), the School of Politics, Language and Communication Studies (PPL), at the University of East Anglia (UEA), including Dr Pierre Bocquillon, Dr Oliver Brooks, Professor Alan Finlayson, Dr Hazel Marsh, Dr Kate Mattocks, Dr Sally Broughton Micova, Dr Fiona Roxburgh, and Dr Helen Warner, as well as our beloved former colleague and friend Dr Susan Qingning Wang. Their support was crucial during my PhD life at UEA.

The Postgraduate Research (PGR) Student communities at PSI, PPL and the Faculty of Arts and Humanities (HUM) are my go-tos for collective love, mental health, mutual support, and social energy. I would like to send a massive thank-you to my fellow PSI PGRs: Moé Suzuki, Yixuan Duan, Matthew Gallagher, Kodili Chukwuma, Briony Hannell, Kasia Piwnicka, Arife Kose, Sabrina Ahmed, Prakash Rote, Shamisa Alnumani, Kerry Stranix, and Sonali Campion, PPL PGRs: Yanzhou Chen, Adam Edwards, Megan Pay, Anaïs Augé, Hao Mo, and Taochen Zhou, and HUM PGRs:

Yuxin Liu, Hua Ma, Leidong Wang, Khalid Alhumaidhi, Catriona Bide, Duncan Breeze, Brett Darling, Chris Kershaw, Jasmin Kirkbride, Wiam Miles, Karitas Palsdottir, Benjamin Pinsent, Hirohito Tsuji, and Emily Walker. I would also like to thank Ayane Hida and Elise Page who have done so much for the PGR communities as our beloved Student Union Postgraduate Officers. I would not be able to go through the pandemic and finish my PhD without peer support.

The UK-China Media and Cultural Studies Association has also been supporting me since I joined the community in 2018. I would like to thank all the committee members, including Dr Oscar Tianyang Zhou, Dr Yuxin Liu, Dr Zizheng Yu, Dr Ming Zhang, Dr Chi Zhang, Dr Zexu Guan, Dr Peter Po-Han Lee, Dr Wei Cui, Dr Shulin Gong, Bing Yang, Zheyu Shang, Kang Yan, Shiyi Zhang, Hongzhe Xiang, Xiaofei Yang, Shasha Zhao, Yixuan Zhang, Heyang Hu, Xinrui Liu, Su Li, Yufei Li, Angelina Wangyan Yang.

Although we have not seen each other in person for about three years now, but my family and my dearest friends in China have been my greatest emotional supporters throughout my PhD. I am who I am today largely because of them. By this thesis, I want to thank my parents, my brother, Qingqing Yang, Xian Yan, Shuang Wu, Liren Chen, Jiajia Qin, Xi Cheng, Xueqin Tan, for their unconditional love.

My partner, David Fung, has witnessed the development of my PhD entirely. He has not only supported me throughout the whole time but also contributed to this thesis as a proofreader and a translator. He constantly reminds me of the critical relationship between inequality and intersectionality in areas that I sometimes overlook and helps me understand the queer from a wider perspective. I am so grateful for his support, help, and love.

Lastly, I wrote this thesis for not just my PhD but the Chinese LGBTQ+ community. Everyone, who is speaking out and fighting for gender and sexual equality in China, played a part contributing to this thesis. They are brave, admirable, and inspirational. I would like to thank the Voice of Comrade, in particular, for not only their dedicated work in improving the community but also their help in recruiting interview participants for my research. I will always be in solidarity with Chinese LGBTQ+ activists and organisations, fighting for freedom and equality.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Findings from Change.org revealed that more than 110 million people worldwide have supported [activist] campaigns since the virus took hold of the world in January. In addition, 80 percent more petitions were launched, and in 10 countries the number of petitions created in the past seven months doubled compared to the same period in 2019. (Barber, 2020)

As the quote shows, the global COVID-19 pandemic ushered activism in increasing use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Because of lockdown, activists were isolated and dependent on social networking sites (SNSs) for social connections with other people who viewed and reacted to social issues in similar ways (Grant and Smith, 2021). They largely adapted their tactics to be digital (Pinckney and Rivers, 2020). For instance, following the death of George Floyd, the Black Lives Matter Movement in 2020 widely used SNSs to progress protests (J. Hu, 2020; Rosenblatt, 2020). In China, many netizens engaged in digital activism to support Dr Li Wenliang, a COVID-19 whistle-blower, and against the government's information control (X. Cao et al., 2021). On the other hand, anti-lockdown and anti-mask conservatives also widely used SNSs for their advocacy (Schradie, 2020).

Such an increasing use of SNSs for activism during the pandemic has prompted another wave of heated discussion about the effectiveness of digital activism. The slacktivist critique – which was popularised after the prosperity of SNSs around 2010 and argues that low-cost online political activities have zero impact and only serve to fulfil participants' ego (Morozov, 2009) – has made its way back into the public eye. While some people praise slacktivism and argue against the critique based on successful digital campaigns during the pandemic (e.g. Finnegan, 2020; Oxford, 2020; Sanjay, 2020), others have also found specific cases by which they argue for more caution towards slacktivism. For instance, the #BlackOutTuesday campaign launched a week after the death of George Floyd was criticised for being a typical example of slacktivism that did not bring any structural change and hindered the circulation of useful information (Aviles, 2020; S. Ho, 2020; Jennings, 2020).

The slacktivist critique has been studied from many perspectives. Studies have disproven its universal application, arguing that slacktivism can not only be effective but also induce subsequent political participation (see Christensen, 2011; Christensen, 2012; Y. Lee and Hsieh, 2013; Vie, 2014; Jones, 2015; Howard et al., 2016; Lane and Dal Cin, 2018; Kwak et al., 2018; Dennis, 2019). However, the fact that the critique has been used again since the COVID-19 pandemic shows that there is still doubt and scepticism about digital activism in the public. Meanwhile, most previous studies, as Dennis (2019) argues, rely on anecdotal case studies to show the impact of slacktivism. Their methodological approaches to explain the impact of slacktivism are flawed. There is still much about slacktivism that needs to be explained.

Regardless of the slacktivist critique, how does digital activism take effect? This has been one of the central questions in digital activism studies. Of course, there are various ways in which digital technologies enhance activism. It affords more innovative forms of action (Van Laer and Van Aelst, 2010; Q. Xiao, 2011a; Sivitanides and Shah, 2011; Treré, 2018; Milan and Barbosa, 2020), eliminates boundaries of time and space (Bennett, 2003a; Bennett, 2003b; Van Laer and Van Aelst, 2010; Theocharis et al., 2015; Cammaerts, 2015; Schradie, 2018), and empowers marginalised groups (Papacharissi, 2010; George and Leidner, 2018a; Ortiz et al., 2019; G. Yang, 2019), just to name a few.

One of the ways in which digital activism takes effect is to form collective identity between activists (Breindl, 2010). Collective identity refers to the concept that describes the process of forming a shared belief of ‘we’ between collective action participants (Melucci, 1989, 1995). It has been developed by a range of social movement scholars including Alberto Melucci, Verta Taylor, Nancy Whittier, Leila Rupp, David Snow, Scott Hunt, Robert Benford, etc. It is argued to be one of the central concepts in social movement studies, which plays important roles throughout the development of social movements (Polletta and Jasper, 2001). The journal of *Information, Communication & Society* has dedicated an entire special issue titled ‘Social Media and Protest Identities’¹ to discuss the formation of collective identity through SNSs. The special issue features the introduction article by Gerbaudo and

¹ <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rics20/18/8?nav=tocList>

Treré (2015), who argue that collective identities formed through SNSs are marked by ‘inclusivity, multiplicity and malleability’ (p. 868).

Therefore, I am intrigued by the idea of linking slacktivism with the concept of collective identity. This thesis, thus, aims to address two central research questions: *as SNSs afford collective identity formation, does it mean that slacktivism, i.e. online minor political activities, can facilitate collective identity formation as well? If so, how does slacktivism achieve this?*

1.1 The #IAmGay# movement

In order to answer the research questions, a case study – the #IAmGay#² (#我是同性恋#) movement on Weibo³ in mainland China – was carefully chosen. Before introducing the movement, it is necessary to clarify how I use gender and sexual identity terms in this thesis. The acronym ‘LGBTQ+’ and the phrase ‘gender and sexual minorities’ are used to refer to non-heterosexual identities, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and all other marginalised gender and sexual identities. I use ‘homosexual’ to generally refer to people who are attracted by people of their own gender. When ‘gay man’ and ‘lesbian’ are used, I emphasise both the gender and sexual identities of homosexual men and women. Importantly, when the word ‘gay’ is used alone (e.g. in ‘the Chinese gay culture’ in the next paragraph), I use it to only refer to ‘gay man’, not ‘homosexual’ or ‘queer’ as it may mean in some contexts. However, there is one exception in this thesis, which is the use of ‘gay’ in the hashtag. The precise translation of the Chinese hashtag #我是同性恋# should be #IAmHomosexual#, but when it was translated into English in news reports (e.g. Kuo, 2018b; Shepherd, 2018) and academic studies (e.g. Liao, 2019), people have used #IAmGay#. In this translation, ‘gay’ is used to mean ‘homosexual’. Since the translation has been commonly accepted already, I have decided to use it in this thesis. Meanwhile, it is also imperative to explain my use of ‘queer’. Rooted in queer theory, the term ‘queer’ is used as ‘the problematisation of the categorisation of gender and

² As there is no spacing between Chinese characters in writing, hashtag signs are used both in front and after a hashtag topic.

³ Weibo is one of the most popular SNSs in mainland China. It provides microblogging and social networking services (L. Zhang and Pentina, 2012).

sexual identities’ and as ‘massive transgression of all conventional categorisations and analyses’ (Stein and Plummer, 1994, p. 182). In other words, not only is ‘queer’ a term that includes all marginalised gender and sexual identities (Jagose, 1996), but also it deconstructs binary gender and sexual systems within which man and woman as well as heterosexuality and homosexuality are often seen as oppositional (Valocci, 2005). I use the term ‘queer’, therefore, when I emphasise deconstructed gender and sexual category boundaries. In addition, I also use indigenous Chinese terms, such as ‘comrdade’ and ‘lala’, in specific contexts, which I will explain at length in Chapter 3.

Self-identifying as a Chinese gay man, I have been paying attention to the progress of LGBTQ+ activism in China since my youth. My personal identity strongly motivates me to understand how LGBTQ+ activism is organised, performed, and effectively improving gender and sexual equality in the Chinese restrictive context. Drawing on my personal experience of living in China as a gay man and knowledge of the Chinese gay culture, especially the Chinese gay culture in the digital world, I aim to make sense of Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism from the perspective of collective identity. Because of the chosen case study, this thesis further addresses another research question: *how is collective identity formed in LGBTQ+ digital activism in China?*

What I call the #IAMGay# movement is a series of digital activism activities that all shared the use of the hashtag #IAMGay# on Weibo. It was launched by the #IAMGay# protest on the 13th April 2018 and consisted of at least one online protest, a virtual community, and various everyday digital activism practices. To understand the launch of the movement, one needs to firstly know the context of it. Weibo’s censorship of LGBTQ+ content in April 2018 was the primary cause of the movement. Weibo’s censorship was believed to be linked to another censorship guideline released in 2017 (Shepherd, 2018).

On the 30th June 2017, China Netcasting Services Association (CNSA) issued the General Rules for Reviewing Netcasting Content (the General Rules), aiming to regulate online video programs to ‘improve their quality and promote healthy development’ (CNSA, 2017). CNSA is an industrial union supervised by the former State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the People’s

Republic China (SAPPRFT)⁴. It consists of over 700 members of mainstream Chinese media organisations, including national and local television networks and radio stations (e.g. the China Central Television, Hunan Television, and Zhejiang Television), news agencies (e.g. the People's Daily), IT companies (e.g. Alibaba, Baidu, Tencent, and Sina), video service websites (e.g. Youku, iQiyi, and Bilibili), program production companies (e.g. China Film Group Corporation) and network technology companies (e.g. Huawei and ZTE). The association is empowered by its large membership coverage of Chinese media organisations and the members are obliged to obey the rules issued by the association. According to the General Rules, media organisations are required to review the content of online video programs before those programs are released to the public and there are ten categories of reviewing criteria that impose restrictions on the content. For example, content would not be allowed if it 'is not in line with current national conditions and social configuration', 'undermines the image of the country', or 'jeopardises national unity and social stability' (CNSA, 2017). The General Rules, therefore, were issued as detailed guidelines for online video content censorship and enforced upon almost every media organisation in China. It also states that any violation of it would result in serious punishment.

However, the censorship itself did not lead to a large discussion in China, possibly because it was not the first time that the government issued a censorial regulation and what they did was imposing similar criteria to those used before to another increasingly popular media form. Instead, one certain criterion invoked Chinese netizens' heated discussion. In the General Rules, under the category of 'obscene pornography and vulgar taste', homosexuality is regarded as one of the 'abnormal sexual relationships' together with incest, sexual perversion, sexual assault, sexual abuse, and sexual violence (CNSA, 2017). Although homosexuality had always been banned from mainstream media in China (Y. Wang et al., 2019a; K. Hu and Li, 2019), it was rather rare that the authorities gave such an order in writing that was

⁴ According to the First Session of the 13th National People's Congress in March 2018, SAPPRFT was replaced by the General Administration of Press and Publication, the National Radio and Television Administration, and the China Film Administration (People's Daily Online, 2018), which now supervise their respective areas as the names suggest. Since that, CNSA has been under the supervision of the National Radio and Television Administration (CNSA, n.d.).

shown directly to the public, as they would usually inform media organisations to do so in a more discreet way (Y. Wu et al., 2018). Regardless, many people were infuriated by the discriminatory categorisation. Led by Yinhe Li (see Figure 1.1 for Li's posts), one of the most well-known sociologists in China, people started to post on Weibo to condemn the categorisation, claiming that homosexuality had been removed from the mental illness list for over a decade and therefore should not have been seen as a type of abnormal sexual relationship.



Figure 1.1 Yinhe Li's three posts against the General Rules⁵

⁵ Li's first post was censored by Weibo. The second post reads 'There is no wrong love in the world. As long as it's love, it's not wrong. There is no wrong romantic partner and no wrong love. Love itself is a sound reason and a concrete piece of evidence for its existence. To say that some types of love are wrong is self-contradictory. Love comes unexpectedly, so there is no right or wrong, as you can't say the rain is a mistake, or the wind is a mistake, or ... (expand to read more).' The third post reads 'Why

Unfortunately, the discussion lasted for only a few weeks. It ended up with Li muted on Weibo for three months and nothing changed with the General Rules. This censorship guideline was eventually implemented as planned. During this incident, most people posted condemnation online individually. There were signs of collective action when people started to follow Li by speaking out, but they faded with the deletion of her posts and her being muted. Yet, politically, the General Rules were believed to be the main cause of Weibo deciding to launch their own censorial operation later (Shepherd, 2018), and socially, Chinese netizens were emotionally prepared for the later incident after the online discussion.

On the 13th April 2018, Weibo posted an announcement via its administrator account (see Figure 1.2 for the announcement), and by this announcement, Weibo initiated a three-month censorship operation. One of the main censorial targets was homosexual-themed content such as comics, images, fictions, and short videos (BBC, 2018). Meanwhile, they also stated in the announcement that they had already censored over 50 thousand posts and over 100 accounts on Weibo that seriously violated their censorial criteria.

do we have to protect minorities? There has been hostility amongst minorities since ancient times, such as fights between tribes. The reason for those fights can be as simple as that “they’re not from our tribe”. However, in the contemporary society, humans can’t live like that anymore, especially in a huge country like China with a 1.4-billion population. There must be differences between so many people. It’s absolutely not going to work if we just hate and eliminate people who are different from us. Han people toward other ethnic minorities ... (expand to read more).’

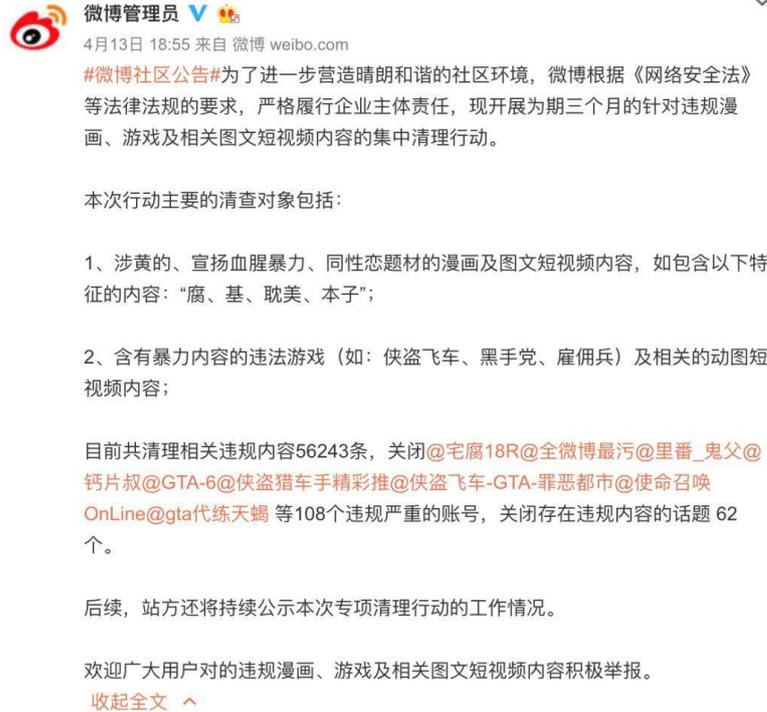


Figure 1.2 Sina Weibo’s announcement of censorship⁶

At 00:53 on the 14th April, the Voice of Comrade (同志之声), an LGBTQ+ charity organisation who runs one of the most popular LGBTQ+ information sharing accounts on Weibo, posted that they had to suspend their work on Weibo due to force majeure (see Figure 1.3 for the post). Despite the fact that the organisation did not specify what force there was, the followers believed that the suspension of the Voice of Comrade was directly caused by the censorial operation on Weibo, which was proved true later as the organisation returned to Weibo very shortly after the termination of the censorial operation.

⁶ The whole announcement reads ‘#WeiboCommunityAnnouncement# To further foster a harmonious community environment and required by the law and regulations including the Internet Security Law, Weibo is strictly fulfilling our responsibility as an enterprise and initiating a three-month cleansing operation of comics, games, and related images, texts, and short videos that violate the regulations. The main objectives of the cleansing operation include: 1. pornographic, violence-promoting, and homosexual-themed comical, image, textual, and short video content, including the following characteristics: fu, ji, danmei, and benzi; 2. illegal games that contain violent content (e.g. Grand Theft Auto, Mafia, and Mercenaries) and related content of gifs and short videos. So far, we have deleted 56,243 pieces of content that violated the regulations and shut down 108 accounts that seriously violated the regulations including @宅腐 18R @全微博最污 @里番_鬼父 @钙片叔 @GTA-6 @侠盗猎车手精彩推 @侠盗偷车-GTA-罪恶都市 @使命召唤 OnLine @gta 代练天蝎, and 62 hashtag topics holding content against the regulations. From now on, we will also continue to announce the working progress of the operation. We welcome and encourage users to report content of comics, games, and related images, texts, and short videos that violates our regulations.’



Figure 1.3 the Voice of Comrade’s announcement of work suspension⁷

To respond to the operation, a gay celebrity named Zhudingzhen (竹顶针), whose Weibo account has been now deleted, posted to encourage netizens to use the hashtag #IAmGay# to protest against Weibo (see Figure 1.4 for Zhudingzhen’s post). A few people started to post with the hashtag at the beginning, but on the 14th April, after the suspension of the Voice of Comrade, hundreds of thousands of people started to participate in the action.



⁷ The Voice of Comrade’s announcement reads that ‘due to the reason of force majeure, the Weibo editorial department of the Voice of Comrade is indefinitely suspended. During the suspension, we will no longer use the official Weibo account of the Voice of Comrade to update any comrade information. We would like to thank Sina Weibo for supporting and helping the Voice of Comrade for so many years and readers on Weibo who have followed the Voice of Comrade since 2009: your every comment, repost, and ‘like’ was speaking up for love. Wishes for a better future. The Weibo editorial department of the Voice of Gay, 14.04.2018.’

Figure 1.4 Zhudingzhen's post encouraging people to use the hashtag⁸

It was probably not a surprise to participants, but this protest started against censorship was censored. Not only were some participants' posts deleted, but the hashtag was also blocked (Kuo, 2018b). On the 14th, some participants noticed that although they could still post with the hashtag, they could no longer see any other post by searching the hashtag. This means that only people following each other could see themselves participating in the hashtag, and the virtual space where they could interact with others, even if they did not follow each other, was gone. Yet, participants were not discouraged and continued posting with the hashtag. By the time it was censored, the hashtag was viewed almost 300 million times (Shepherd, 2018).

Under the increasing pressure of the protest, on the 15th April, only two days after Weibo's announcement, the People's Daily, which serves as the official newspaper of the Communist Party of China (CPC), posted an article on Weibo titled *'Different Fireworks' can Bloom as the Same* (“不一样的烟火”，一样可以绽放) (see Figure 1.5 for the post). In the article, the Chinese government showed its support to sexual minorities and demanded that sexual minorities should be treated equally in China.



⁸ Zhudingzhen's post reads '#IAmGay# How about you?'

Figure 1.5 the article posted by the People’s Daily on Weibo⁹

Following this, on the 16th April, Weibo made another announcement via its administrative account, stating that they had decided to terminate the censorial operation targeting homosexual-themed content. Only two hours after that, the Voice of Comrade announced its return to Weibo and indicated that the hashtag #IAmGay#, which was initially created by the organisation seven years ago, had reached 500 million views and had become the most used hashtag about LGBTQ+ in China within 48 hours (see Figure 1.6 for the announcement). Meanwhile, the hashtag itself was unblocked by Weibo and participants were able to access it and freely interact with each other again.



Figure 1.6 the Voice of Comrade’s announcement of its return and the success of the movement¹⁰

⁹ The post reads that ‘People’s Daily Commentary: “*Different Fireworks*” Can Bloom as the Same. The set of textbooks named *Cherish Life: Sexual Health Education Reader for Primary School Students* was called “having the righteous views on the world, life, and values”. The textbooks says that there is more than one sexual orientation, and homosexuality and bisexuality are both normal, definitely not illnesses. Children’s sex education is not only important but also necessary. Let go of prejudice, tolerate other people, wish no harm upon any type of love, and everyone can live their true colours.’

¹⁰ The announcement reads ‘Announcement: #theVoiceofGayWeiboBacktoWork# Thanks to everyone who participated and spoke out. Everything which happened during the last 48 hours while the Voice was suspended proves that speaking out makes change possible. The Weibo editorial

The #IAmGay# movement, therefore, successfully pressured the Chinese government to make a statement of its support for sexual minorities and prevented the discriminatory censorship of homosexuality on one of the largest Chinese SNSs. Such success had never happened before in the history of LGBTQ+ activism in China.

The hashtag was not simply abandoned after the protest. While some participants continued to use it to perform digital activism on a daily basis, a virtual community based on the hashtag, the #IAmGay# super-topic community (我是同性恋超话社区), was created by the Voice of Comrade. LGBTQ+ users have been using this community for various social purposes, such as making friends, seeking romantic partners, and discussing LGBTQ+ related current affairs.

1.2 Analytical framework and research methods

Based on the case study, I adopted the theory of collective identity framing developed by Hunt et al. (1994) as the analytical framework. Combining framing theory in social movement studies and collective identity, Hunt et al. (1994) suggest that collective identity is framed by collective action participants, consisting of three ‘identity fields’. The identity fields are ‘categories of actors cluster[ed] around three socially constructed sets of identities’ (p. 186): *the ‘we’*, *the antagonist*, and *the audience*. Each of them can have various constituents that are recognised and imputed by collective action organisations and participants. To use this analytical framework, researchers examine what constituents there are in the ‘we’, the antagonist, and the audience, and how those constituents are framed by collective action organisations and participants. This analytical framework has been used in many empirical studies (e.g. Gamson,

department of @theVoiceofComrade restarts working from now on. It was all because of you during the last 48 hours: the hashtag topic #IAmGay#, which was launched by the Voice of Comrade 7 years ago, has been viewed over 500 million times, succeeding #SupportGayAgainstDiscrimination#, and has become the most viewed comrade hashtag topic on Weibo in the history of the Internet in China; during the last 48 hours, the People’s Daily, one of the top ten biggest newspapers in the world and the newspaper of the Party and the government, wrote an article to speak out for comrades; @WeiboAdministrator eventually fixed the wrong decision and will no longer categorise homosexuality as a cleansing target. All of the above will be remembered in history. With you, there is more strength to progress the public welfare of comrades! We will spare no effort to continue disseminating healthy, scientific, and insightful comrade information, making the public understand the group of comrades in more objective and scientific ways and eradicating discrimination. The Voice of Comrade will remain true to our original aspiration and continue to serve Chinese LGBT groups in various areas.’

1996; Gamson, 1997; Rao et al., 2003; Ergas, 2010; Guenther et al., 2013; J. Lu and Chan, 2016; Khazraee and Novak, 2018; Panjaitan and Janah, 2022) and has been proven to be useful to study the formation of collective identity.

It should be noted that I have considered using an overarching theory in sociology/philosophy to guide this research but have decided against it. For instance, the disciplinary society (Foucault, 2012) and the society of control (Deleuze, 1992) can be useful to interpret the relationship between LGBTQ+ activism and the state's control in China. The concepts of the information society (Webster, 2014; Garrett, 2006) and the network society (Castells, 2011; Van Dijk, 2020) can be used to discuss digital technologies' roles in organising activism. Theories of post-Marxism, post-modernism, and post-structuralism have also been widely used by theorists in social movement studies (Buechler, 1995; Agger, 1991), and of course, since I am studying LGBTQ+ activism, queer theory (Butler, 2011; Butler, 1988; de Lauretis, 1991; Jagose, 1996; Gamson, 2000) can also be helpful. However, to examine the process of collective identity, the subject matter that this research is interested in exploring, researchers usually closely explore interpersonal relationships on a micro level (Ergas, 2010; David and Bar-Tal, 2009; Koller, 2012). Although collective identity formation on a micro level can also reflect what is happening on meso and macro levels (ibid.), I decided to focus on the micro level and not apply an overarching theory in this research. In doing so, I can ensure that my research has a persistent objective throughout, that is, to reveal the relationship between slacktivism and collective identity especially in the context of Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism.

With the case study and analytical framework decided, I designed a process to conduct the research by using mixed methods. Firstly, I collected data consisting of posts and reposts containing #IAmGay# on Weibo from the launch of the #IAmGay# movement on the 13th April 2018 to the 30th April 2019, a period of slightly more than one year, for quantitative content analysis. The content analysis aims to provide a basic understanding of participants' use of the hashtag. Then, based on the idea of research triangulation (Denzin, 2015), I conducted digital ethnographical observation and interviews. I observed Weibo users' activities through the hashtag during the same period of the content analysis and interviewed 39 people who participated in the #IAmGay# movement on Weibo.

1.3 Contributions of this thesis

The contribution of this thesis is two-fold. Through this thesis, I engage with both digital activism studies and Chinese LGBTQ+ studies in original ways.

Firstly, I present an overview of the debate surrounding slacktivism, comprehensively addressing its significance. I argue that the slacktivist critique is problematic, as it does not provide a clear definition of slacktivism, ignores political and social contexts in which slacktivism occurs, and stands on the dichotomy between online and offline activism. My theoretical and methodological approaches are distinguished from most previous studies on slacktivism, which focus on visible and material outcomes of slacktivism and favour quantitative methods (e.g. Christensen, 2012; Breuer and Farooq, 2012; Waugh et al., 2013; Y. Lee and Hsieh, 2013; Kristofferson et al., 2014; Cook et al., 2014; Štětka and Mazák, 2014; Jones, 2015; Howard et al., 2016; Leyva, 2016; Kwak et al., 2018; Foster et al., 2019). By linking slacktivism with collective identity, I propose a new way to understand slacktivism and its impact, arguing that *slacktivism impacts collective action and activist organisations as participants (re)form their collective identities through minor political actions on SNSs*.

Secondly, I also aim to bridge the gap between the concept of collective identity and practices of Chinese LGBTQ+ activism. Chinese LGBTQ+ activism has been studied from many perspectives, such as cultural activism (Bao, 2018a, 2018b, 2020, 2021b, 2021c; Deklerck, 2017, 2019; Shaw and Zhang, 2018; W. Wei and Yan, 2021), political economy (Hildebrandt, 2011a, 2012, 2018; Hildebrandt and Chua, 2017), legislation (Chia, 2019; Parkin, 2018), and the empowerment through digital technologies (Y. Yang, 2019; Y. Wang et al., 2020), but not social movement studies. This is, of course, partially because China's restrictive political environment – where explicit and confrontational forms of LGBTQ+ activism are usually not allowed and often censored (Shaw and Zhang, 2018) – causes most LGBTQ+ individuals and organisations to adopt non-confrontational and soft approaches to performing activism (J. Cao and Guo, 2016), whereas social movement studies often examine confrontational collective action. China's political environment cultivates specific opportunities and constraints for Chinese LGBTQ+ activism. I argue that under such circumstances, *it is particularly important for Chinese LGBTQ+ individuals to*

participate in so-called slacktivism, as during the process they can (re)form their collective identity for future activism.

1.4 Structure of thesis

Following this introduction, the rest of this thesis is structured into nine chapters.

Chapter 2 will review previous academic literature pertaining to digital activism, slacktivism, and collective identity. It will problematise the slacktivist critique against digital activism and identify the gap in previous studies of slacktivism, which as I shall demonstrate, is the lack of an approach to examine the impact of slacktivism across case studies. The collective identity framing theory developed by Hunt et al. (1994) will be explained at length, followed by discussions about collective identity formation through SNSs and previous uses of the concept of collective identity in Chinese studies.

Chapter 3 will contextualise Chinese LGBTQ+ activism by mapping out the development of Chinese LGBTQ+ activism from ancient records of homosexual behaviours to the current digital era. Even though there have been periods of significant development, Chinese LGBTQ+ activism is under the tightening control of the state. Drawing on the concept of political opportunity structure in social movement studies, this chapter will also discuss the opportunities for contemporary LGBTQ+ digital activism in China. It will conclude on a brief discussion of the slacktivist critique's applicability in Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism.

Chapter 4 will focus on the methodology of this research. It will explain, firstly, why this research chose the #IAmGay# movement as the case study, secondly, after reviewing research methods that have been used in previous studies on slacktivism and Chinese digital activism, why this research adopted a mixed approach of quantitative content analysis and digital ethnographical observation and interview, and thirdly, how this research was conducted by using those methods. Research ethics and my positionality will also be discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 5 will be the content analysis of Weibo posts and reposts collected from the #IAmGay# protest. The aim of this chapter is to obtain some basic and overall understandings of the protest. It will discuss three categories of findings: firstly, potential soft leaders of the protest based on numbers of post and repost engagements,

secondly, discursive themes identified in keywords of the posts and reposts, and thirdly, potential antagonists in the protest.

Chapter 6 will be the qualitative analysis of the #IAmGay# protest based on observation and interview data. It will show how participants of the protest framed the collective identity that consisted of an inclusive ‘we’, Weibo as the primary antagonist, the state and the society as the secondary antagonists, and a broad audience.

Chapter 7 will be the content analysis of Weibo posts and reposts collected from the post-protest period of #IAmGay#. It will firstly look at the monthly numbers of posts and reposts to identify time periods during which subsequent collective action likely happened, and then, the keywords to identify some facts and themes in those posts and reposts. Like Chapter 5, the aim of this chapter is to gain some understandings of the use of the hashtag during this lengthy period.

Chapter 8 will be the qualitative analysis of the everyday use of #IAmGay# and a likely collective use of the hashtag around the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia (IDAHOTB) in the post-protest period of #IAmGay#. It will show that Chinese gay men socially dominated the #IAmGay# super-topic community, which reformed the collective identity to be dominated by gay men as well. Meanwhile, the hashtag was used for everyday activism, which served to maintain the momentum of the #IAmGay# protest. The primary contribution of the collective use of the hashtag around the IDAHOTB was also maintaining the momentum.

Chapter 9 will conclude the empirical and theoretical arguments of this thesis. It will show two likely ways of collective identity (re)formation in Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism, that slacktivism is a necessary process in LGBTQ+ activism in China, and that slacktivism has indeed the capacity to (re)form collective identity. Some other findings in the research will also be discussed, with suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2 Digital activism, slacktivism, and collective identity

Since the 1990s, digital technologies – including both personal electronic devices such as smart phones, tablets, and computers and SNSs such as Facebook, Twitter, and Weibo – have been rapidly popularised. The political use of such technologies has been discovered, and continuously celebrated and criticised. Indeed, after several seemingly successful digitalised campaigns and social movements (e.g. the Arab Spring, the #Metoo movement, and the #BlackLivesMatter movement) and shocking crises centralising digital politics (e.g. Edward Snowden’s leak of the United States’ surveillance programs, the scandal involved with Facebook and Cambridge Analytica, and the epidemic of disinformation), mixed and polarised voices are often seen in the public. However, regardless of diverse opinions in the public, the general attitude amongst scholars towards the political use of digital technologies tends to be increasingly cautious. In order to discuss digital activism and slacktivism in relation to collective identity, I shall first navigate through those voices and identify an analytical position before diving into the review of the academic literature.

On the one hand, digital optimists, who are sometimes also called digital utopians, see the enormous political potential of the Internet based on its capabilities of providing fast and low-cost access to information and bringing people together by lifting geographical boundaries (Papacharissi, 2002), imagining that a liberal revolution is deemed to be brought by the Internet. For instance, as Webster (2014) observes, in the early 1990s, many commentators saw the Internet as the ‘information superhighway’ that enabled extraordinarily efficient communication and would undeniably lead to economic and political transformations. Wellman et al. (2001) find that the use of the Internet is positively associated with users’ political participation in both online and offline forms and predict a similar result for future research. From a journalist perspective, Gillmor (2006) argues that by using the Internet, citizen journalism can destruct traditional media monopolies’ control over news production and dissemination. Meanwhile, Natale and Ballatore (2014) discover that the 5-Star Movement in Italy claimed that a digital democracy would overrule the traditional political establishment that tightly associates with traditional media. Those are a few examples of the digital optimistic discourse, which to some extent show possibilities

– not inevitabilities – of digital technologies and a high expectation of an ‘appropriate’ political use of them. Undoubtedly, digital optimism attracts harsh criticism. Surely, to understand digital optimism, one shall not read it as ‘predictions for future developments, but [...] as narratives that offer orientation on uncertainties and conflicts shaping current societal communication’ (Dickel and Schrape, 2017, p. 48).

On the other hand, digital pessimists or digital dystopians fear that digital technologies are controlling people in ways which people cannot even understand (Howcroft and Fitzgerald, 1998). For instance, as the awareness and knowledge of digital technologies rapidly increase in the public during the recent decade, an ongoing discussion of digital surveillance can be often found in the digital pessimist discourse. Particularly, the ‘Orwellian nightmare’ originated from George Orwell’s book *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), which sketches a state under constant political surveillance and persecution, is often referenced to describe the contemporary society under the influence of digital surveillance technologies (Diglin, 2014). China’s Social Credit System can be an example of such political surveillance. As many studies attempt to argue, through datafication, the Social Credit System implemented by the Chinese government gains control over Chinese citizens, businesses, and social organisations (Creemers, 2018; C. S. Lee, 2019; Y. Chen and Cheung, 2017; Hoffman, 2017; Liang et al., 2018; Kostka, 2019), which also means that digitally mediated political participation can be monitored, directed, and altered. Meanwhile, Zuboff (2019) argues that the society has come to an age of surveillance capitalism and digital surveillance has an ‘instrumentarian power’ that understands, predicts, and modifies human behaviours for the benefit of capitalists. In this way, humans are controlled by capitalists and the capitalist society, rather than an Orwellian state in a more direct political way. In contrast to the digital optimistic discourse, the digital pessimistic discourse strongly suggests that people are disempowered by digital technologies, left as subjects of manipulation.

Both digital optimistic and pessimistic discourses, however, are more or less skewed towards technological determinism (Howcroft and Fitzgerald, 1998), emphasising the impact of digital technologies on social changes while disregarding humans’ agency and their societal circumstances, despite that their primary social function may be not about predicting the future but reflecting hopes and fears of

uncertainties in the contemporary society (Fisher and Wright, 2001; Dickel and Schrape, 2017). Where and how those technologies are used may vary and contribute in different ways towards social changes. The application of similar surveillance technologies, for example, is different between in China and in the United Kingdom due to different political systems and needs, which produces different local political and societal sceneries. Similarly, how the public reacts to the application of such technologies may vary as well. In the United Kingdom, the public shows a concern about digital surveillance and tends to escape from the ubiquitous datafication (Dencik and Cable, 2017), whereas in China, there is a surprisingly high level of public endorsement of the Social Credit System across social groups, because many Chinese citizens perceive it to be benefit-generating and honesty-promoting (Kostka, 2019).

Therefore, to study the political use of digital technologies, specifically digital activism in this case, the fact that the roles of technology, activists and their contexts are all essential and equally significant should be understood and acknowledged. In other words, digital activism today is the consequence of interaction between technology, people, and society. Meanwhile, it is insignificant to be either optimistic or pessimistic about the prospect of digital activism. What is important is its meaning to people and society today.

What political opportunities and approaches do digital technologies provide with activists? How are those opportunities and approaches provided? Who are the activists? What action is taken? How is action taken? To address what social and political issues? Those are questions, yet perhaps not the only questions, for researchers who study digital activism to answer.

Hence, this chapter will examine previous digital activism studies, synthesise their arguments and findings, and identify the theoretical gap that this thesis aims to fill. In short, I will explore 1) main theories on digital activism and the role of technology, especially SNSs, in digital activism, 2) the definition of the term slacktivism as one of the most prevalent critiques of digital activism and why such a critique is problematic, and 3) the concept of collective identity in new social movement theories and its relation to digital activism and slacktivism.

As I will demonstrate, most studies on slacktivism examine minor online political activities' impact on external changes and participants' willingness to

continuously participate, overlooking the context of slacktivism that can sometimes makes slacktivism more meaningful, e.g. the political environment in China where offline activism can be difficult to be realised, and internal changes within social movement and activist organisations. Collective identity, thus, is a useful analytical lens through which researchers can examine internal changes within social movement and activist organisations in their given contexts.

2.1 Digital activism

2.1.1 The definition of digital activism

To understand digital activism, essentially one needs to firstly understand the meaning of ‘activism’. In the Cambridge Dictionary, the definition of activism is ‘the use of direct and noticeable action to achieve a result, usually a political or social one’ (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). Though simple as it is, this definition shows some essence of activism. It assigns human agency to activism by specifying an orientation of action taken and indicates the objective attribute of activism to be political and social. On the other hand, scholars’ definitions of activism vary greatly. It can be extremely simple or complicated. For instance, George and Leidner (2019) conclude from the many studies of activism that the definition of it can be as simple as ‘[t]aking action to create social change’ (p. 4). Svirsky (2010), on the contrary, refers to it as:

involving local instigations of new series of elements intersecting the actual, generating new collective enunciations, experimentations and investigations, which erode good and common sense and cause structures to swing away from their sedimented identities. (p. 163)

Although these two definitions look very different, both of them provide at least one more insight that activism is about bringing changes to the societal status quo, one which the definition in the Cambridge Dictionary does not provide. Undoubtedly, changes and activism are inseparable, whether changes are achieved through activism or not.

This thesis draws on the definition of activism composed by Hands (2011), who, from a more practical perspective, defines activism as a configuration of three

concepts: dissent, resistance, and rebellion. This definition is helpful to understand types and levels of action taken in activism. Dissent, the first level, can be understood as expressions of disagreement or dissatisfaction to individuals, institutions, or injustice circumstances. It is simply a claim without any further action entailed, which often ends up with a compromise under situations of broader issues. However, dissent may generate participants' shared interests and solidarity. Resistance, then, means a more active series of actions that refuse to consent and comply, for example, not taking orders from authorities or breaking regulations and laws while being aware of the consequence. Force may be used to advance causes in resistance. Lastly, rebellion is action that makes further efforts in influencing others' beliefs to achieve a complete transformation of current circumstances. It is not isolated. In other words, it must take place in a collective and cooperative manner, including both dissent and resistance. In order to make a clearer explanation, Hands (2011) also uses three statements to exemplify dissent, resistance and rebellion as the following:

Dissent: I dissent from the party line on issue X, but for the sake of party unity I will not vote against this policy; or I dissent from the view that such and such a person ought to be excluded from society, but given that it is the law I will agree not to have dealing with it. (p. 4)

Resistance: [n]ot only do I not believe in the war, but also I will refuse to pay my taxes until it's over. (p. 5)

Rebellion: not only do I not believe in the war, protest against the war and refuse to pay my taxes, but also I recognise the profound inequity of the system that supports it, caused it and profits from it, and will do all I can to organise against it and act to bring about a different system. (p. 5)

It should be noted that although Hands' (2011) definition of activism is a configuration of those three concepts, it does not suggest that all forms of activism are necessarily made up of all of them. Rather, activism can take the form of any one of them and the higher level subsumes the lower one(s).

Therefore, fundamentally, activism is concerned with political action of different levels of activeness taken by humans and aiming to achieve social and political changes, whether discursive or physical. In addition, a social movement, as

‘a network of informal interaction between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organisations, engaged in political or cultural conflict on the basis of a shared collective identity’ (Diani, 1992, p. 13), is subsumed within and often at the centre of the spectrum of activism (George and Leidner, 2019).

Digital activism, therefore, can be understood as digitally mediated activism, namely, all kinds of political action taking place in the digital world to address real-life social and political issues, ranging from expressing one’s political dissent to resisting a political matter, and to transforming a political system.

2.1.2 The role of technology in digital activism

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, digital technologies are essential to digital activism. To understand the role of digital technologies thus becomes one of the main tasks in the study of digital activism. The evaluation of the role of digital technologies in digital activism should find the balance between the optimistic and pessimistic views. That is, while digital technologies, mostly SNSs nowadays, afford political opportunities, they also limit substantial collective action.

Firstly, SNSs can amplify traditional offline activism by increasing the efficiency of communication and building new communication channels. On the one hand, SNSs not only lower the cost of communication but also break down the barricades of space and time in the process of activists’ communication (Bennett, 2003a; Bennett, 2003b; Van Laer and Van Aelst, 2010; Theocharis et al., 2015; Cammaerts, 2015; Schradie, 2018). This can be found evident in the prevalent use of SNSs in various examples of transnational social movements (Bennett, 2003a; Bennett, 2003b; Cammaerts, 2015), such as the Arab Spring in which the use of SNSs helped to disseminate democratic ideas across national borders in North Africa and the Middle East (Howard et al., 2011; Howard and Hussain, 2013). More efficient communication means that the organisation of political events can be improved as well, although how SNSs shape and reflect the organisation of collective action is in fact more complex than simply improving the efficiency (Segeber and Bennett, 2011). On the other hand, marginalised groups who did not have much space in traditional mainstream media are able to communicate with each other and the rest of society via SNSs in order to participate in politics and advance their political causes (Papacharissi, 2010;

George and Leidner, 2018a; Ortiz et al., 2019). Studies have shown that marginalised groups, such as those of gender (e.g. Vivienne, 2011; Baer, 2016; Williams, 2016; Hou, 2020), sexuality (e.g. Vie, 2014; Bao, 2018a; Liao, 2019; Y. Yang, 2019; Y. Wang et al., 2020; Schmitz et al., 2020) and race (e.g. G. Yang, 2016; Williams, 2016; Ray et al., 2017), are empowered by SNSs to perform activism in varying degrees. Moreover, SNSs can be used for various old and new forms of activism, including but not limited to donations, online petitions, online meetings, email bombings, sit-ins, demonstrations, hacktivism and so forth (Van Laer and Van Aelst, 2010).

Secondly, many studies have demonstrated the mobilisation role of SNSs. Here, ‘mobilisation’ means the process ‘by which a collective actor gathers and organises its resources for the pursuit of a shared objective against the resistance of groups opposing that objective’ (Melucci, 1996, p. 289). Essentially, it is argued that SNSs can mobilise participation in political collective action. As ‘an alternative structure alongside mainstream media and established political and civil society organisations’ (Enjolras et al., 2013, p. 904), SNSs can reach and mobilise a less politically involved population (Enjolras et al., 2013; Anduiza et al., 2014), e.g. young people (Hirzalla et al., 2011; Yamamoto et al., 2015). People can be emotionally mobilised via SNSs by either forming bonds with each other within collective action (Gerbaudo, 2012; Breuer et al., 2015) or by feeling sympathetic towards activists and their political causes outside of collective action (Eltantawy and Wiest, 2011; Howard and Hussain, 2013). Furthermore, Gerbaudo (2012) conceptualises SNSs’ role of mobilisation as ‘choreography’ in collective action, as they ‘revolve to a great extent precisely around acts of choreographing: the mediated “scene-setting” and “scripting” of people’s physical assembling in public space’ (p. 40) in decentralised social networks of activists. This conceptualisation recognises the significance of space in collective action, both online and offline, which has been often overlooked while discussing the mobilisation role of SNSs.

However, SNSs may also limit digital activism. As Bennett and Segerberg (2012) argue, in contrast with collective action, *connective action* can be seen as another organisational logic of digitally networked political action, in which most action takes the form of personalised expression shared through SNSs, and participants are connected in loose social networks, rather than strongly coordinated and managed

by movement organisations. Consequentially, Bennett and Segerberg (2012) argue that connective action is decentralised. Rather than a strong organisation that takes the leadership of collective action, individuals often become soft leaders in connective action (Gerbaudo, 2012).

As Bennett and Segerber (2012) continue to show, despite that those networks in connective action are flexible, and therefore, can achieve rapid adjustment of action to reflect changing political goals and cross the boundaries of space and time, they can be fragile, unstable, and irrational. Issues, such as low commitment, incapability of sophisticated strategies, and anger overflowing, can occur in connective action. It is because, essentially, SNSs have changed the way of communication that constitutes a salient part of organisational structure of activism. However, it should be noted that connective action does not necessarily lead to issues in organisation and a failure of sustaining activism. It is a new form of organisation that brings new opportunities and challenges. In fact, Bennett and Segerberg (2012) also acknowledge that real-life examples are often more complex, combining both collective action and connective action.

In addition, another vital way in which SNSs limit digital activism is when they are weaponised by opponents for oppressive purposes (Morozov, 2011; Rød and Weidmann, 2015; Tucker et al., 2017; Greijdanus et al., 2020). SNSs are not ‘new’ anymore, as opponents have also gained knowledge of digital activism and are aware of what activists are capable of arming with the Internet (Van Laer and Van Aelst, 2010). This can be seen particularly evident in authoritarian regimes. For instance, in the Arab Spring, several national governments censored political activities online (Howard et al., 2011; Howard and Hussain, 2013) and ‘state bureaucracies learn[ed] censorship strategies from each other’ (Howard and Hussain, 2013, p. 11). In China, not only is a ‘Great Firewall’ – ‘a filtering system that blocks websites on domestic Internet connections’ (MacKinnon, 2011, p. 32) – built so that it is increasingly difficult for Chinese activists to obtain information from the outside of the border and to interact with international support, but also ‘the party-state has cultivated an approach that combines repressive policing with gentler methods of social management’, which ‘has evolved in response to changing forms of Internet activism’

(G. Yang, 2014, p. 110) (also see Bamman et al., 2012). In such cases, SNSs are also playing a role of oppression, which can be rather powerful sometimes.

To sum up, digital technologies, specifically SNSs, play multiple roles in digital activism, as an amplifier, a mobiliser, and a limiter. It is worth noting, however, that they often play multiple roles simultaneously, rather than one at a time. Researchers, therefore, need to pay more attention to the interplay between those roles, i.e. challenges within opportunities or opportunities induced by challenges, when the real-life situation gets more complex.

2.1.3 The classification of digital activism

There are various online activities that can be regarded as digital activism. Rather than being studied as a whole, practices of digital activism are often classified into different groups. This is mainly because, although they can all be seen as digital activism, those practices sometimes can generate profoundly different dynamics in terms of motivation, commitment, interpersonal relationship, strategy, and outcome. For instance, changing profile pictures on SNSs to support a political cause may involve little effort, very basic skills and almost no risk, whereas hacktivism generally requires much more effort and highly professional computational skills and may lead to greater danger.

Scholars have developed different classifications of digital activism. Vegh (2013) classifies digital activism into two groups, the Internet-enhanced and the Internet-based, depending on whether digital activism is linked to offline activism. The Internet-enhanced practices focus on using the technology to achieve traditional offline activism more efficiently. Specifically, the Internet-enhanced practices aim to increase the public awareness by supplying information that mainstream media do not cover or misrepresent, advocate political pursuits, mobilise more participation, or organise activities for a faster and easier realisation of offline activism. In this way, digital activism does not change the traditional structure of activism. In contrast to the Internet-enhanced practices, the Internet-based practices do not serve offline activism and are entirely structured online. However, as Vegh's (2013) classification was formulated before the rise of SNSs, the Internet-based practices refer particularly to hacktivism, 'the combination of hacking techniques with political activism' (P. A.

Taylor, 2005, p. 626). What Vegh (2013) did not foresee is that with the rise of SNSs, some traditional social movement forms, such as protests and occupations, can also nowadays happen on SNSs. Hashtag activism, for instance, refers to ‘large numbers of postings appear[ing] on social media under a common hashtagged word, phrase or sentence with a social or political claim’ (G. Yang, 2016, p. 13), and it can also be entirely Internet-based. Therefore, according to Vegh’s (2013) classification, the Internet-based activism practices should include not only hacktivism but also virtual collective action. Although this classification of digital activism is still valid, the boundary between the Internet-enhanced and the Internet-based practices based on their relationship with offline activism is no longer clear. As illustrated, since traditional forms of offline activism can be carried out online as well, digital activism practices such as increasing awareness, advocating viewpoints, mobilising participation and organising activities can no longer just serve to achieve offline activism but also online activism. This calls for a newer approach to classify digital activism practices.

Another approach to classify digital activism is based on the evaluation of the hierarchy of different online political practices. In addition to whether online political practices are enhancing offline activism or only structured in the digital world, the proposition that there is a hierarchy of political participation (Marsh, 1977; Milbrath and Goel, 1977; Ekman and Amnå, 2012; Pacheco and Owen, 2015) can be applied to online political practices as well (Van Laer and Van Aelst, 2010; George and Leidner, 2018b, 2019). Specifically, Van Laer and Van Aelst (2010) focus on the cost of those practices and argue that there are low-threshold practices, such as online money donation, online petitions and online legal demonstrations, and high-threshold practices, such as online transnational demonstrations, more radical forms of online protests and hacktivism. Building on the cost threshold model, George and Leidner (2018b, 2019) suggest that the impact factor of online political practices should be included as well. Hence, they propose the three categories of low, medium and high impact and cost levels – digital spectator practices (slacktivism, metavoicing¹¹ and

¹¹ Metavoicing refers to ‘engaging in ongoing online knowledge conversation by reacting online to others’ presence, profiles, content, and activities’ and ‘adding metaknowledge to the content that is already online’ (Majchrzak, et al., 2013, p. 41).

assertion), digital transitional practices (political consumerism, digital petitions, botivism¹² and e-funding), and digital gladiatorial practices (data activism, exposure and hacktivism).

The classification of digital activism practices, according to their relationship to offline activism, cost thresholds and potential impact, can be to some extent useful for digital activism researchers to grasp basic characteristics of those practices. However, ranking the cost thresholds and potential impact may only be meaningful when the comparison is made between those practices in general. This is mainly because, first of all, the cost of performing political practices involves both the effort required and the risk entailed (McAdam, 1986), and while the effort required for each type of online practices may be consistent, the risk may be not. The same action can lead to different levels of risk, both low and high, in different contexts. For instance, posts online that criticise or disapprove the power of the government are mostly allowed in a democratic regime, whereas in an authoritarian regime, they are likely to result in either mild or serious punishment – censorship, prohibition of SNSs use or arrestment – depending on the degree of the criticism or disapproval and the regime’s stance and policy on the control of online public opinions. In other words, what scholars have regarded as low-risk online political practices are not universally low-risk, and they are only relatively less risky compared to other ones within one political system. Similarly, the potential impact of the same online political practice is not consistent across all political systems. In fact, the potential impact of the same online political practice can even vary to a seemingly large degree within one political system. For instance, both #IceBucketChallenge and #Metoo are seen as successful examples of hashtag activism originating in the United States, and their impacts are greatly different and incomparable. #IceBucketChallenge was successful in raising public awareness of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis and increasing donations (Pressgrove et al., 2018), whereas #Metoo promoted women’s self-awareness and subjectivity against sexual violence on a global scale (Y. Hu et al., 2020). The hierarchical classification model of digital activism practices, therefore, should be used as a reference that indicates a general understanding of degrees of the cost and impact of those practices,

¹² Botivism refers to the activist use of online bots for calling volunteers to action (Savage et al., 2016).

but does not necessarily suggest a universal hierarchy between them cross-contextually.

Noticeably, slacktivism is always at the bottom of such a hierarchy, considered to be the least-cost and least-impact digital activism practice that has the least direct relationship with offline political activities. In the next section of this chapter, I will review the current academic discussion surrounding this particular practice, in which many scholars reveal that slacktivism seems not as meaningless as the term originally suggests.

2.2 Slacktivism

2.2.1 The definition

Slacktivism, which was originally coined to shorten ‘slacker activism’ to describe ‘bottom up activities by young people to affect society on a small personal scale’ in a positive way (Christensen, 2011), has become one of the most prevalently used terms to criticise digital activism. It is defined as, in a short and neutral version, low-cost political activities on SNSs that aim to raise awareness and produce social and political changes (Rotman et al., 2011). Examples include showing support online by clicking ‘like’ and reposting, changing profile pictures to display one’s political stance, signing online petitions, and hashtag activism in some cases. People who participate in slacktivism are, therefore, referred to as slacktivists.

The critical use of the term was popularised in public from the late 2000s to the early 2010s by media and politics commentators and bloggers. Morozov (2009) defines slacktivism in an extremely negative way in the article titled *The Brave New World of Slacktivism* in *Foreign Policy*, stating that:

‘[s]lacktivism’ is an apt term to describe feel-good online activism that has zero political or social impact. It gives those who participate in ‘slacktivist’ campaigns an illusion of having a meaningful impact on the world without demanding anything more than joining a Facebook group. [...] “Slacktivism” is the ideal type of activism for a lazy generation: why bother with sit-ins and the risk of arrest, police brutality, or torture if one can be as loud campaigning in the virtual space?

Gladwell (2010) compares traditional on-street social movements and low-cost forms of digital activism in the article, *Small change: Why the revolution will not be tweeted* in *The New Yorker*. Although the term is not directly used, Gladwell (2010) argues that:

[digital activism] is simply a form of organising which favours the weak-tie connections that give us access to information over the strong-tie connections that help us persevere in the face of danger. It shifts our energies from organisations that promote strategic and disciplined activity and toward those which promote resilience and adaptability. It makes it easier for activists to express themselves, and harder for that expression to have any impact.

Then, in the article *Clicktivism is ruining leftist activism* in *The Guardian*, White (2010) criticises clicktivism, a possible subset of slacktivism, for its commercial characteristic:

[t]he trouble is that this model of activism uncritically embraces the ideology of marketing. It accepts that the tactics of advertising and market research used to sell toilet paper can also build social movements. This manifests itself in an inordinate faith in the power of metrics to quantify success. Thus, everything digital activists do is meticulously monitored and analysed. The obsession with tracking clicks turns digital activism into clicktivism.

White's (2010) criticism also corresponds to part of Morozov's (2009) opinion that:

[g]iven the media's fixation on all things digital — from blogging to social networking to Twitter — every click of your mouse is almost guaranteed to receive immediate media attention, as long as it's geared towards the noble causes. That media attention doesn't always translate into campaign effectiveness is only of secondary importance.

Essentially, as Christensen (2012) concludes, the public concern about slacktivism involves three main allegations:

1. slacktivists are disconnected with the formal political sphere, believing that the political system is by no means able to function properly;

2. as their eagerness of political participation has been fulfilled by online participation, slacktivists have no intention to engage in offline political activities;
3. and due to the lack of political competence, slacktivists cannot effectively influence political decision making.

Combining those three allegations, the slacktivist critique argues that slacktivism touches a political or social issue in a highly superficial way, is not impactful, and harms offline activism that is believed to make a real difference.

There are also a few academic studies that are more or less consistent with this serious public accusation of slacktivism. For instance, Cook et al. (2014) argue that while there are an increasing number of fake profiles automating inauthentic narratives on Twitter, slacktivists often fail to distinguish them from genuine political sentiment because they are ‘either ignorant, naïve or lazy towards large samples of non-genuine twitter support’ (p. 65). Kristofferson et al. (2014) find that an initial public token display supporting a political or social cause may decrease one’s willingness to participate in subsequent action. Lewis et al. (2014) show that SNSs can create an illusion of activism amongst participants without solid contributions, such as activist recruitment and donations, being made.

The case of *Kony 2012* is often used to exemplify slacktivism. In March 2012, a non-profit organisation called Invisible Children released a video aiming to increase the awareness of the atrocity of Joseph Kony, a warlord in Uganda (Kligler-Vilenchik and Thorson, 2016). The video quickly attracted hundreds of millions of views and Invisible Children raised over 32 million dollars (Sanders, 2014). However, enormous criticism against the video and the organisation followed, concentrating on the appropriate use of the money donated, the oversimplification of the situation, and the ‘white saviour’ role that the video and the organisation played (Kligler-Vilenchik and Thorson, 2016; Sanders, 2014; Cauterucci, 2016). Those activities across SNSs in which millions of young adults liked and shared the video are seen as ‘textbook slacktivism’ by many in the public (Cauterucci, 2016; Kligler-Vilenchik and Thorson, 2016), because people considered that the low-cost online action was taken by those young adults without a comprehensive understanding of the background and most of them did not participate in any subsequent offline collective action. However, there

are also some arguments that do not agree with simply defining those activities as slacktivism. For instance, van Engelhardt and Jansz (2014) argue that by watching and sharing the Kony 2012 video, people mitigated ‘moral responsibility towards the suffering other’ (p. 480), and the campaign was successful in raising a considerable sum of donation and increasing public attention of suffering in Africa. Thus, it is arbitrary to say that all minor political activities online are not impactful.

Therefore, I argue that the slacktivist critique is problematic in at least three aspects. Firstly, it does not specify what activities are regarded as slacktivism, i.e. ‘low-cost’ online political activities. Of course, many may think that clicking ‘like’, posting and reposting something on SNSs, and signing an online petition require little skill and physical effort, and therefore, can be seen as low-cost, whereas hacktivism is the opposite extreme, i.e. high-cost. Yet, there are still many other types of digital action that fall in between the two extremes, e.g. political consumerism and online donation. The cost of those types of action varies contextually, and therefore, it is difficult to make a conclusion regarding whether they are slacktivism or not. Such an ambiguous use of ‘low-cost’ in the slacktivist critique has led scholars to use the term slacktivism to refer to different types of action. While most scholars (e.g. Christensen, 2011; Christensen, 2012; Y. Lee and Hsieh, 2013; Vie, 2014; Jones, 2015; Lane and Dal Cin, 2018; Kwak et al., 2018; George and Leidner, 2018b; George and Leidner, 2019) use it to exclusively talk about individual and low-threshold political activities on SNSs, such as clicking ‘like’, posting, reposting, and changing profile pictures, a few others (e.g. Howard et al., 2016; Dennis, 2019) use it to also refer to the political use of SNSs by politicians and activist organisations, which is often long-term.

Meanwhile, as I have explained before, the cost of political activities is concerned with not only required skills and effort but also risk (McAdam, 1986). Those seemingly low-cost political activities are not necessarily low-risk. This links to the second problematic aspect of the slacktivist critique that it ignores the context in which slacktivism happens. Importantly, it takes a western centric perspective to criticise digital activism and assumes the criticism’s universal application. Yet, it may be only applicable in liberal and democratic political environments. In authoritarian regimes and other contexts where activism is controlled, prohibited, and prosecuted, forms of digital activism – no matter whether they require much effort and professional

skills or not – can entail varying levels of risk. The impact of digital activism in those contexts may also differ greatly from in liberal and democratic environments.

Nevertheless, it seems that the term slacktivism has now been used broadly to refer to all minor political activities online. The definition of slacktivism has become expandable and so has the slacktivist critique. The cost of online political activities is often not evaluated with the consideration of their context before they are seen as slacktivism and considered to fit the slacktivist critique. Therefore, instead of ‘low-cost’, ‘low-threshold’ may be a more suitable word to describe those online political activities that are currently referred to as slacktivism.

Lastly, the slacktivist critique treats offline activism as always more effective than online activism and implies a dichotomy between offline and online activism, which fails to recognise the likelihood that online activism may make impact in different ways from offline activism does and the fact that online and offline activism are often intertwined. Studies have shown many different types of impact of online activism. Just to name a few, it can mobilise different groups of people to participate in activism (Kopacheva, 2021; Oser et al., 2013; Schuster, 2013), rapidly shape public opinions (Q. Xiao, 2011b; Stokes and Atkins-Sayre, 2018; Hafeez, 2021), and put bottom-up pressure on opponents to react (Hassid, 2012; Faris and Meier, 2012; Brimacombe et al., 2018). Moreover, studies have also shown that, in most cases of contemporary activism, there is no distinct boundary between online and offline activism. In other words, forms of both online and offline activism often converge. For instance, Harlow and Harp (2012) show many activists use SNSs to mobilise support both online and offline and they treat online and offline activism equally. Milošević-Dorđević and Žeželj (2017) argue that online and offline activism are not independently constructed and, nowadays, activism is commonly ‘hybrid’, consisting of both forms. Greijdanus et al. (2020) review empirical studies about the relationship between online and offline activism and conclude that there is no evidence supporting the dichotomy between offline and online activism, because they have been shown as positively correlated and intertwined.

2.2.2 Defending slacktivism

Therefore, the slacktivist critique has been criticised by many scholars since its emergence. Yet, most scholars have been focusing on the impact of slacktivism and the relationship between online and offline activism. The cost and context of slacktivism have not been critically engaged yet. Regardless, those scholars reject the slacktivist critique's universal application by arguing that there are many situations where slacktivism has impact on political or social causes and leads to subsequent political participation.

Christensen (2011) argues that on the one hand, though many online campaigns did not seemingly achieve their proposed political goals, it is certainly premature to call all political participation online ineffective – some online campaigns are not even necessarily supposed to reach proposed goals, because they are parts of ongoing activism both online and offline. On the other hand, as Christensen (2011) continues to argue, there is no evidence that slacktivism is replacing offline activism, suggesting that slacktivism has a link with offline activism, despite the fact that the link can be weak sometimes. In most situations, slacktivism can at least raise awareness, which constitutes an important part of the mobilisation process. What's more, Christensen (2011) also calls for further studies to better assess the impact of digital activism on political decision making.

Following this call, more studies have been done to explore the impact of slacktivism. Some scholars focus on the impact of slacktivism on social and political causes, while some others focus on the impact of slacktivism on subsequent political participation. Meanwhile, there are also some of them who combine both types of impact.

For instance, Howard et al. (2016) examine the use of SNSs by a political candidate and citizens, arguing that slacktivism can sustain the democratic communication between political figures and their supporters, opponents and bystanders by generating a large quantity of opinion exchanges online. From a psychological perspective, Y. Lee and Hsieh (2013) conduct an experiment by exposing individuals to slacktivism and suggest that slacktivists often participate in subsequent impactful activities that are related to the issues to which have contributed already, as they intend to maintain their moral balance and consistency. Jones (2015)

argues that sharing a video online for a social or political cause, a typical form of slacktivism, can indicate participants' motivation to help the cause, which is also their motivation to follow the progress. Such motivation can induce real-life political action, such as money donation that will have material impact on concerned issues. This argument is similar to Lane and Dal Cin's (2018) research finding, which suggests that sharing political content in public on SNSs is positively associated with slacktivists' willingness to volunteer behaviours offline. However, Jones' (2015) study emphasises that the strength of ties between participants and cultural differences can influence the impact of slacktivism, whereas Lane and Dal Cin's research (2018) underlines the role of individuals' previous social and political usage of SNSs. Kwak et al. (2018) collect panel survey data during the U.S. presidential election in 2016 and find that political expressions on SNSs improve users' understanding of the political use of SNSs, which positively influence their involvement in offline political activities. Vie (2014), through analysing political memes online such as changing profile pictures to a unified form, argues that small political acts on SNSs can create a supportive environment and raise awareness of urgent issues, which are likely to lead to further action.

Those scholars have evidently demonstrated that slacktivism is meaningful in advancing political and social causes and inducing subsequent political action, solidly disproving the slacktivist critique's universal application. However, they commonly focus on the visible and material outcomes of specific case studies, disregarding the fact that slacktivism as part of a bigger picture of digital activism can have its own organisational significance: the role that slacktivism plays in the organisation of collective activity in either/both online or/and offline activism. By revealing the impact of slacktivism on the progress of collective action, one may utterly reject the slacktivist critique, rather than disproving its application to specific circumstances. This is because while visible and material outcomes of slacktivism can be observed rather easily, they always vary from case to case. Therefore, instead of examining the varying visible and material outcomes of slacktivism, one may look at its use in organising activism, which is an essential part of any activist activity.

Amongst various scholars, Dennis (2019) has contributed to this organisational use of slacktivism, arguing that slacktivism plays an important role in 'the continuum of participation'. Rather than regarding online political participation as one of the

outcomes of slacktivism, Dennis (2019) shows that slacktivist participation itself can be seen as the process during which everyday digital activism is organised. Subsequent political participation driven by slacktivism is the continuity of this organisational process. Through studying the use of Facebook and Twitter by 38 Degrees, a British non-profit activist organisation, Dennis finds that the members of the organisation consume alternative information on Facebook and Twitter that mainstream media outlets do not provide, in order to sustain their own public and private discussions. Meanwhile, the leaders of the organisation use Facebook and Twitter to better listen to and respond to the members, in order to organise their political agendas. Even though these behaviours are low-threshold online political activities that fit the definition of slacktivism, they significantly contribute to the meaningful organisational process on an everyday basis. As a result, a unified collective with articulated political agendas forms.

Although Dennis (2019) sees that slacktivism's role in 'the continuum of participation' in everyday activism, especially the political use of SNSs for private and public discussions based on the consumption of alternative information, can be observed out of well-established activist organisations, it should be highlighted that the role that slacktivism plays is more likely to be observed in well-established activist organisations where activist leaders use SNSs to better manage the organisations. While digital activism nowadays is often decentralised and fragmented, becoming connective action rather than collective action (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012), it is increasingly difficult to locate 'the continuum of participation' in loosely organised slacktivism. For instance, in some of the most common slacktivist behaviours, such as clicking 'like', reposting and changing profile pictures to a unified form, there is often no central organisation with which slacktivists identify. The usefulness of 'the continuum of participation' framework for those connective slacktivist behaviours is, therefore, decreased. However, this does not mean that Dennis' (2019) argument is invalid – it is in fact a much more powerful approach that defends slacktivism by assessing its use as an organisational process of digital activism than those previous methods that focus on outcomes of slacktivism. Rather, this is to raise a question: considering its organisational use, is there another way in which slacktivism can be

defended, disregarding whether or not it is in tightly organised collective action or loosely organised connective action?

To answer this question, I draw on new social movement theories. Specifically, as one of the key concepts in new social movement theories, collective identity can be used to further examine the organisational use of slacktivism. Slacktivism can be seen as the process during which slacktivists form or reform their collective identities as part of their activism construction. The (re)formation of collective identity is an invisible and non-material outcome of slacktivism.

2.3 Collective identity

In this section, in order to link slacktivism to collective identity, I will firstly explore the definition of collective identity in new social movement theories and emphasise the fluidity of it. The fluidity of collective identity suggests that collective identity is not a constant, but rather, a negotiable process changing along with the progress of collective action (Melucci, 1995). When assessing the outcome of collective action, regardless of visible and material successes, collective identity can be examined to reflect the inner change and achievement – collective identity (re)formation between participants – in collective action.

Then, how can researchers explore collective identity? In this thesis, I draw on the analytical framework of collective identity framing developed by Hunt et al. (1994), which suggests that to examine collective identity, researchers are to explore the ‘we’, the antagonist, and the audience framed by activist collectives.

In particular, the examination of collective identity can also be applied to digitalised collective action. Through participating in collective action on SNSs, activists can (re)form their collective identities for future activism organisation. This can be used to argue against the slacktivist critique, despite whether there is any visible and material outcome and whether there is a strong organisation, which differs from most previous arguments defending slacktivism.

Beyond those points, it is also important to highlight how the analytical framework of collective identity in collective action can be used in a Chinese context of activism. As the social and political environments in China greatly differ from the

western circumstances under which the framework was initially developed, a careful consideration of the differences is often needed.

2.3.1 The definition

Why do people participate in collective political action? This has been one of the key questions in social movement studies since the very beginning of the emergence of social movements. Early studies that attempted to answer this question were largely based on the traditional Marxist theory, focusing on the conflict between social classes in the industrial society, i.e. the conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie (Melucci, 1989, 1980; Offe, 1985; Buechler, 1995). The compelling emancipatory demand from the working class against the capitalist control over factories was the main motive in labour movements (Melucci, 1989) and this motive was embedded in the structure of the capitalist system (Melucci, 1980; Melucci, 1989). This conclusion was made because most social movements observed in the industrial society were anti-capitalist labour movements where the main group of participants was the proletariat.

However, since we have entered a post-industrial society, labour movements are no longer the only or the most common form of social movements. 'New' social movements, such as gay rights movements, feminist movements, environmental movements etc., have emerged since the 1960s (Calhoun, 1993). As Habermas (1981) argues, those new social movements 'no longer arise in areas of material production', 'are no longer channelled through parties and organisation', and 'can no longer be alleviated by compensations that conform to the system' (p. 33). What can be observed in new social movements is that the conflicts often focus on 'cultural reproduction, social integration and socialisation' and collective action is often 'sub-institutional' and 'extra-parliamentary' (p. 33). Similarly, Steinmetz (1994) also contends that not only the social conflicts but also the social composition of new social movements, i.e. the demographics of the participants and their supporters, cannot be mapped by Marxist categories of social classes. Moreover, the goals of new social movements are no longer framed to benefit specific Marxist social classes (Steinmetz, 1994). The traditional Marxist approach, therefore, cannot explain the reason why people participate in collective political and social action in all forms of social movements in the contemporary society.

For example, in gay rights movements, it is rather obvious that gay people as the main participants in those movements as well as their supporters do not necessarily belong to only one Marxist social class. Their political goals, such as anti-homophobia and social equality, challenge not only political parties, institutions, or policies for material or political gains but the heterosexual dominated society as a whole.

In such circumstances, scholars of new social movement studies are keen to discover a new theory that can effectively rationalise the emergence of diverse forms of social movements in contemporary society. Consequently, 'collective identity' has been theorised and argued to be the most widely used concept (Snow, 2001; Simon and Klandermans, 2001; Hunt and Benford, 2004; Flesher Fominaya, 2010a). Collective identity, as Melucci (1989) defines, 'is an interactive and shared definition produced by several interacting individuals who are concerned with the orientations of their action as well as the field of opportunities and constraints in which their action takes place' (p. 34). Although there is often interplay between collective identity and personal identity, as Polletta and Jasper (2001) contend, collective identity should be distinguished from personal identity, as 'collective identity describes what makes people occupying a category similar' whereas 'personal identity is a bundle of traits that we believe make us unique' (p. 298). Essentially, it is produced upon the recognition of who 'we' are and the affirmation of how 'we' are different from 'others' in collective action (Schlesinger, 1987; Melucci, 1996; Snow, 2001).

Many studies before the 1980s regarded collective identity as essential prior to the emergence of collective action (Garrison, 1992; Gamson, 1995; Rupp and Taylor, 1999; Polletta and Jasper, 2001; Flesher Fominaya, 2010a). Specifically, the essentialist view treated collective identity as a completed resource before collective action, which was made visible through the organisation of collective action and its political deployment (Gamson, 1995). This means that collective identity was expected to be formed as an essence for deployment. In other words, it was something necessarily ready prior to, and non-changeable throughout, collective action.

The essentialist view of collective identity has been eminently rejected and disproven in more recent theorisation and studies. Collective identity is argued to be fluid, neither necessarily ready beforehand nor non-changeable, or as Schlesinger (1987) puts it, 'a continual process of recomposition rather than a given' (p. 237). To

explain this process, Melucci (1989) argues that '[c]ollective identity formation is a delicate process and requires continual investment [...] in which actors produce the common cognitive frameworks that enable them to assess their environment and to calculate the costs and benefits of their action' (p. 34-35). Since the environment of collective action is constantly changing as collective action progresses, the assessment of the environment is also changing. The changing assessment, then, leads to the changing formation of collective identity.

Collective identities in LGBTQ+ collective action have been investigated in studies. Those studies have shown that those collective identities in LGBTQ+ collective action adapt to their environments in order to fulfil new needs. Conducting empirical research on an LGBTQ+ organisation, Ghaziani (2011) contends that rather than forming their collective identities in a traditional 'us versus them' approach in which heterosexuals are treated as the oppression, LGBTQ+ activists nowadays tend to form a more inclusive 'us and them' collective identity that reach out to heterosexuals, because by suppressing the differences between them and heterosexuals, LGBTQ+ activists can gain strategical advantages. V. Taylor et al. (2004) argue that drag performances, as a tradition in gay and lesbian social movements, redefine the boundaries between groups of gender and sexual identities, which helps to form collective identities beyond gay/straight and male/female binaries in gay and lesbian social movements. By investigating gay and lesbian film festivals, Gamson (1996) demonstrates that in order to gain public visibility and survive in increasingly unstable environments, some gay and lesbian organisations emphasise racial diversity to transform their collective identities. Although those studies exemplify different reformations of collective identities in LGBTQ+ collective action, which is mainly a result of varying environments in which LGBTQ+ collective action takes place, they all correspond with the assertion that collective identity is fluid. On the other hand, they also underpin, as Melucci (1989) writes, that 'processes of construction of collective identity vary greatly, both in intensity and in complexity, according to the type of collective phenomenon in question' (p. 36) and this requires researchers to examine specifically how and under what circumstances participants invest cognitively and emotionally in such processes.

Based on the fluidity of collective identity, it is also argued by scholars that rather than merely being used to explain the emergence of collective action, collective identity plays various roles throughout collective action. Polletta and Jasper (2001) review studies on such a matter and outline that not only emergence, but also strategies, both internal and external, and outcomes of collective action are all tightly linked to collective identity.

Firstly, as explored earlier in this section, collective identity has replaced Marxist social classes to rationalise the emergence of collective action. Today, 'protesters have been less likely to seek a redistribution of political power than to seek change dominant normative and cultural codes by gaining recognition for new identities' (p.286). This collective phenomenon happens prominently in contemporary new social movements, where participants construct collectives based on shared identities rather than a certain social class.

Secondly, collective action strategies reflect collective identity. On the one hand, collective identity management is key to internal strategies of collective action, namely, how collective organisations can recruit more participants and ensure their commitment to the organisations. Specifically, as Polletta and Jasper (2001) argue:

[o]rganisers often concentrate on recasting constituents' identities to include participation as one of the responsibilities or benefits of group membership. Identities need to be integrated with injustice and agency frames so as to clearly distinguish 'us' from opponents and bystanders. Finally, sustaining participants' commitment over time requires ritualised reassertions of collective identity and efforts to manage, without suppressing, difference. (p. 292)

On the other hand, collective identity is embedded in external strategies, including political and cultural goals, action forms and deliberative styles. While there are many strategies available to collective action participants, how do they choose strategies that may fit their situation and potentially lead to success? As collective identity is based on the assessment of its environment, it provides criteria according to which strategical decisions can be made. Conversely, changes of strategies also signify changes of collective identity.

Lastly, collective identity itself can be seen as one of the outcomes of collective action. When discussing outcomes of collective action, it seems very usual that many would first look for those visible impacts, such as changes of policies and in institutions. People may consider collective action as successful if there is a certain amount of positive impact. However, noticeably, in many cases of collective action, there is limited visible impact, if any. Yet, to call these cases of collective action unsuccessful may be arbitrary. Then, what are the alternatives to assess their success? What other invisible outcomes may there be? One particular outcome that can be used for success assessment is the change of collective identity. Whether it is an explicit goal of collective action or not – sometimes it can be a primary goal in collective action like self-help movements that aim to raise self-value – collective identity can be reformed as a result. Reformed collective identity, then, can gain power, as it may ‘[become] available for subsequent waves of protest’, ‘have lasting impact on institutional political arenas and organisational forms’ and ‘influence subsequent uses of [...] symbols and strategies [that] resonate with the identities of prior users’ (p. 297). Yet, when it is reformed to be strong, it may also entail backlash, ‘as those portrayed as the enemy may be angered or frightened into counterorganisation’ (ibid.). Despite the fact that the impact of reformed collective identity requires specific examination because circumstances often vary case to case, it can be certainly argued that viewing collective identity as an outcome provides an approach through which researchers can understand collective action.

Overall, Polletta and Jasper’s (2001) summary of different roles of collective identity playing in collective action can be useful, especially for those who tend to study the internal changes of collective organisation and how they influence ways in which participants act.

2.3.2 The analytical framework

Aside from this, what are the specific constituents of ‘we’ and ‘others’ in collective identity? How are they formed? Those questions are immediately faced by anyone who wants to use the concept to explore the topic of collective action. Hunt et al. (1994), therefore, combine the framing theory in social movement studies and collective identity and propose that there are three ‘identity fields’ in collective

identity framed by activists and movement organisations. In social movement studies, framing refers to the active meaning construction by which activists and movement organisations progress their action (Benford and Snow, 2000). Therefore, collective identity framing, as Hunt et al. (1994) suggest, is the process of activists' or movement organisations' identification of the 'we', the antagonist and the audience, three identity fields of socially constructed actor clusters, 'by situating or placing [them] in time and space and by attributing characteristics to them that suggest specifiable relationships and lines of action' (p. 185).

Hunt et al. (1994), then, further explains the constituents of the identity fields. Firstly, the 'we' is:

constellations of identity attributions about individuals and collectivities taken to be advocates of movement causes. These usually include collective identity claims about 'the movement' and allied aggregations and organizations. They also involve a variety of personal identity attributions such as movement heroes and heroines, paid and unpaid staffers, leaders, rank-and-file followers, and star supporters (for example, celebrities and politicians). Also included are collective and personal identity attributions about constituents, such as 'innocent victims', aggrieved populations, 'future generations', and 'the silent majority'. (p. 193)

By framing the 'we', activists and movement organisations look for 'the "best" ways, from their point of view, to convey to themselves and others their interpretations of what is wrong with extant conditions' (p. 193) and 'specify what needs to be done to rectify identified problems and why corrective actions are necessary'. While framing the 'we', activists also often engage in managing boundaries between groups based on their views of what helps to progress collective action (also see V. Taylor and Whittier, 1992). Secondly, the antagonist is:

constellations of identity attributions about individuals and collectivities imputed to be opponents of movement causes. These include claims about countermovements, countermovement organizations, hostile institutions, inimical publics, and social control agents. Additionally, numerous personal

identity typifications are socially constructed and imputed for specific villains, oppositional leaders, rank-and-file opponents, and star adversaries. (p. 197-198)

The framing of the antagonist, then, involves ‘identifying and defining individuals, collectivities, beliefs, values, and practices as being in conflict with’ (p. 198) the ‘we’. Lastly, the audience is:

constellations of identity attributions about individuals and collectivities imputed to be neutral or uncommitted observers who may react to or report on movement activities. For example, allied [movement organisations], the media, powerful elites, marginal supporters, sympathizers, and bystander publics can be the subjects of audience identity claims. A common characteristic of all imputed audience identities is that they are capable of receiving and evaluating protagonist messages in a favourable light. (p. 199-200)

To frame the audience, activists simply impute the ‘observer role to individuals and collectivities’ (p. 200).

Hence, as Hunt et al. (1994) have mapped out, to explore collective identity, researchers should look at individuals and collectivities framed as the ‘we’, the antagonist, and the audience as well as how the framing is done. Yet, importantly, Hunt et al. (1994) also stress that the three identity fields ‘overlap and hang together’ and ‘expand and contract across time’ (p. 186), as activists and movement organisations construct different meanings and look for better ways to progress their collective action, according to their changing context.

2.3.3 Collective identity in digitalised collective action

Although the analytical framework of collective identity was developed before the digital era, many researchers have sufficiently adopted the framework to study digitalised collective action. In this section, I will now summarise some contributions that have been previously made, mainly about the influences of digital communication on forming collective identity. While some studies focus on how SNSs afford collective identity formation, others discuss the impact of the increasingly individualised and decentralised digital collective action, i.e. connective action

(Bennett and Segerberg, 2012), on collective identity formation. Following this, I will extend the discussion to my argument that slacktivism can be seen as a meaningful process during which collective identity can be (re)formed.

As collective action is now often organised partly or entirely on SNSs, the communication within collective action organisations and between collective action organisations and external parties have been often digitalised. They differ greatly from face-to-face and mass broadcast communication in traditional collective action before the digital era. Therefore, many recent studies on collective identity formation through digital communication aim to find out firstly what affordances SNSs provide, and secondly, based on those affordances, how collective identity is formed in different ways.

On the one hand, SNSs afford the same communication needs as in collective action before the digital era but in information-technologically innovated ways. In a broad sense, as Khazraee and Novak (2018) illustrate, SNSs afford collective identity formation in two ways: ‘affordances for discourse’ and ‘affordances for performance’. ‘Affordances for discourse’ enable internal communication via ‘sharing grievance and collectively negotiating meaning’ as well as ‘sharing of personal stories that resonate with the group’ (p. 2). Conversely, ‘affordances for performance’ facilitate external communication via ‘creating and sharing transgressive [content] publicly’ (p. 2). Because of both types of affordances of SNSs, participants of collective action can form relationships with each other and external parties, which contribute to the formation of collective identity. Therefore, the categorisation of SNSs’ affordances is helpful to researchers to understand the fundamental possibilities for collective identity formation through digital communication particularly on SNSs.

Specifically speaking, many functions of SNSs have been studied as the extension or replacement of non-digital communication in collective identity formation. For instance, hyperlinks can be used to exchange resources (Ackland and O’Neil, 2011) and to reinforce common goals, relationship ties and media visibility (Pilny and Shumate, 2012); non-public features of SNSs, such as Facebook chats and groups, and instant messaging services, such as WhatsApp, have significantly contributed to internal communication (Treré, 2015); memes, as easily imitated and modified digital media forms, can be used for fast dissemination and negotiation of

meanings, particularly amongst young SNS users who embrace memes the most (Gal et al., 2015; DeCook, 2018); even SNS algorithms can be a tool for the mobilisation of members who share similar political and social interests (Gaudette et al., 2021). In those certain ways of using SNSs, collective action participants are able to form collective identity through new digital communicative interactions.

However, it is worth noting that while SNSs afford digital communicative opportunities for collective identity formation, they may also constrain it in various communicative ways. For instance, Leung (2013) argues that as participants can be anonymous in digital collective action, they may be unable to recognise each other's identities and cultivate apt communication. Thus, collective identity may be formed in a limited way. Some commercial SNSs' communication protocols, such as Facebook's increasing promotion of top-down communication flows, may decrease the diversity of voices and hinder the formation of a strong collective identity (Coretti and Pica, 2015).

Here, I listed only a few examples of how SNSs are affording or constraining collective identity formation, which are substantially examined in previous studies. Certainly, there are more empirical examples that have been or can be observed and can be included, but the purpose of listing some of them is to show that digital communication on SNSs is evidently changing the process of collective identity formation and this is one of the focuses of previous studies, rather than to find all the affordances and constraints – in fact, it is impossible to complete a task like that. This is because, firstly, SNSs are constantly changing and new technological innovations are becoming available on a daily basis. Therefore, participants' knowledge of using new communicative tools to form collective identity is constantly renewed. And secondly, many affordances and constraints are context specific, which means some features or functions of SNSs may not be the same affordances or constraints as they are in different studies and discussions. For instance, in Coretti and Pica's (2015) study, Facebook's protocols that algorithmically favour top-down communication flows cause participants to be passive in collective identity formation, whereas in the study of Gaudette et al. (2021), participants are active in exploiting Reddit's algorithms to form their collective identity. This may also remind researchers the importance of human agency in the changing digital environment.

On the other hand, regardless of specific affordances and constraints, it seems to be more important to discuss the consequences of digitally mediated collective identity, which is another focus of previous studies. Most studies of such a matter inherit from Bennett and Segerberg's (2012) argument about the increasing individuality and decentralisation in connective action, characterising collective identity formed through digital communication as also increasingly individualised (Milan, 2015, 2013; Soon and Kluver, 2014; Rohlinger and Bunnage, 2018; Brünker et al., 2019).

As argued by Milan (2015), a heavy proportion of contemporary collective action on SNSs aims to promote visibility by digitally mediated expressions and performances of individuals, which 'exacerbates the centrality of the subjective and private experience of the individual', as those expressions and performances of individuals are 'partially losing the representative function of the "we"' (p. 896). Rather than solidarity, individual expressions and performances tend to resonate by emphasising group cohesion and emotional attachment (Brünker et al., 2019), as participants are of multiplex social identities with different backgrounds and interests (Soon and Kluver, 2014), who are now able and encouraged to participate via their individualised means and styles. Collective identity formed in this phenomenon, therefore, can be seen as 'a set of shared meanings [...] of private individual experiences' (Milan, 2013, p. 72) or the identity of 'individualised collectiveness' (Soon and Kluver, 2014).

However, this does not necessarily suggest that increasingly individualised collective identity is in any way weaker than it used to be in traditional offline collective action or that it is unable to facilitate fruitful collective action. Whether it is 'thinly' or 'thickly' formed through digital communication, as Rohlinger and Bunnage (2018) contend, depends on its position and the structure of communication:

[t]hick identity results when an organization makes cultivating a collective identity a priority and structures communication in ways that facilitate interaction on- and offline. [...] Thin identity results when an organization does not make collective identity a priority and adopts a hierarchical structure of communication that allows leaders to control what and how information is

disseminated to supporters as well as to determine the organization's issues, campaigns, and goals. (p. 136)

Therefore, although collective identity is likely to become loosely linked meanings of individual experiences, the organisation of collective action, especially how goals are negotiated and what communication structure is deployed, still plays an important role in affecting the strength of collective identity.

Yet, Bennett and Segerberg (2012) also suggest that due to the increasing individualisation, connective action is also increasingly decentralised. It means that connective action is often loosely organised, without a strong organisation that oversees collective identity management. Based on this, Gerbaudo and Treré (2015) argue that digitally formed collective identities are often characterised by 'inclusivity, multiplicity and malleability' (p. 868). More studies have also shown that they can be volatile (Gerbaudo, 2015), unclear (Stephansen, 2017), fragmented and tension-laden (McClelland-Cohen and Endacott, 2020), and cause conflicts within movements that underscore inclusive and direct participation (Kavada, 2015).

Altogether, as collective action is often digitalised nowadays, collective identity formation has been made possible through digital communication via SNSs, but it is also significantly influenced by the increasingly individualised and decentralised nature of connective action. It should be noted, however, that what those previous studies have discovered is *likely* how collective identities form through SNSs and may not be the case in every digitalised collective action. This means that close examination of each case is still required.

How can those findings then fit in a discussion of slacktivism? While attempting to link them with slacktivism, I find it intriguing that a discussion of the slacktivist critique is completely absent in all the studies. This is because when scholars study the formation of collective identity in the digital world, they have already made a pre-assumption that digitalised collective action does produce and negotiate meanings that contribute to the formation of collective identity, even though some of them may not integrate to form a strong collective identity. This pre-assumption undoubtedly opposes the slacktivist critique, as it denies the proposition that low-threshold political activities on SNSs have no political or social impact. One

of the impacts, as those scholars are all arguing, is that they contribute to the formation of collective identity. Therefore, previous studies on collective identity formation through SNSs support my argument that slacktivism contributes to the formation of collective identity. However, the articulation of this point is long overdue.

As a matter of fact, in those studies, lots of case studies and activities observed therein can be categorised as slacktivism. For instance, the study of Gal et al. (2015) focuses on the memetic video clips in the 'It Gets Better' campaign on YouTube. Khazraee and Novak's (2018) case study is the 'My Stealthy Freedom' Facebook campaign page where Iranian women shared photos of themselves not wearing a hijab in public. Brünker et al. (2019) analyse how Instagram comments discursively contributed to the formation of an environmentalist collective identity in the Fridays for Future movement. Those studies have shown that slacktivist activities are evidently making a difference by forming collective identities.

Though this pre-assumption has always been made prior to studying digitally formed collective identity, it has not been articulated or theorised. To use collective identity as an analytical approach against the slacktivist critique of digital activism will take a further step in explicitly understanding how low-threshold political activities on SNSs impact activism and activists as a whole, from an organisational perspective. Essentially, slacktivism can be seen as a meaningful process during which collective identity can be (re)formed as an outcome.

I emphasise the reformation of collective identity and this is because there is almost no entirely new collective identity in contemporary collective action. Collective identity is distinctive from pre-existing social or personal identities (Snow, 2001; Polletta and Jasper, 2001; Hunt and Benford, 2004; Flesher Fominaya, 2010a), yet, as Snow (2001) claims, they often overlap and interact. Meanings that are used to form collective identity can be derived from social or personal identities. Meanwhile, previously formed collective identity, which encapsulates experiences of strategies of mobilisation, shared goals, deliberative styles, and organisational forms, can be adapted for new collective action (Whittier, 2004; V. Taylor, 1989). Therefore, rather than saying collective identity is formed, which sometimes can suggest that it is a new shared definition every time when collective action emerges, collective identity can be

seen as reformed on the basis of what is already there, whether the basis is personal, social or collective.

The reformation of collective identity also corresponds to Melucci's (1989, 1995) argument that the process of collective identity is continual and highlights the phenomenon of slacktivism. When individuals participate in collective action on SNSs by slacktivism, their participation and their relationships formed with each other are often temporal (Poell, 2020) and fragmented (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). However, the temporality and fragmentation of their participation makes informal and crowd-enabled activist organisations (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Trott, 2018; Grömping and Sinpeng, 2018), which further lowers the threshold of participation and mobilises an even more diverse participation. Individuals' low-threshold participation continually negotiates meanings in collective action on a micro interpersonal level, redefining who the 'we' are and who the 'others' are. Thus, slacktivism contributes to the process of collective identity by continually reforming it throughout digitalised collective action.

Meanwhile, slacktivism also needs to be contextualised so that specific reformed meanings of collective identity can be understood. As I have emphasised repeatedly, the cost of online political activities needs to be assessed in their context and some of them are not necessarily low-cost even though they can be easily done on SNSs. The cost affects the reformation of collective identity, as it partially decides individuals' commitment and degree of participation.

Furthermore, as collective identity is comprised of shared definitions between participants (Melucci, 1989), the definitions are socially, culturally, and politically specific to participants. When a social movement becomes global, for example, its impacts of different levels of contexts – national, regional, and local – are different (della Porta and Kriesi, 1999), as there are geographically specific sets of political and social opportunities and constraints (V. Taylor, 2000). Likewise, 'the process of collective identity construction is embedded in a wider political field [...] not in isolation from structural factors' (Flesher Fominaya, 2010b, p. 398). Therefore, the process of collective identity (re)formation through slacktivism must be located in its context where meanings are produced facing specific opportunities and constraints of certain types of digital contentious politics.

2.3.4 Collective identity in Chinese studies

Since my research aims to bridge the theory of collective identity with Chinese practices of digital activism, I will also briefly discuss the applicability of the theory in a broad Chinese context. Although the theory of collective identity, as well as new social movement theories, are initially developed based on western societies, it is sometimes taken for granted that they can be applied universally without much adaptation. This, however, should never be the case, because the process of collective identity is not universalised to any social structure or political system. China has its distinctive social, cultural, and political environments where the ways in which collective action happens differ greatly from western societies. Hence, the way in which collective identity is formed and reformed is also different.

Drawing on the concept of political opportunity structure, L. Xie and Van Der Heijden (2010) argue that compared to western societies, under the ruling of the authoritarian one-party regime, China has a more restricted political opportunity structure in which collective action is less likely to take place – it relies heavily on informal political elites in public and informal policy making processes. However, their argument is made exclusively from the digital phenomenon, focusing on incidents during and before the early 2000s. Since the late 2000s, Chinese SNSs have become a significant part of public networks and more decentralised collective action has been now made possible (Brunner, 2017). Individuals can participate in collective action in a more horizontally structured activist organisation and achieve negotiation with authorities via SNSs. Regardless, SNS-facilitated collective action in China still has its common context-specific constraints, such as the difficulty in sourcing global and international funding and collaboration, and the government's surveillance and censorship of the digital space (Y. Liu, 2015).

The number of studies that directly address collective identity in collective action in China is surprisingly limited. Although those studies focusing on different types of collective identity are distinct from each other, collectively, they have made two significant contributions. Firstly, the collective identity theory is applicable to the Chinese context, and secondly, it is necessary to consider specific factors that affect the process of collective identity in China. Here are some examples of the studies that shed light on the contributions.

Crane (1994) examines the collective identity in the student protest fighting for the democratisation of the central government in Nanjing, China, from 1988 to 1989, and demonstrates that the collective identity was utterly context-dependent. Politically, while the elite fragmentation in the government offered the students opportunities for movement mobilisation, any social movement that might question the leadership of the ruling party was not allowed. Culturally, the students inherited the historical tradition of intellectuals acting as both critics and servants of the state, but they were also confused by a period of cultural repression when intellectual criticism against the state had been severely persecuted. And interpersonally, as formal network spaces were controlled by the state, the students were forced to build discussion groups to sustain their relationships with each other. Crane's (1994) study, therefore, shows that the process of collective identity formation in China can be extremely complex in its context, relating to political opportunities and constraints as well as cultural heritages.

Analysing migrant workers' strikes in Dongguan, China, in 2004 and 2007, Chan and Ngai (2009) propose that the collective identity of a new working class was formed. The context of the strikes was also complex, as it was built on the discourse of workers' rights and a strong common emotion against foreign capital, involving factors of localness, gender, ethnicity, peer alliance and solidarity across workplaces. However, F. Chen and Xu's (2012) work studying the same group of people from the oppressive force perspective indicates that because of the spontaneity and loose organisation of those strikes, local judicial professionals were able to interfere and prevent a strong collective identity from forming. Both studies, though presenting very different findings, outline the multi-dimensional context of the migrant workers' collective identity in southern China.

J. Lu and Chan (2016) investigate the collective identity in an environmental movement that happened in Qidong, China, in July 2012, and show that the collective identity formed by the activists was specific to their political and social contexts. On the one hand, the collective identity is a localisation of a national wave of urban environmental movements that happened around 2010 in China, involving identifying specific pollution issues, potential opponents and adherents, and solutions in the community. On the other hand, a nationalist incentive was strategically deployed to avoid possible risks, as nationalism had been a part of the propaganda led and

legitimised by the state. J. Lu and Chan's (2016) discovery highlights the importance of the Chinese context at both local and national levels to the environmental collective identity formation, which again reminds scholars that the Chinese context often differentiates from western ones.

There are also a few other studies of collective identity in the Chinese context that have been done, discussing a variety of collective identities, such as the collective identity of parents and teachers in migrant children's schools (M. Yu, 2018), the anti-nationalism feminist collective identity in modern China (Y. Zhang, 2015), and 'comrades' as a queer collective identity in queer politics in post-socialist China (Bao, 2019a). Although they may not explicitly address the concept of collective identity or the concept in empirical cases of collective action, all of them are dedicated to illustrating that those collective identities are formed in their respective complex context, which cannot be simply understood as the same as those in western societies – nor in fact as any in other societies.

Therefore, despite the fact that the theory of collective identity is applicable to the Chinese context, to study collective identity in China requires a comprehensive understanding of its specific context, in which miscellaneous factors may be at play. When digital communication is involved, such as in slacktivism, it is also essential to consider the digital environment.

Chapter 3 LGBTQ+ digital activism in China

In order to understand LGBTQ+ digital activism in China, it is essential to first have a grasp on how activism is situated in China on a macro level. The authoritarian political context in which activism emerges, progresses, and attains outcome in China is distinct (L. Xie and Van Der Heijden, 2010). The state is imposing tightening restrictions, such as censorship, on forms of liberal activism (M. Zhao, 2020; Stern and O'Brien, 2012). Chinese activists and their organisations often struggle to work around or confront the restrictions.

Although there has not been explicit prohibition of activism declared by the Chinese government, it has shown a general negative attitude towards, at least, confrontational activism. Looking at the goals that the government has been discursively propagating for the development of a better society, one can easily find that the government deters dissent and contention that underpin activism. 'Harmony' ('和谐') is defined by the government as one of China's national Core Socialist Values (社会主义核心价值观) to govern the society (Gow, 2017). It aims to construct 'a united public front, precluding the possibility of dissenting opinion once policies have been decided' (Gow, 2017, p. 101). To maintain a 'harmonious society', the government is justified to suppress 'inharmonious' acts (Kallio, 2015). 'Social stability' ('社会稳定') is another phrase that the Chinese government often promotes and uses in a similar way to 'harmony'. In the discourse of 'social stability', a compliant society is seen as necessary for economic growth, and activism that causes the society to be 'unstable' is not tolerated (C. K. Lee and Hsing, 2009; C. Feng, 2013). Next, 'civility' ('文明'), another Core Socialist Value, is also discursively used by the government to demobilise activism, as those who engaged in activism are regarded in the discourse as emotional and irrational, i.e. 'uncivil' (G. Yang, 2018).

To what standard would activism be classified as 'inharmonious', 'uncivil', and 'damaging social stability'? How confrontational can activism be before it gets shut down in China? Those questions remain unknown to all Chinese activists and activist organisations as well as to the public (Stern and O'Brien, 2012). As Stern and Hassid (2012) show, while activists and activist organisations are uncertain what they

can do, public professionals such as journalists and lawyers who work on activism in China also often engage in self-censorship to avoid clashes with the government, as they are unable to fathom the government's tolerance of political action. Such a phenomenon, then, narrows down options of political action for activists and activist organisations in China, because they are made to understand that the government's tolerance is incredibly low, as represented by those public professionals.

However, under such circumstances, Chinese activists and activist organisations still manage to find opportunities to contribute to the process of liberation of the Chinese society. Rather than relying on grand social movements on the street, such as protests and demonstrations to make social changes in a relatively short time, activism in China usually works to gradually shift the state and the society (P. Ho, 2007). In other words, activism in China commonly adopts non-confrontational and incremental approaches (J. Wang, 2019). For instance, Gleiss (2015) studies an activist organisations' discursive practices on Weibo and argues that 'minimal politics', which refers to low-key resistance that challenges the hegemonic discourse, can be effective under the authoritarian control. Bao (2021b, 2021c, 2020, 2018a, 2018b) has examined various types of queer cultural activism, including film, sound, literature, and art, which has been a significant part of queer activism in China. Queer cultural activism also represents this sort of soft approach to activist activities.

Certainly, this is not to say that large-scaled collective action on the street is impossible in China. There have in fact been several, even within the past decade. For instance, the anti-Japan protests across China in 2012 were tolerated, and maybe even incited, by the Chinese government (Reilly, 2014), as the Chinese government had been implementing anti-Japan patriotic education and cultivating anti-Japan sentiments for a long time (M. Zhou and Wang, 2016). Another example, the environmental protests against para-xylene factories between 2007 and 2014, managed to gain mainstream media coverage (J. Liu, 2016), largely adopted digital media for communication (J. Liu, 2016; K. Lee and Ho, 2014), had middle-class people as a strong force in the protests (S. Chen, 2017), and cooperated with local and supralocal non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Sun et al., 2017). However, as those examples show, to realise large-scaled collective action on the street in China is extremely difficult, as it requires special conditions.

Meanwhile, the emergence and rapid development of SNSs have made significant impact on how activism is conducted in China. Many scholars have documented a variety of employment of digital activism and how the Internet has been playing a vital role in it in China (e.g. Tai, 2015; G. Yang, 2009, 2014, 2018; J. Cao and Guo, 2016; Deklerck and Wei, 2015; Wallis and Shen, 2018; Esarey and Xiao, 2011; Skoric et al., 2016). On the one hand, SNSs have contributed to liberalising and diversifying public discourse in China, empowering activism with new opportunities (Y. Zheng, 2022, Esarey and Xiao, 2011; G. Yang, 2009). By performing activism online, Chinese activists can avoid being physically exposed to the government, especially when their activities involve with sensitive topics, and therefore the risk of personal safety that is often associated in offline activism is significantly lowered (Y. Xie, et al., 2017; Q. Xiao, 2011a). Meanwhile, contrary to the assumption often propagated in western societies that the Chinese government censors all activism on SNSs (Y. Jiang, 2012), online expression of dissent towards the government is, in fact, often allowed. Interference only occurs when there is collective action already taken or forthcoming (King et al., 2013). On the other hand, the Chinese government has been implementing new measures, including evolving forms of censorship (G. Yang, 2014), fabricated content (King et al., 2017) and digital surveillance (Qin et al., 2017; X. Xu, 2021), to gain control over activism and to direct the public discourse and political expressions on SNSs (Esarey and Xiao, 2011). Thus, digital activism in China faces both opportunities and constraints.

This is the wider political context of LGBTQ+ digital activism in China. Based on this brief overview, the objective of this chapter is to further contextualise Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism. To achieve this, I will review the existing literature in two aspects. Firstly, by examining the historic development of Chinese LGBTQ+ identities and activism, I will map out how LGBTQ+ activism in China has progressed into the digital era from the early history of homosexual behaviours, the emergence of LGBTQ+ identities, and the wave of HIV/AIDS activism. Secondly, from the perspective of political opportunity structure, I will expand the discussion on the structural opportunities that LGBTQ+ digital activism is currently facing in China.

Essentially, as I will demonstrate, the prevalent use of SNSs in Chinese LGBTQ+ activism along with the state's control – especially over Chinese LGBTQ+

organisations – have led to the current phenomenon that Chinese LGBTQ+ activism is increasingly foregrounded by individual and online participation, to which the slacktivist critique may seem applicable. However, those individual and online forms of action have been argued to be meaningful in many regards. Despite that, I argue that the concept of collective identity can also be an analytical lens through which researchers examine meanings produced in those forms of action. To explore LGBTQ+ digital activism in China in this way focuses on internal shifts of dynamics that occur through digital performances of activism, opposing the logic of slacktivist critique that assesses the impact of digital activism by visible and material changes and offline mobilisation.

3.1 The development of LGBTQ+ activism in China

The historical records of non-heterosexual behaviours in China, mainly those of gay men and lesbians, can be traced back to over 2,000 years ago. However, it was not until the 1980s that LGBTQ+ identities started to emerge in China. Since that time, there have been several stages of development of LGBTQ+ activism marked by distinctive characteristics. During the 1990s, LGBTQ+ organisations gradually emerged in China and their focus of activism was placed on identity exploration and community building. From the late 1990s to the 2000s, by collaborating with domestic and international resources on HIV/AIDS health issues, many local grassroots activist organisations were established and flourished across the nation. From the late 2000s to the present, Chinese LGBTQ+ individuals have been greatly empowered by SNSs to perform activism. In this section, I will succinctly demonstrate how during those stages of development, Chinese LGBTQ+ activism has been or is being shaped by various factors, especially the political control. Such a historical overview will provide us with the context that is essential to understanding contemporary LGBTQ+ activism in China.

3.1.1 The early history

In general, scholars have discovered that the history of non-heterosexual behaviours in China is surprisingly long (J. Wu, 2003; van de Werff, 2010; Ruan, 2013). Several well-known stories that describe non-heterosexual behaviours can be found in the

history of ancient China. For instance, ‘Yutao’ (‘余桃’ or ‘Left Peach’) and ‘Duanxiu’ (‘断袖’ or ‘Cut Sleeve’) are two stories that document affection between emperors and their male lovers in the Eastern Zhou period (770 – 256 B.C.) and the Former Han Dynasty (202 B.C. – 8 A.C.) (J. Wu, 2003). According to *Han Shu (The History of Former Han Dynasty)*, the book in which ‘Duanxiu’ is documented, ten out of eleven emperors in the Former Han Dynasty had at least one male sexual partner or expressed affection towards men (Ruan, 2013). Although the origin of the phrase is not clear, ‘duishi’ (‘对食’ or ‘having a meal while facing each other’) is also mentioned in the book, which is one of the earliest phrases that describe lesbian behaviours (J. Wu, 2003). This indicates that same-sex sexual behaviours existed not just between men but also between women in ancient China.

Generally, scholars believe that in ancient China, especially before the mid-fourteenth century, society had a relatively tolerant and accepting attitude towards same-sex sexual behaviours, though they were never fully accepted (J. Wu, 2003; Ruan, 2013; Samshasha, 1997). However, to engage in any type of non-heterosexual behaviour did not mean one was ‘gay’, ‘lesbian’ or ‘bisexual’ in ancient China, because homosexual and bisexual identities had not emerged. For those people, having any form of sex with people of the same sex was only regarded as a particular behaviour – not something that could define them or undermine their identity as heterosexuals (J. Wu, 2003; van de Werff, 2010). Most of them still chose to marry people of the opposite sex (J. Wu, 2003).

Significantly, such an accepting attitude in society no longer exists in modern China. After 1949, the year in which the regime of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was established, led by CPC, mainland China was almost completely secluded from the outside world for nearly three decades (Y. Zhang, 1998). This means that while western societies made progress on LGBTQ+ issues, such as the Stonewall Riots in 1969 that marked the beginning of LGBTQ+ liberation movements (Carter, 2004) and the removal of homosexuality from the list of mental disorders by the American Psychiatric Association in 1973 (Bayer, 1987; Drescher, 2015), Chinese LGBTQ+ people were not able to access information beyond the border (J. Wu, 2003). Instead, a few western examples of homosexuality were used by the Chinese government as ‘evil western thoughts’ to educate the public against their imitation (Ruan, 2013).

During the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, homosexual people in mainland China were persecuted and forced to take class-education and labour reform to reclaim ‘correct thoughts’, because they were seen as ‘poisoned’ by western bourgeois ideologies (Worth et al., 2017). Then, in 1979, the Chinese Supreme Court specified that homosexual intercourse, consensual or not, was officially categorised within the punishable crime of hooliganism (Worth et al., 2017; Y. Xie and Peng, 2018).

This period right after the establishment of the PRC is seen as, probably, the darkest time for Chinese LGBTQ+ people. Most of them had to disguise their sexual orientations and gender non-conforming identities, follow the social norms, and act like heterosexuals. While they were struggling to survive, activism seemed to be a luxury, especially without any information on what they could do to make a change.

3.1.2 The emergence of LGBTQ+ identities

At the end of 1978, after the difficult ten years of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government adopted the ‘Reform and Opening Up’ (‘改革开放’) policy to open its market and welcome foreign goods and cultures (J. Wu, 2003; Y. Hu and Scott, 2016). Information about western LGBTQ+ culture could finally enter mainland China again. Under such circumstances, LGBTQ+ identities started to emerge in China.

However, Chinese LGBTQ+ people refused western identity terms – ‘gay’, ‘lesbian’, ‘queer’, and so forth – for their own use. Neither did they use the official Chinese terms like ‘homosexual’ (‘同性恋’) or ‘bisexual’ (‘双性恋’). This is because the former ones were embedded with western LGBTQ+ histories to which Chinese LGBTQ+ people did not feel strongly related, and the latter ones were stigmatised due to their frequent uses in association with criminality and pathology at the time in China (Bao, 2019a).

Therefore, they used some existing Chinese terms and created new terms to represent their identities. Since the late 1980s, the term ‘comrade’ (‘同志’) has been used to mean ‘homosexual’ and sometimes ‘queer’ (J. Wu, 2003; Tan, 2016; Bao, 2019a). As Bao (2019a) illustrates, used as an address term, ‘comrade’ means ‘people with the same ethics and ideals’ (p. 25) and was originally popular amongst CPC members. The use of the term by Chinese LGBTQ+ people, therefore, ‘upholds

principles of egalitarianism and social justice’ (p. 27) that were embedded in socialist revolutions and allows Chinese LGBTQ+ people to acquire subjective power. The term is gender neutral (Chou, 2000) and often used in ‘male comrade’ (‘男同志’) and ‘female comrade’ (‘女同志’) to refer to ‘gay man’ and ‘lesbian’. Other than the term ‘comrade’, ‘lala’ (‘拉拉’) is the term created to specifically refer to lesbians in China and has been used since the late 1990s (Engebretsen, 2009). ‘Ku’er’ (‘酷儿’), which literally means ‘a cool kid’, has been used to mean ‘queer’ since the early 2000s (Bao, 2021a).

It could be said that the emergence of those identity terms signals the consolidation of LGBTQ+ identities in China on the basis of Chinese LGBTQ+ people’s distinct histories, struggles, and political pursuits. Those identities, in turn, provide Chinese LGBTQ+ people with a sense of belonging (van de Werff, 2010), establishing the foundation for LGBTQ+ activism in China.

3.1.3 The early stage, legislation, and HIV/AIDS activism

During the 1990s, LGBTQ+ activist organisations started to emerge in China (Deklerck, 2019). In the early stages of their activism, those organisations primarily worked on community building through various ways of providing care and support for each other – an approach that still makes a large proportion of today’s LGBTQ+ activism in China. For instance, hotlines were set up to encourage Chinese LGBTQ+ people to increase their visibility and support each other (He and Jolly, 2002; Bao, 2019b; J. Cao and Cao, 2009), and Aibai, the first Chinese LGBTQ+ website, was also launched during this time (Bie and Tang, 2016).

This was the same period during which homosexuality and bisexuality were finally decriminalised and depathologised in China. In 1997, ‘hooliganism’ – the charge that had been used to persecute homosexual behaviours since 1979 – was abolished by the Chinese government, and both homosexuality and bisexuality were removed from the third edition of the Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders published by the Chinese Psychiatric Association in April 2001 (J. Wu, 2003). The decriminalisation and the depathologisation legalised the existence of homosexuals and bisexuals in China. However, to this day, LGBTQ+ people are still not legally

protected or normalised in any possible way in the Chinese society. The Chinese government took the advice from the Human Rights Council of the United Nations in 2013 and established legislation to prevent workplace discrimination and ensure that minorities receive equal medical treatment (E. Jeffreys and Wang, 2018). Although it laid the legal foundation for anti-discrimination lawsuits for sexual minorities, it did not explicitly provide protection for LGBTQ+ people in China (Chia, 2019). Neither does the law in China explicitly protect other rights of LGBTQ+ people, such as the freedom of speech, the freedom of association, and the freedom of assembly (*ibid.*), which are essential for activism.

From the late 1990s to the 2000s, Chinese LGBTQ+ activism – and to be more precise, Chinese gay men’s activism – saw a wave in advocating for the awareness of HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS was becoming an increasingly concerning national public health issue. To raise awareness of preventing and treating HIV/AIDS amongst men who have sex with men (MSM), the Chinese government had no choice but to collaborate with local and grassroots organisations of gay men by providing funding (J. Cao and Guo, 2016; Hildebrandt, 2018). Many international NGOs were also allowed by the government to fund those organisations for HIV/AIDS related activities (Hildebrandt, 2012; Moreno-Tabarez et al., 2014). With such financial support, local and grassroots organisations of gay men quickly flourished across the nation, building regional and cross-regional as well as national and transnational activist networks (Hildebrandt, 2012, 2011a; Gåsemyr 2016).

However, those organisations were under heavy control by the government. Funding was distributed by the central government via local Centres for Disease Control (J. Cao and Guo, 2016; Hildebrandt, 2012). In return, those organisations had to register with the authority, strictly follow instructions made by the government, and act within the granted political space (J. Cao and Guo, 2016; Hildebrandt, 2011a; Chua and Hildebrandt, 2014; Chia, 2019). Sensitive topics like human rights and LGBTQ+ equality, especially criticism against the government, were not permitted in any form of their campaigns. Raising awareness of sexually transmitted diseases amongst MSM seems to be the only objective of this wave of activism, as evidenced by the political and financial control. Therefore, campaigns were only designed to increase HIV/AIDS awareness within the Chinese LGBTQ+ community.

For these reasons, HIV/AIDS activism in China differed from the one in western societies. HIV/AIDS activism in western societies frequently engaged in battles with governments and pharmaceutical corporations from the 1980s to the 1990s. In the United States, both Reagan's and Bush's administrations were criticised by activists for being silent on the issue (Capozzola, 2002). In the United Kingdom, activists heavily condemned Thatcher's conservative government (Berridge, 1996). Pharmaceutical corporations, meanwhile, were protested against for not providing timely and affordable treatment (R. A. Smith and Siplon, 2006). Those types of action did not occur in HIV/AIDS activism in China. In comparison, the Chinese local and grassroots organisations of gay men that received funding from the government did not engage in confrontational activism at the time and adopted only soft approaches to address the issue. Consequently, as Chua and Hildebrandt (2014) indicate, they 'became the least contentious' (p. 1585).

It is also worth noting that during the wave of HIV/AIDS activism, lesbians split with gay men in organising and performing activism to a large extent. This was mainly caused by the uneven distribution of funding, i.e. funding was mostly given to activist organisations that were primarily involved in local communities of gay men, due to their higher risk of transmitting the virus, rather than to lesbians and people of other marginalised gender and sexual identities (Hildebrandt and Chua, 2017). Related to this, lesbians have been arguably less visible than gay men since the emergence of LGBTQ+ activism in China (L. Han, 2021). Chinese lesbian activists and their agenda are often excluded from homosexual politics (W. Liu et al., 2015; Cheng, 2018; T. Wei, 2015). Meanwhile, it has been also argued that as Chinese lesbian activists and organisations often focus on building friendship and their communities, they are less involved in activities that aim to increase their public visibility (J. Cao and Cao, 2009).

With the government's tightening control over funding, especially the cut-off of international financial aids, many of those local and grassroots organisations started to collapse during the 2010s (Hildebrandt, 2018; Bao, 2021c). While they were collapsing, the wave of HIV/AIDS activism in the Chinese LGBTQ+ community inevitably dwindled. Since then, organisational activism, which served as the main form of LGBTQ+ activism during the wave, has mostly returned to the underground again.

3.1.4 The digital era

Like other activists in China, starting from the late 2000s, Chinese LGBTQ+ activists have widely employed SNSs to conduct activism. SNSs have become arguably the primary space for LGBTQ+ political advocacy. Through SNSs, Chinese LGBTQ+ activists are now able to speak out to the public and the society more easily and directly. Various SNS-based strategies have been applied, such as creating community groups (T. Zhou, 2018; J. Cao and Lu, 2014), sharing and producing news (Y. Wang et al., 2020), producing and disseminating visual-sound content with public educational meanings (Shaw and Zhang, 2018), hashtag campaigns (Liao, 2019; S. X. Chen, 2020), and so forth. Essentially, Chinese LGBTQ+ people are empowered by SNSs ‘to increase their capacity for publicity, social visibility, and promoting the acceptance of [LGBTQ+] individuals through disseminating knowledge about the [LGBTQ+] community’ and ‘to negotiate with the state regarding specific governmental regulations and policies’ (Y. Yang, 2019, p. 664).

The prevalent use of SNSs has also brought some major changes to Chinese LGBTQ+ activism. Since China embraced post-socialism and neoliberalism in 1979, the rapid growth of the economy has led it to become a new political power around the globe, yet the political gain of marginalised social groups does not correspond with that (Bao, 2020). The frustration of not gaining equality – as expected along with the nation’s economic and political development – amongst Chinese LGBTQ+ individuals has gradually increased in their daily lives (ibid.). Under such circumstances, the values of self and the pursuits of the ideal future of Chinese LGBTQ+ people – especially the young generation – have been increasingly influenced by neoliberal individualism (Kong, 2020; Gong and Liu, 2021). SNSs, therefore, provide spaces where neoliberal ideals of gender and sexuality are reproduced and exchanged in China (Peng, 2021; T. Liu, 2016). Such an environment, thus, shapes LGBTQ+ digital activism in China.

After spending about three decades mostly on their inner issues, such as identity construction, self-identification, understanding their positions in the society, and health problems, many Chinese LGBTQ+ activists have realised that what happens outside of their community may be a more urgent matter that needs to be tackled. A significant change of Chinese LGBTQ+ activism was gradually made from

targeting mostly inwards to more outwards in the 2010s (Moreno-Tabarez et al., 2014). In other words, the primary task of current LGBTQ+ activism in China has shifted to anti-discrimination, as a large part of the public still holds a rather negative attitude towards LGBTQ+ people in China (Y. Xie and Peng, 2018; Y. Feng et al., 2012). Such a shift means that confrontation has been increasingly involved in digitally mediated LGBTQ+ activism. For instance, in 2016, Qiu Bai (秋白), a Chinese LGBTQ+ activist, sued the Ministry of Education because of serious homophobia in university textbooks and utilised SNSs to promote publicity and mobilise support (Y. Yang, 2019; S. X. Chen, 2020).

Then, while organisational activism has mostly subsided and gone underground, another change has been seen in the rise of individualised activism in Chinese LGBTQ+ activism. Increasing numbers of individuals are now participating in LGBTQ+ activism directly through SNSs. This phenomenon has been documented in a few recent studies. For instance, Y. Wang et al. (2020) find that many individual accounts, including vloggers and influencers, share their personalised LGBTQ+ content on Weibo and Bilibili¹³, arguing that what they do ‘fill[s] the gap left by institutional Chinese media producers, and a cross-platform news network is established to serve both informational and civic purpose’ (p. 4879). Using Bennett and Segerberg’s (2012) concept of connective action, S. X. Chen (2020) explores Qiu Bai’s campaigns on SNSs and discovers that the activist’s personal experience of fighting homophobia spurred other individuals to share their own personalised expressions online.

Previous studies on LGBTQ+ activism in China, however, have mostly focused on non-confrontational and organisational or semi-organisational activism. This is, of course, understandable for two main reasons. Firstly, non-confrontational activism is still more prominent than confrontational activism, as Chinese LGBTQ+ organisations and individuals are constrained to a great extent in the authoritarian political context and confrontational activism is, in most cases, censored before it can be explored in detail. Secondly, individualised activism on SNSs is often much more

¹³ Bilibili is a popular Chinese website for video publishing and live streaming.

diffused than those organised activist campaigns and activities, which means that researchers may find it difficult to compile a body of data for exploration.

Therefore, I call for more attention on those confrontational and individualised forms of digitally mediated LGBTQ+ activism in China. They should not be overlooked, because not only do they take place more than ever, but also dynamics in them may differ greatly from those in non-confrontational and organisational forms of activism. Using the #IAmGay# movement – a movement characterised by confrontational activism and individual participation – as the case study of my research, I aim to contribute to the current gap in the literature of LGBTQ+ activism in China.

3.2 The political and cultural opportunities for LGBTQ+ digital activism in China

My review of the development of LGBTQ+ activism in China has mostly looked at the trajectory of activism within the Chinese LGBTQ+ community, with some brief mention of the wider political and social structures that led to those stages of development. However, the external environment of activism, especially collective action, is also argued to play significant roles in the emergence and efficiency of activism (see Eisinger, 1973; Kriesi et al., 1992; Kriesi, 1995; Meyer and Staggenborg, 1996; Meyer and Minkoff, 2004; Meyer, 2004; Schurman, 2004; Zhan and Tang, 2013; Y. Yang, 2016b). Therefore, in this section, I will further contextualise the current LGBTQ+ digital activism in China from the perspective of political opportunity structure, another concept that has been developed in social movement studies.

The theory of political opportunity structure traditionally focuses on the ‘openness’ of institutional political systems, the relationship between activists and policy makers, the involvement of elites, and the state’s oppressive capacity (McAdam, 1996). The Chinese authoritarian state, however, seems to offer little ‘openness’ through which Chinese LGBTQ+ activists can initiate collective action. Policy makers and elites are usually not closely involved in grassroots LGBTQ+ activism in China, especially after the government’s cut-off of funding from international NGOs (Hildebrandt, 2012). The state also has a strong oppressive power. Yet, as Sawyers and Meyer (1999) argue, ‘even in an unfavourable political environment’, ‘political opportunities may remain’ (p. 194). Therefore, what

opportunities are there for Chinese LGBTQ+ activists? I have found that there are at least three main opportunities for Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism. The first two are concerned with the state's roles in oppressing and supporting LGBTQ+ equality, whereas the third one is more about the social aspect that is distinctive on Chinese SNSs.

Firstly, adverse policies can spur activist mobilisation (Meyer and Minkoff, 2004; Sawyers and Meyer, 1999) and this has been the situation for Chinese LGBTQ+ activism. The Chinese government's tightening control, especially censorship, over LGBTQ+ content has repeatedly agitated Chinese LGBTQ+ people. Incidents of censorship and releases of censorship regulations that target LGBTQ+ content have spurred dissent that accumulates over time.

Secondly, the Chinese government is often ambiguous, and sometimes even self-contradictory, on certain issues, which has created space for activism in China (X. Chen, 2012). Although the attitude of the government towards LGBTQ+ activism is generally understood as negative, the government has not explicitly spoken against LGBTQ+ equality, at least not via its official channels. There have been, in fact, narratives from the government that supported LGBTQ+ equality in China.

Thirdly, as Koopmans (1999) argues, it is also worth analysing the cultural opportunity structure in which collective action occurs, as 'structural opportunities [...] do not have to be political in origin' and 'culture has a structural face too' (p. 101). Beyond the Chinese political system, what is currently happening in Chinese society can also provide forms of opportunity for Chinese LGBTQ+ activism. Despite the low tolerance toward LGBTQ+ people in the wider society, the public on Chinese SNSs is increasingly acceptant of LGBTQ+ people (Y. Wu et al., 2018; J. Zhang et al., 2020; K. Lin and Wang 2021). Such increasing acceptance provides Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism with a potential large crowd of allies.

3.2.1 Dissent spurred by censorship

Censorship is usually regarded as a powerful tool of counter-movement, especially against digital activism. This is undoubtedly correct. As Chang and Lin (2020) show:

autocracies have effectively applied internet censorship to manipulate information and demobilise civil society in reaction to the growth of ICT and

contentious global politics. [...] [A]utocratic governments have rapidly learned to enforce internet censorship when challenged by public discontent and the mobilisation of civil society [...] and] internet censorship is a pivotal tool for autocracies to suppress the development of civil society in the digital age. (p. 889)

Many scholars (e.g. Shaw and Zhang, 2018; Liao, 2019; Y. Wang et al., 2020; Chia, 2019; S. Y. Wang, 2021) have also shown that censorship significantly hinders LGBTQ+ activism in China. However, censorship of LGBTQ+ content – of both activism and cultural production – is also what frequently provokes Chinese LGBTQ+ people to express dissent and mobilise each other to pursue LGBTQ+ equality in China.

In China, media censorship targets LGBTQ+ content in forms of not only online speech but also representation in traditional media. User-generated LGBTQ+ content online is more likely to survive, as major Chinese SNSs are run by private companies, and therefore, under less direct control from the government (J. Wang, 2019). However, this does not stop online censorship, because those SNSs are still regulated by the government. LGBTQ+ activism – in fact, activism in general as I have mentioned at the beginning of this chapter – is seen as a dissenting voice from the idea of social stability and unity (C. Feng, 2013; G. Yang, 2014; Tu and Lee, 2014) and is frequently censored in the digital space.

LGBTQ+ people are also absent in Chinese traditional media. Rather than revealing hidden problems such that typical news agencies do, Chinese mainstream news outlets follow the lead of government authorities and remove dissenting voices (Tu and Lee, 2014). As a result, ‘in most cases, domestic Chinese media likely do their best to make the existence of the homosexual community into an invisible one’ (Tu and Lee, 2014, p. 996).

The Chinese film industry can be another obvious example of severe censorship. LGBTQ+ themed films or films mentioning LGBTQ+ issues are heavily censored in China. Legally, no film can be produced, distributed, exhibited, and exported in China, unless it obtains permission from the China Film Administration (CFA) supervised by the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China (PDCPC) (Y. Yang, 2016a). This means that CFA and PDCPC have the ultimate

power over film making and distribution in China and a production considered ‘inappropriate’ by them would be cancelled by force. Many Chinese LGBTQ+ film makers, therefore, have to produce LGBTQ+ films independently, underground, and distribute them via social media (Shaw and Zhang, 2018; Bao, 2018a). It is also worth noting that international films are not immune from the censorship. Not only is the importation of international films subject to permission (Y. Yang, 2016a), but those which are permitted can also be partially censored (Y. Zhou, 2015). For instance, *Bohemian Rhapsody* (2018), the biographic film of Freddie Mercury, was released in China with several minutes of footage edited out, including explicit and implicit references to Mercury’s sexuality, the diagnosis of AIDS, and an important scene in which the character comes out to his girlfriend (Bell and Allen, 2019). Similarly, Chinese television and streaming programs face censorship as well. In 2016 and 2017, the Chinese government supervised associations of media companies to draft and release two censorship regulation documents for television and online streaming programs: the General Rules for Television Series Content Production (电视剧内容制作通则) and the General Rules for Reviewing Netcasting Content (网络视听节目内容审核通则). These both instruct censorship of homosexual behaviours and relationships (Horwitz and Huang, 2016; Li and Zhang, 2017).

As Meyer and Minkoff (2004) indicate, ‘unfavourable changes in policy may also spur mobilisation, even when mobilisation is unlikely to have much noticeable effect on policy’ (p. 1462). This phenomenon has been observed in many studies (e.g. Chávez, 2011; Meyer, 1993; Staggenborg, 1991; Flesher Fominaya, 2017; Gerbaudo, 2017; Yuen, 2014). What often happens in China, especially during recent years, is that when censorship of LGBTQ+ content occurs or new regulations of censorship that target LGBTQ+ content are introduced, there would be some amount of dissent expressed on SNSs. The censored version of *Bohemian Rhapsody* was boycotted by some Chinese LGBTQ+ people and fans of Mercury. They ‘lashed out at the decision to remove the scenes from the film as part of a larger problem of silencing discourse around LGBTQ rights in China’ (Geisinger, 2019). Also, the two censorship regulation documents released in 2016 and 2017 were immediately met with dissent on SNSs (Horwitz and Huang, 2016; Li and Zhang, 2017). In particular, the General Rules for Reviewing Netcasting Content was harshly criticised by Yinhe Li, a well-known

Chinese sociologist, whose posts on Weibo were supported by numerous users before they were censored (Li and Zhang, 2017). As explained before, this document is believed to be the leading cause of Weibo's censorship of homosexual content in 2018, leading to the #IAmGay# protest being launched (Shepherd, 2018).

Hence, it is evident that while censorship of LGBTQ+ content in China indeed constrains LGBTQ+ activism, it also spurs expressions of dissent. Those expressions of dissent are crucial, as they are the first step of confrontational activism and potentially lead to collective action. It is likely that the stricter the censorship, the more resistant LGBTQ+ people will be. Even though the dissent does not escalate into collective action in most cases, it accumulates over time and builds a shared ground between Chinese LGBTQ+ people upon which collective action against the censorship can occur. Importantly, as I will expand upon later in this thesis, the #IAmGay# protest was launched because of censorship.

3.2.2 The government's ambiguity

Secondly, even though the Chinese government is, in most cases, against LGBTQ+ activism in China, it has not publicly spoken against LGBTQ+ equality. There is ambiguity regarding whether the government is in favour of or completely against LGBTQ+ equality. While it continuously implements censorship of LGBTQ+ content, which hinders the progress of LGBTQ+ equality, it has also acted to support LGBTQ+ equality on some rare occasions. Other than those mentioned earlier, e.g. the abolishment of hooliganism in 1997 (J. Wu, 2003) and the government's legislation that protects minorities from workplace discrimination and their rights of receiving equal medical treatment based on the advice from the Human Rights Council in 2013 (E. Jeffreys and Wang, 2018), the Chinese government has expressed its support for LGBTQ+ equality in China via its official media for several times.

In 2011, in a news program on China Central Television (CCTV, 中国中央电视台), a presenter condemned a renowned actress for her homophobic speech on Weibo and called for respect for the homosexual community in China (Jia, 2011). The presenter stated:

we respect the faith of individual celebrities, and we allow them to have their own point of view on issues. But, that does not mean that we agree that a person of such influence should have the power to openly discriminate against certain communities in China. There is no doubt that the sexual orientation of certain people in our midst are different from the rest of us. But they are also diligently contributing to society. Gay people, like us, have the right to exist and develop themselves in society, and this right should not be overtaken by any other concept. (quoted in Jia, 2011)

This was perhaps the first time that a state-owned television station made a statement in support of homosexuals in China.

China Daily (中国日报), a state-owned news agency, has also published articles and reports that celebrate Chinese LGBTQ+ people and address issues of inequality faced by Chinese LGBTQ+ people, including ones that document and discuss Shanghai Pride 2009 (China Daily, 2009), LGBTQ+ documentary making (W. Liu, 2012), Chinese homosexuals' family issues (Shi, 2013), anti-bullying in schools (L. Xu, 2013), stigma (J. Shan, 2014), and equal employment (Z. Wang, 2016). These articles and reports help readers to believe that not only does the government care about Chinese LGBTQ+ people, but also it supports LGBTQ+ equality in China. However, it is necessary to recognise that China Daily mostly produces English news for international readers and its agenda is set to promote a positive image of the nation (L. Zhang and Wu, 2017; Jiao, 2021) often by covering diverse societal topics (L. Chen, 2012). Thus, Jiao (2021) argues that under pressure from international and domestic human rights campaigns, China Daily's seemingly high attention on LGBTQ+ issues in China is exploited to portray China as a nation of openness, tolerance, and freedom to its foreign readership.

The above-mentioned examples in CCTV and China Daily, coupled with censorship of LGBTQ+ content, show that the Chinese government sends a mixed message to Chinese LGBTQ+ individuals and organisations. As the tightening control indicates, the Chinese government does not support LGBTQ+ liberation in China. However, in order to promote its international image and reputation as well as to pacify domestic activism, it needs to produce narratives in support of LGBTQ+ equality. As Jiao (2021) points out, this is happening because of what Puar (2017, 2013) calls

‘homonationalism’, which suggests that as western liberal values and discourse continue to dominate the globe, “acceptance” and “tolerance” for gay and lesbian subjects have become a barometer by which the right to and capacity for national sovereignty is evaluated’ (Puar, 2013, p. 336).

Despite the intention behind such narratives, they provide space for Chinese LGBTQ+ individuals and organisations to negotiate with the government. To prevent harsh international criticism, the government must not oppress Chinese LGBTQ+ people and activism in barbarous ways. Instead, the oppression is often done quietly, such as by cutting off funding, avoiding domestic news coverage, and not allowing representation in cultural products. The way that the government deals with domestic LGBTQ+ issues, as called by many, is the ‘Three No’s Policy’: no approval (不支持), no disapproval (不反对), and no promotion (不提倡) (Hung, 2011; Y. Wu, et al., 2018; X. Han et al., 2019). Under the circumstances, LGBTQ+ activism can survive and slowly develop in China, albeit being greatly constrained.

3.2.3 Increasing public acceptance on SNSs

Lastly, the public on Chinese SNSs is increasingly accepting of LGBTQ+ people and supportive of LGBTQ+ equality in China (Y. Wu et al., 2018; Y. Xie and Peng, 2017). Such increasing public acceptance on SNSs means that Chinese LGBTQ+ activism, especially digital activism, can potentially mobilise a considerably large crowd of allies.

In the wider Chinese society, the subject of homosexuality is still treated as a taboo. As studies have shown, overall, there are only about 20% of Chinese people who consider homosexuality acceptable (Y. Wu et al., 2018; Y. Xie and Peng, 2017). Y. Xie and Peng (2017) indicate that people’s exposure to relevant information on the Internet is one of the major contributors to their acceptance of homosexuality. Based on such an understanding, Y. Wu et al. (2018) further show that active use of the Internet, particularly SNSs, serves as a de-stigmatising mechanism that greatly improves people’s view on LGBTQ+ groups in China. This partially explains why the younger generation under 30 years old, who grew up with using the Internet in China, are generally more supportive of LGBTQ+ equality (Y. Wu et al., 2018; Y. Xie and Peng, 2017). Meanwhile, those findings also correspond to a national survey on

Chinese people's social attitude towards LGBTQ+ expressions and issues conducted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in collaboration with Peking University and the Beijing LGBT Centre. This survey shows that Chinese people's consumption of LGBTQ+ information online – the main way of consumption due to the lack of gender and sexual education and appropriate representation in mainstream media – leads to their higher acceptance of LGBTQ+ people (UNDP, 2016).

Developed through their use of SNSs, people's awareness, acceptance, and support of LGBTQ+ issues and people are preconditions on which their identity as LGBTQ+ allies can be constructed (Penney, 2015; Grzanka et al., 2015). Heterosexual allies play a crucial role in LGBTQ+ activism (Duhigg et al., 2010), as they can create spaces for and accelerate the process of LGBTQ+ activism in a privileged position (Ji, 2007). The increasing acceptance of LGBTQ+ people amongst the public on Chinese SNSs, therefore, cultivates potential heterosexual allies of LGBTQ+ digital activism, whose force is greatly advantageous to advocating LGBTQ+ equality in China.

3.3 LGBTQ+ digital activism in China and the slacktivist critique

After reviewing the development and current opportunities of LGBTQ+ digital activism in China, at the end of this chapter I shall also briefly discuss LGBTQ+ digital activism in relation to the slacktivist critique. Evidently, there is no need to have an extensive discussion of the applicability of the slacktivist critique to LGBTQ+ digital activism in China. The answer is undoubtedly that the critique does not apply in most cases. This is because firstly, the slacktivist critique is unlikely to be applicable in the Chinese authoritarian context where performing offline confrontational activism, especially large-scaled collective action, is often difficult; and secondly, as I have showed, the use of SNSs in LGBTQ+ activism in China has been previously studied to be effective in building the Chinese LGBTQ+ community (T. Zhou, 2018; J. Cao and Lu, 2014), increasing the visibility and awareness of LGBTQ+ people and issues (Y. Wang et al., 2020; Shaw and Zhang, 2018; Y. Yang, 2019), and negotiating with the state on policies (Y. Yang, 2019; S. X. Chen, 2020; Liao, 2019). Thus, instead of the applicability of the slacktivist critique, the effects that LGBTQ+ digital activism can have in the Chinese context should be the heart of the discussion.

However, there are also some studies that show limitations of LGBTQ+ digital activism in China. They mainly argue that the effect of online LGBTQ+ advocacy and mobilisation does not translate into the offline realm. For instance, Chase (2012) argues that in conducting LGBTQ+ activism in China, there is a tendency that activists and organisations are overly relying on the Internet, which limits their action's effectiveness in improving the public attitude and gaining more support amongst those who are not active users of SNSs. Hence, Chase (2012) suggests that it is necessary for Chinese LGBTQ+ activism to employ a new strategy that involves more access and influence of traditional media. X. Han et al. (2019) state that there is a phenomenon of 'what happens online stays online' in the Chinese LGBTQ+ community, i.e. many Chinese LGBTQ+ individuals depend on SNSs to seek support, yet the support that they receive online often does not improve their offline wellbeing. Although most of those studies correspond to the logic of the slacktivist critique by assessing effectiveness of digital activism by external and offline changes, they indicate that the effectiveness of Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism is still a concern for many, including LGBTQ+ individuals, activists, activist organisations, and scholars.

To explore collective identity (re)formation in Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism, therefore, my research assesses the effectiveness of Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism by focusing on internal changes that occur in the digital space. In the current Chinese political, social, and cultural context, how do minor political actions online shape participants' collective identity? What is the implication of collective identity (re)formation to the Chinese LGBTQ+ community? Those are the central questions in this research.

Chapter 4 Methodology

In order to address the research questions, a case study was carefully chosen, and the research methodology needs to be discussed. However, prior to the specifics of research design, it is essential to refer to the concept of networked publics that lays the foundation for conducting research on SNSs. The concept was created by Ito (2008) to describe ‘a set of social, cultural, and technological developments that have accompanied the growing engagement with digitally networked media’ (p. 2). Based on Ito’s (2008) manuscript, boyd (2008) pinpoints that:

social network sites allow publics to gather. At the same time, by serving as a space where speech takes place, they are also publics themselves. [...] The types of publics that gather on social network sites and the types of publics that such sites support are deeply affected by the mediated nature of interaction. (p. 125)

The architecture of SNSs differentiates from that of traditional unmediated publics, which provides four affordances that configure networked publics (boyd, 2008; boyd, 2010). Those four affordances are:

Persistence: Online expressions are automatically recorded and archived.
Replicability: Content made out of bits can be duplicated.
Scalability: The potential visibility of content in networked publics is great.
Searchability: Content in networked publics can be accessed through search.
(boyd, 2010, p. 46)

Persistence and searchability, in particular, suggest that what has happened on SNSs is kept in its original form and location, and therefore, is accessible regardless of its time of happening. Such affordances, then, make it possible for researchers to explore expressions, activities, and spaces on SNSs for data collection unrestricted by time and space (Nuridin, 2017). This research is designed on such a premise.

Based on the case study of the #IAmGay# movement, I have explored previous empirical research – of both slacktivism and explicit forms of digital activism on Weibo – to find suitable research methods that would help in answering the research

questions. Conclusively, this research adopts content analysis, digital ethnographic observation and interview, a combined approach of both quantitative and qualitative research methods. By doing so, I am able to depict and analyse slacktivism and Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism in a comprehensive way that previous research has not attempted to do.

Therefore, in this chapter, I will firstly explain the methodological reasons for choosing my case study. Then, after a brief review of research methods that scholars have commonly used in the field, I will explain how my approach of combined methods is suitable for this research, both separately and as a whole, and specifically how I conducted the research by using those methods. However, there are still limitations of the research design, which will be listed. Finally, the ethical issues involved in conducting this research will also be discussed, followed by a reflection of my positionality in conducting this research.

4.1 Case study

The #IAmGay# movement, the case study chosen, is a series of LGBTQ+ digital political and social activities including at least one protest and everyday activities that happened across 2018 and 2019 on Weibo. The #IAmGay# protest, which marked the beginning of the movement, was launched in April 2018, where participants of various backgrounds protested Weibo which had decided to censor homosexual content. After the #IAmGay# protest, the hashtag was continuously used by users on Weibo, who created a virtual community based on it for social purposes and performed everyday activism by using it. According to interviewees who participated in this research, the movement, especially the #IAmGay# protest, is seen by many as a milestone in Chinese LGBTQ+ history because of its large scale, rare success, and significant impact.

There are several reasons why the #IAmGay# movement was chosen to be the case study of my research. Firstly, the movement was mostly based on a SNS: the protest was caused by Weibo's censorship; the participants were mobilised, took action, and interacted with each other on Weibo; the negotiation between the participants, Weibo, and the government was through Weibo; and the outcomes were also mostly designed and attained on Weibo. This benefits the research to focus on what happened

in the digital world, rather than attempting to explain digital activism when it is, in many cases, tightly linked to offline activism, especially when it is used to accelerate the progress of offline activism. For instance, many activists use SNSs to communicate with each other, disseminate frontline information, or organise movements on the street, but real-life action may still be more important for them. As this research aims to precisely explore slacktivism – the particular critique of digital activism – in relation to collective identity, choosing the #IAmGay# movement as the case study avoids indulgence in the complexity of interaction between digital and offline activism. However, it is essential to acknowledge that social movements like the #IAmGay# movement are still influenced by what happens offline, reflecting offline social and political atmospheres. Therefore, the intention underlined here is not to ignore real-life factors involved but to focus on the digital side so as to address the key issues in this research.

Secondly, identities seem to play a significant role in the movement. Individual and social identities, namely sexual and gender identities, were a significant part in the movement structure. The hashtag itself is a statement of identity claim. Through posting with the hashtag, homosexual participants were publicly claiming their identity, whereas many participants of other sexual and gender identities, such as heterosexual, bisexual, transgender etc., which seemingly made up a large percentage of the collective, also claimed their own identities in various ways. A format of post used commonly amongst participants who were not homosexuals was ‘I am not [gay], I am straight/bi/trans and ...’. Rather than using a hashtag directly against Weibo, for example something like #BoycottWeibo#, it seems that the participants were primarily trying to validate their existence in society. It seems that the collective identity formed in the movement was based on participants’ individual and social identities, especially gender and sexual identities. Therefore, how was the collective identity formed? Why did participants form such a collective identity? Addressing these questions will help in understanding not only the dynamics in this particular movement, but also a collective identity (re)formation located within LGBTQ+ activism in China.

Thirdly, the hashtag was continuously used after the protest and is still being used for multiple purposes. As the slacktivist critique argues that slacktivists are less or even completely unwilling to engage in subsequent political activities due to the

fulfilment of their eagerness to participate (Morozov, 2009), in a discussion of slacktivism it is important to examine whether or not slacktivists continue to participate in subsequent political activities. By observing #IAmGay# after the protest, I am able to discover how users engaged in subsequent activities. Meanwhile, the fact that the hashtag has been transformed into a community of Chinese LGBTQ+ people is also a dimension that is worthy of investigation – that is how digital social interaction on a daily basis can shape participants’ collective identity and their ways of political participation.

Lastly and necessarily, forthcoming and ongoing collective actions on Chinese SNSs are usually severely censored (King et al., 2013; King et al., 2017), and therefore, it is extremely difficult to keep record of what has happened in them. For instance, in the movement of #Metoo in China, many feminists’ SNS accounts were deleted (Zeng, 2018). To avoid censorship, Chinese activists had to change #Metoo into many different versions¹⁴. Due to this, the #Metoo movement in China became rather difficult to research. Although #IAmGay# also suffered from censorship, thanks to the participants’ effort and achievement, most of it is still accessible. This means that, as a researcher, I am able to look back to where and when it started and explore its step-by-step development. In the majority of other online movements on Chinese SNSs, researchers must take extra effort to do so, if it is possible at all. Therefore, the accessibility of #IAmGay# made itself feasible for academic research.

4.2 Research methods

Many approaches have been adopted to study slacktivism worldwide and digital activism on Chinese SNSs. Certainly, for different aims, different methods can be adopted. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are commonly used to study activities on SNSs. While quantitative methods are useful in ‘identifying large-scale patterns’, qualitative methods can help in understanding ‘meaning-making, placing technology use into specific social contexts, places and times’ (Marwick, 2013, p. 119).

¹⁴ The different versions of #Metoo include #Iamtoo# (#我也是#), #MetooinChina# (#Metoo 在中国 #), #RiceBunny# (#米兔#, the pronunciation of ‘me too’ in Chinese, which literally means ‘rice bunny’), and, both cleverly and ridiculously, the emojis of a bowl of rice and a bunny (Zeng, 2018; Camus, 2019).

To choose a suitable approach, I have reviewed previous research designs of similar subjects.

Most previous research of slacktivism seems to favour a quantitative approach. Survey has been the predominant method (e.g. Christensen, 2012; Breuer and Farooq, 2012; Štětka and Mazák, 2014; Jones, 2015; Leyva, 2016; Kwak et al., 2018; Foster et al., 2019), followed by big-data analysis (e.g. Waugh et al., 2013; Cook et al., 2014; Howard et al., 2016) and experiment (e.g. Y. Lee and Hsieh, 2013; Kristofferson et al., 2014). Such a phenomenon is mainly caused by their research objective, that is, to directly examine whether slacktivism can lead to subsequent political participation, which is one of the most important aspects of the slacktivist critique. Statistics are indeed effective in revealing the correlation between slacktivism and subsequent political participation or willingness to participate in the future. However, the quantitative approach may be ineffective in closely examining many aspects of slacktivism, such as reasons of participation, strategies of mobilisation and action, structures of organisation, and outcomes, which are often addressed in digital activism and social movement studies. Qualitative methods are, therefore, more recently used by an increasing number of scholars to examine slacktivism. For instance, B. G. Smith et al. (2019) use in-depth interview to explore slacktivists' strategical communication on SNSs and Dennis (2019) uses ethnography and interview to unfold the organisational use of slacktivism. Both B. G. Smith et al. (2019) and Dennis (2019) have presented strong findings against the slacktivist critique, as rather than answering a simplified question by yes or no, they show that slacktivism can be complex in various aspects and contribute to the process of both online and offline activism.

Meanwhile, previous research of digital activism on Chinese SNSs has used diverse methods. Quantitative methods, such as social network analysis (e.g. R. Huang and Sun, 2014) and big-data content analysis (e.g. Tong and Zuo, 2014), have been used to present overviews of activity patterns and discursive themes. On the other hand, qualitative methods, such as interview (e.g. J. Liu, 2011, 2016; Brunner, 2017; S. X. Chen, 2020; Hou, 2020; Z. Yu, 2021), digital ethnography (e.g. K. Fang and Repnikova, 2018; Mao, 2020; Hou, 2020) and textual analysis (e.g. Brunner 2017; Liao, 2019; S. X. Chen, 2020), have been used to address more specific questions.

Importantly, censorship creates difficulties in researching activism on Chinese SNSs, which should be considered when choosing research methods. T. Zhu et al. (2013) examine over two million posts from practically identified ‘sensitive’ users on Weibo and discover that 4.5% of them were censored, and approximately 30% of censorship happened within 30 minutes and 90% of censorship happened within 24 hours after the posts were published. The fact that censorship happens so fast on Weibo leaves researchers only a little time to collect a complete set of data. Realistically, most data sets collected directly from Weibo, especially those focusing on explicit forms of digital activism, are incomplete. Therefore, certain quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, for example big data collection and digital ethnography, are affected. This is partly why a lot of empirical research of digital activism in China chooses interview as their primary or supplementary research method. Overall, W. Chen (2014) suggests that when researching political participation on Chinese SNSs, ‘mixed methods that combine online data with surveys or interviews [...] may help to present a more comprehensive picture with greater depth and granularity’ (p. 5).

Drawing on experience and concerns from previous research of both slacktivism and Chinese digital activism and based on the nature of the chosen case study, this research, therefore, adopts mixed research methods: content analysis and digital ethnographic observation and interview. Following the concurrent transformative research design model from Creswell et al. (2003), this research collected quantitative and qualitative data at the same time; the integration of data happened in the analysis phase; quantitative data were analysed first; and qualitative data analysis is the emphasis.

While the quantitative analysis is used to provide basic understanding of the movement, digital ethnographic observation and interview were chosen based on the idea of methodological triangulation. Triangulation refers to the research design that uses more than one perspective to explore the same research question (Denzin, 2015; Wilson, 2014; Heale and Forbes, 2013; Thurmond, 2001). This can be methodological triangulation (using more than one research method), theoretical triangulation (using more than one theoretical framework), data triangulation (using more than one source of data), and investigator triangulation (using more than one researcher) (Wilson, 2014; Thurmond, 2001). ‘The combination of multiple methodological practices’, as Denzin

(2015) argues, ‘adds authenticity, trustworthiness, credibility, rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry’, which is the reason I chose to use both observation and interview in this research.

Firstly, content analysis, specifically quantitative content analysis, as the first step of investigation, was used to identify some key facts in the case study, which then also helped in guiding the analysis of digital ethnography data. The quantity of engagements and interactions, including original posts, reposts, comments, and likes, of #IAmGay# on Weibo is numerous. One news report states that around 170,000 users participated in the #IAmGay# protest during the first day (Michell, 2018). This means that directly navigating the action undertaken by the collective consisting of individual users in a qualitative way requires a tremendous amount of effort and cannot be achieved without a basic and general understanding of the movement. Under such circumstances, quantitative content analysis is essential, as it can provide an overview of action patterns and themes upon which qualitative analysis can be conducted.

Secondly, building on the quantitative analysis, digital ethnographic observation was used in this research. The topic of formation and reformation of collective identity through action in the #IAmGay# movement can be addressed mainly by this method. The formation of collective identity, as Melucci (1989) contends, is the process by which movement organisations and activists identify a common belief of relationships, and such a belief is undoubtedly an unquantifiable attribute. By observing participants’ action embedded in the content of posts, reposts, and comments through which relationships were formed on Weibo, I can also explore other aspects of the movement, such as the organisational structure and mobilisation and action strategies that are influenced by the collective identity formed.

Thirdly, interviews were also used. Due to the time gap between the #IAmGay# movement and this research, Weibo’s censorship and users’ self-censorship may have caused some information to no longer be accessible on Weibo. Apart from that, some actions that happened between participants, such as direct messaging, are not publicly displayed on Weibo. Those actions, however, can sometimes be important to collective identity formation, as they contribute to internal communication within the movement organisation (Treré, 2015). Interview, therefore, can be useful to obtain those types of data from participants directly. Additionally, collective action reflects societal

conditions where conflicts emerge (Melucci, 1995; Rose, 1997; Wall, 2007). Interview can also be used to collect data of participants' recognition of conflicts outside of social movements, for instance, how participants of the #IAmGay# movement think that conflicts in the wider society were manifested in and linked to the movement.

Combining three methods and applying them to the case study, this research can effectively address the research questions and analyse slacktivism and Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism through the lens of collective identity in a more comprehensive way compared to previous research of similar subjects. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods is hardly seen in any previous study. By doing this, this research can 'gain perspectives from the different types of data or from different levels' (Creswell et al., 2003) of the case study. Furthermore, both collective action and everyday activism in both explicit and implicit forms – during the #IAmGay# protest period and the post-protest period – were examined. Commonly, research tends to focus on either collective action or everyday activism in either explicit or implicit forms. This research, however, covers examination of more types of digital activism in the particular context of China.

To present the research in a clearer way and because of different focuses in the two periods of the #IAmGay# movement, my analysis was conducted separately for the #IAmGay# protest period and the post-protest period. In the following section, I will explain in detail how the research was conducted using the methods, including data collection and data analysis.

4.2.1 Content analysis

Data collection

To collect data for quantitative content analysis, a Chinese web crawling software package, *GooSeeker*, was employed. The software has been used and proven efficient in many academic studies (e.g. S. Shan et al., 2021; J. Liu and Gao, 2021; Io and Lee, 2020; C. Fang et al., 2020; Y. Wang et al., 2019b; Z. Wu and Lu, 2017; M. Xiao and Yi, 2016) for collecting a large quantity of data especially in Chinese and on micro-blogging styled SNSs including Weibo and Twitter. With the software, I was able to collect every original post and repost that contains the hashtag #IAmGay# on Weibo

during certain time periods. Comments are, unfortunately, not included, as only original posts and reposts are displayed when the hashtag is searched. Regardless, original posts and reposts provide sufficient information that can lay the foundation for further qualitative analysis in which observation of comments is included. Other than the textual content of those posts and reposts, additional information, including usernames, time of publishing, and numbers of engagements, was also collected. Then, the data were stored in spreadsheets for analysis.

Two data sets were collected, which are for the #IAmGay# protest period and the post-protest period. Firstly, the data set for the #IAmGay# protest period of the movement, from the 13th to the 16th April 2018, consists of in total 22,111 original posts and reposts. Figure 4.1 shows the numbers of them of each day.

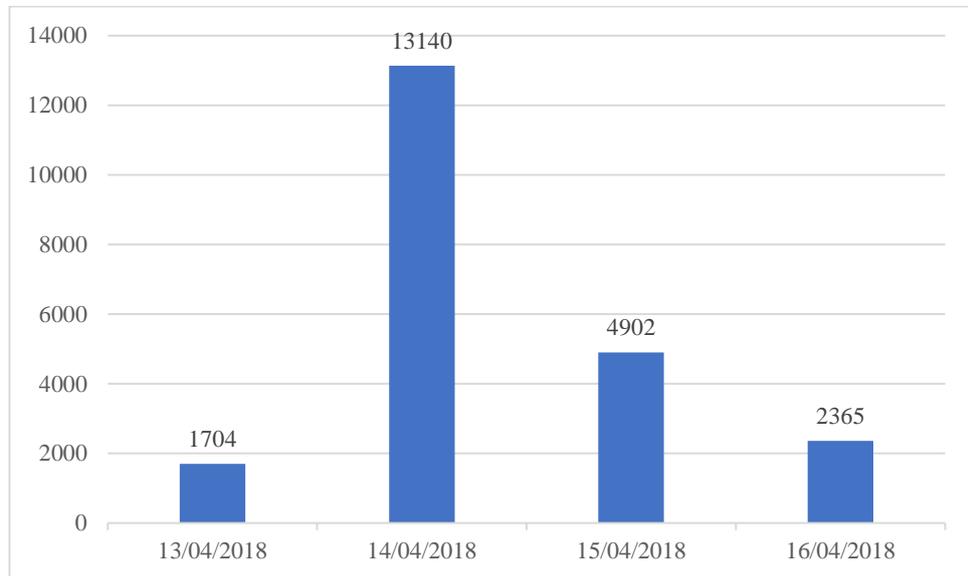


Figure 4.1 numbers of original posts and reposts containing the hashtag #IAmGay# from the 13th to the 16th April 2018 on Weibo (collected on the 28th February 2019)

Secondly, for the post-protest period of the movement, I collected data from the 17th April 2018 to the end of April 2019, slightly more than one year after the protest. In total, 48,393 original posts and reposts were collected. Figure 4.2 shows the numbers of them of each month.

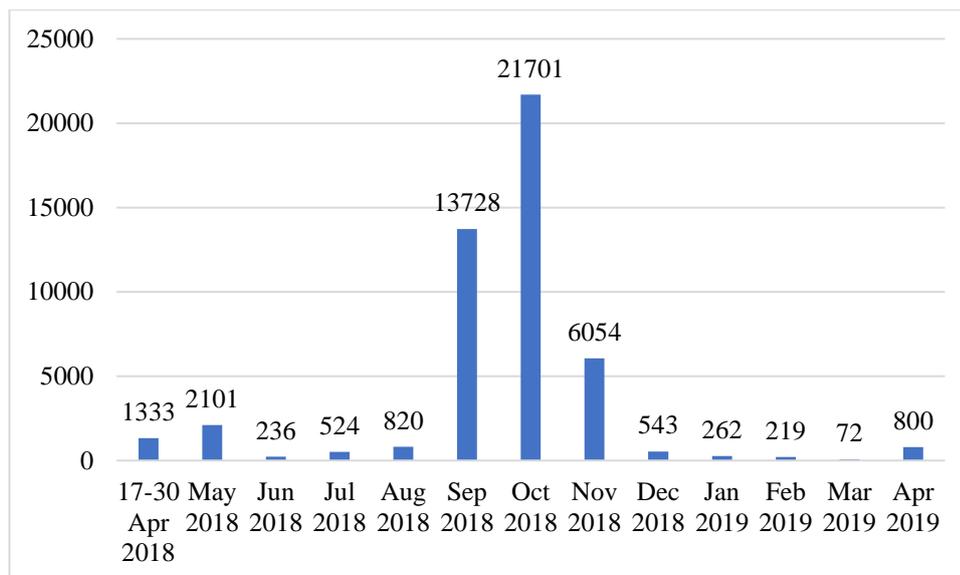


Figure 4.2 numbers of original posts and reposts containing the hashtag #IAmGay# from the 17th April 2018 to the 30th April 2019 on Weibo (collected on the 21st October 2019)

Data analysis

The two sets of data were analysed in two ways. The first is through direct comparison between numbers, which was done simply in the spreadsheets themselves. For the protest period, I compared the numbers of engagements of the data to find the most engaged posts and reposts. In doing so, I attempted to identify potential influential users, as they were likely to construct a soft leadership in the protest (Gerbaudo, 2012). Those identified influential posts, reposts, and users were later used to assist qualitative analysis. For the post-protest period, the comparison focused on the numbers of posts and reposts between each month. This is because a sudden increase of a monthly number may suggest that the hashtag was used for a new incident or cause, which then can be helpful to navigate a rather long period of time in the observation data analysis.

Textual analysis was the second method employed and was done through *Sketch Engine*. Sketch Engine is a leading web-based corpus tool (Kilgarriff et al., 2014) that can be used to ‘analyse authentic texts of billions of words (text corpora) to identify instantly what is typical in language and what is rare, unusual or emerging language’ (Sketch Engine, n.d.). The tool has been used widely to conduct computer-based linguistic studies on large corpora extracted from SNSs (e.g. Essam and Abdo, 2021; Georgakopoulou, 2021; Florio et al., 2020; Opeibi, 2019; Potts, 2015; McEnery

et al., 2015). It also supports Chinese language (C. Huang et al., 2005; Kilgariff et al., 2014) and has been used effectively in Chinese studies (e.g. Ahrens and Jiang, 2020; S. Wang and Huang, 2017; Shih and Hsieh, 2016; C. Huang et al., 2015).

Sketch Engine provides me with a wide range of approaches to analyse the data, among which I decided to use *keywords* and *collocation*. With the help of the tool, I firstly identified *keywords* that appear most frequently in both data sets of the protest and the post-protest periods. The information was then interpreted to find discursive themes with a focus on collective identity. Then, since collective identity is the process through which participants of collective action identify relationships between ‘we’ and ‘others’ (Melucci, 1989; Hunt et al., 1994; Snow, 2001), particular nouns that may refer to the ‘others’ in the keyword list of the protest period were extracted and put back into the tool to test *collocation*. Collocation tests revealed the context of those nouns by finding other words that frequently collocate with them. Such contexts were interpreted to find some basic relational and emotional attributions that participants had towards certain organisations and institutions during the protest.

4.2.2 Digital ethnographic observation

Data collection

To collect data by using digital ethnographic observation, it was necessary to firstly identify the ‘field’ in which I could conduct my observation. Unlike traditional ethnography when researchers have to go to physical locations to conduct their fieldwork, digital ethnography requires researchers to enter virtual fields by only watching and reading on their screens (Varis, 2014). ‘Field sites are accessible and data [are] available for the ethnographer potentially all the time’ (Varis, 2014, p. 63). Such facts enabled me as a researcher to remotely access and collect data of the #IAmGay# movement on Weibo. Since the movement is hashtag based, I could easily search the hashtag to access all publicly displayed posts containing it (see Figure 4.3 for the searching interface). By clicking on the ‘repost’ and ‘comment’ buttons, I was then able to access interactions between movement participants. The filter function also provided me with the means to choose the time period needed, i.e. the protest period from the 13th to the 16th April 2018 and the post-protest period from the 17th

April 2018 to the 30th April 2019. As a result, I identified the search result page as the field for observation.

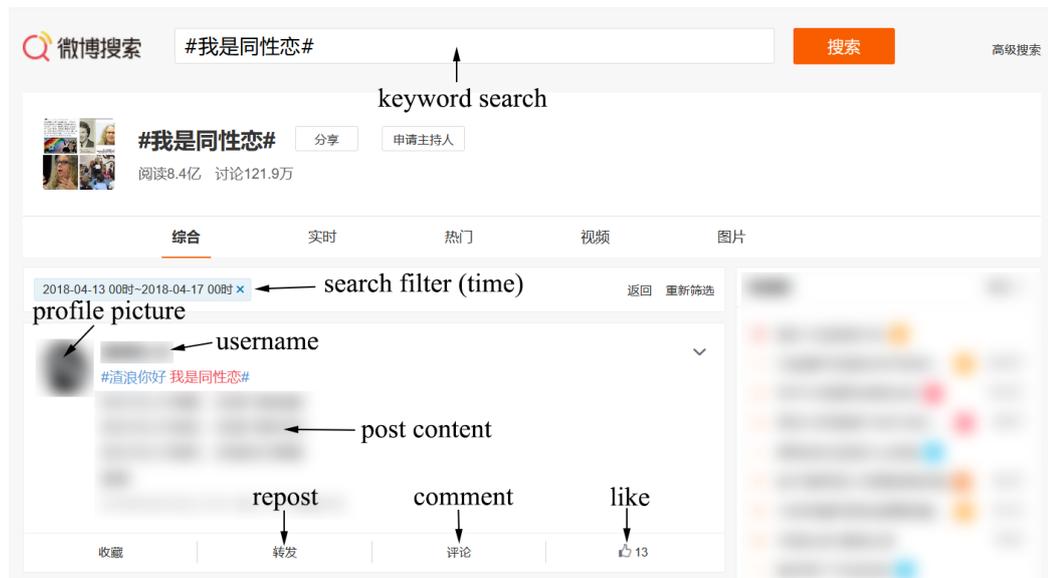


Figure 4.3 The search result page of #IAMGay# on Weibo

Following this, my observation focused on two main aspects within the field. First, the content of posts was unquestionably the largest part that constituted the movement. Second, interactions based on reposts and comments formed relationships between movement participants. Both aspects are predominantly text-based, yet other forms including emojis, images, and videos were also observed. Observation was done for both the protest period and the post-protest period of the movement. Fieldnotes were made while observing, supplemented by screenshots that helped to record important information. The fieldnotes and screenshots together, then, form my observation data.

Data analysis

To analyse the observation data, I used *Nvivo*, a software that has been developed and commonly used in academic studies for qualitative data analysis (Welsh, 2002; Hilal and Alabri, 2013; Jackson and Bazeley, 2019). Two coding sheets were employed respectively for data of the protest period and the post-protest period (see the complete coding sheets in [Appendix](#)). This was because I predicted that participants acted in noticeably different ways during the two periods, as once participants had achieved their goal in the first protest, it seems reasonable for them to stop protesting and change

the usage of the hashtag. Both coding sheets were refined throughout the process of analysis to ensure clearer interpretation of the data that serves to answer the research questions. Some previous findings from content analysis were also used to effectively design the coding sheets and understand the data.

For the protest period, the coding sheet was designed based on the concept of collective identity (Melucci, 1989, 1995; Flesher Fominaya, 2010a) and its framing theory (Hunt et al., 1994), emphasising the elements of collective identity formed amongst the participants. Namely, two major code types, 'we' and 'others', are used. Within the 'we' type, attention is paid to '*social groups*' that form the collective, including '*gay men*', '*lesbians*', '*bisexual and other sexual minorities*', '*transgender and other gender non-conforming groups*', and '*heterosexuals*', as well as '*framing strategies*' that were deployed by participants to mobilise such a collective, including '*inclusive discourse*', '*personal narratives*' and '*audio-visual approach*'. Similarly, within the 'others' type, two sub-types, '*antagonists*' and '*audience*', are included. The sub-type of 'antagonists' is then further specified as '*Weibo*', '*the state*', and '*the society*', as well as '*goals and strategies*' that correspond with them.

For the post-protest period, the coding sheet focuses on various subsequent usages of the hashtag, consisting of two major code types, '*everyday activism*' and '*collective action*'. Sub-types of 'everyday activism' include '*virtual community building*', '*personal stories and expressions*', and '*discussion of rights and equality*', whereas 'collective action' is classified as '*cooperating with offline action*' and '*online action*'.

4.2.3 Interview

Data collection

In order to recruit interview participants who had engaged in the protest, I posted a call for participants on Weibo. The Voice of Comrade assisted in spreading the call. In the end, 41 participants were interviewed via phone calls and interviews were from 15 minutes to one hour. However, two of the participants had not used the hashtag before and were not familiar with the uses of the hashtag. Therefore, the final data were yielded from 39 interviews (see Table 4.1 in [Appendix](#) for the list of interview

participants and their gender and sexual self-identifications). Interviews were recorded and then transcribed. The transcriptions were saved in *Nvivo* for later analysis.

The interview format was semi-structured, which means that a few questions were prepared beforehand, and further questions were asked based on participants' response during the interview. In doing so, I was 'allowed more flexibility to digress and to probe based on interactions during the interview', as well as 'to discover the respondent's experience and interpretation of reality, and access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words' (Blee and Taylor, 2002, p. 92-93). The prepared questions centred around three aspects of the participant's background and experience (see the list of interview questions in [Appendix](#)): firstly, the participant's identity including both gender and sexual identities, secondly, details of action that the participant took by using the hashtag, and thirdly, the participant's subsequent engagement with relevant issues.

Data analysis

A coding sheet was designed to analyse the interview data (see the complete coding sheet in [Appendix](#)). Since interview was used because of methodological triangulation, a significant part of the coding sheet is in correspondence with the coding sheets used for observation data analysis. However, framing, strategies, and goals are not emphasised here on the individual participant level, because they are decided by the networked crowd in connective action (Bennett et al., 2014). Meanwhile, the interview data also includes crucial information of participants' experience and opinions that cannot be fully observed online, situating online activities in a wider context of the offline world. Therefore, parts of the coding sheet are dedicated to topics that connect the online with the offline. As for the coding sheets used for observation data analysis, this coding sheet was also refined throughout the process of analysis.

Specifically, the coding sheet is divided into two sections, '*protest*' and '*post-protest*'. Within the '*protest*' section, the coding is based on the elements of collective identity, namely, '*we*' and '*others*'. '*Solidarity between social groups on Weibo*' and '*solidarity between social groups offline*' are sub-type codes of '*we*'. '*Others*' is again specified as '*antagonists*' including '*Weibo*', '*the state*', and '*the society*', and '*audience*'. The '*post-protest*' section consists of codes '*influence of participation*',

‘subsequent uses of the hashtag’, and *‘subsequent action taken for relevant issues’*. ‘Subsequent uses of the hashtag’ includes *‘everyday activism’* and *‘collective action’*, whereas ‘subsequent action taken for relevant issues’ includes *‘online action’* and *‘offline action’*.

4.2.4 Limitations

Although the research was designed to comprehensively explore the case study, there are limitations embedded in the research design and they should be acknowledged. By acknowledging the limitations, I understand that there are possible shortcomings of the research. They are caused by obstacles that are often unavoidable and ought to be reasonably addressed. There are three main limitations, which will be discussed for their respective impact on the research.

Firstly, the most significant limitation of the research is concerned with censorship’s impact in data collection. As emphasised before, censorship on Weibo targets content that is regarded as sensitive and often happens within a rather short time after the content is published (T. Zhu et al., 2013). In particular, collective action related content is severely censored (King et al., 2013; King et al., 2014). There is no doubt that the #IAmGay# movement – both the protest and other daily activities – suffered from censorship. Dalton (2018) reports that more than 150,000 comments might have been deleted by Weibo by the 15th April. Liao (2019) compares around 800 posts between the beginning of the protest and after the protest and finds that a quarter of them were deleted, either by Weibo or users themselves. Self-censorship is certainly involved as well for various reasons. Apart from the #IAmGay# protest, Weibo’s censorship and users’ self-censorship may also happen during the post-protest period. Therefore, the fact that the content analysis and observation data were not collected real-time, i.e. at the moment when posts, reposts, and comments were published, causes the data sets to be incomplete. There is also no possible way for the researcher to fully restore the data of the movement.

As a result, the analysis is only based on data that was still accessible at the time. Regardless, the amount of data collected for content analysis and observed posts, reposts and comments is still relatively large. The data are sufficient to identify key elements, such as of collective identity, framing strategies and subsequent political

engagements, in this research, especially with the help of interview data. Additionally, news reports were also used as an alternative source for some particularly important information that was no longer accessible at the time, e.g. Zhudingzhen's posts by which the protest was launched.

A second limitation is the fact that the interview data may lack representativeness of the participant demographic. This was caused by the nature of the online movement and the process of participant recruitment. Discussing the importance of representativeness in qualitative interview, Brinkmann (2013) claims that:

[i]n most quantitative studies, the goal is to obtain a representative sample, which may enable researchers to generalise from the sample to the general population. This can also be a goal in qualitative research, but because most qualitative projects aim for thorough analyses in depth – rather than larger and broader analyses – they often employ other sampling strategies. [...] Sometimes qualitative interviewers do not have the luxury of choosing a sampling strategy, but must stick to the respondents that they are able to recruit. (p. 57)

The situation that Brinkmann (2013) discusses occurred in this research regarding sampling interview participants. The participant population of the #IAmGay# movement is likely huge and there is no exact number of it, even a rough one. This means that to identify a sample size that can be considered big enough to generalise participants' experience is practically impossible. Furthermore, to recruit interviewees, I did not have the opportunity to select and had to rely on volunteers. In addition, the interviewees didn't disclose much information about themselves prior to interviews. For these reasons, the interviewee sample was not a representative one. Therefore, the interview method used in this research may not produce generalisable findings about participants' experience of Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism.

However, the impact of not having a representative sample is not significant on this research. This is because, firstly, interview is not the only research method. It serves to provide more information that is no longer available on Weibo because of censorship and links online activities with the offline world. The data analysis is intended to be in-depth, rather than broad, which is the same case in Brinkmann's

(2013) discussion. Secondly, the composition of the sample has a certain high level of inclusiveness. The final sample includes people of various gender and sexual identities, such as man, woman, transgender, homosexual, bisexual, pansexual and heterosexual. This is considered to be particularly important, as the core of the movement is about the visibility of LGBTQ+ people in China.

The third limitation in this research is concerned with the representation of the data in the following data analysis chapters. Most of the data, especially those of content analysis and interview, are in Chinese. This means that there is a translation process involved in representing the data. This process often entails problems that need to be carefully addressed. Birbili (2000) identifies several crucial problems in such a process and suggests that:

researchers have to make a number of translation-related decisions. Words which exist in one language but not in another, concepts which are not equivalent in different cultures, idiomatic expressions and/or differences among languages in grammatical and syntactical structures are issues which call for very specific decisions. These decisions along with factors such as, for example, who the researcher or her translators are and what they 'know' have a direct impact on the quality of the findings of the research and the resulting reports.

Following Birbili's (2000) suggestion, I have made three translation-related decisions. First, data analysis should be conducted with the data in the original Chinese form, rather than in translated English. By doing so, I was able to directly interpret the data as a native Chinese speaker. Second, when representing the data, the data are translated by me in the first place. This is because I have sufficient knowledge of not only the #IAmGay# movement but also Chinese LGBTQ+ and digital cultures. However, I am neither a professional translator nor a native English speaker, and this to some extent prevented me from making the translation more accessible and understandable while delivering its original meaning. Therefore, the third decision is to have a native English speaker who can work with me to improve my translation. This ensures that the representation of data is as accurate and understandable as possible.

However, even perfect translation, which is probably never the case, may not authentically represent data due to epistemological differences between cross-cultural contexts where knowledge is produced in rather different ways (Temple, 1997). Considering such an issue, this research acknowledges that there must be some loss of authenticity and meanings during the translation process of data representation, but that the impact is minimised and should not cause any misunderstanding of the movement on the whole.

4.3 Research ethics

There are ethical issues undoubtedly involved in the research and they should be necessarily addressed. Therefore, in this section, following Townsend and Wallace's (2016) ethical guide on conducting research on SNSs, I will discuss several ethics related issues identified in this research as well as decisions and actions that I made regarding each of them. They are: 1) whether SNSs are treated as public spaces where users' data can be used for research without informed consent, 2) to what extent the data may contain sensitive information that needs to be assessed for its potential risk of harm, 3) anonymity, and 4) informed consent.

4.3.1 Public or private?

There has been a continuous discussion about privacy on SNSs and such a discussion has also been extended to ethics surrounding conducting research on SNSs. At the beginning of this chapter, it is mentioned that the concept of networked publics is used to describe the configuration of publics on SNSs (boyd, 2008; boyd, 2010). However, this does not necessarily suggest that all forms of expression and interaction on SNSs and all inches and bytes of SNSs are public. The boundary between the public and the private can often be rather indistinct on SNSs (Fuchs, 2018). For instance, a publicly accessible Facebook group may treat the content on their group page as private. Furthermore, content generated by users on SNSs, even though it is publicly displayed, may not be intended to be collected as data for research. This has become particularly important, as researchers are often 'covert' – invisible to research subjects on SNSs – while collecting data on SNSs (Murthy, 2008). Similarly, boyd and Crawford (2012) also argue that 'it is problematic for researchers to justify their actions as ethical simply

because the data are accessible' and '[j]ust because content is publicly accessible does not mean that it was meant to be consumed by just anyone' (p. 672). Whether data is public or not depends on the context of data, including SNSs' terms and conditions upon users' registration, online settings, and users' expectation of privacy or public observation (Townsend and Wallace, 2016). Therefore, ethical evaluation cannot be disregarded, whether data are seemingly public or not.

Such an ethical issue is involved in content analysis and observation in this research, as both methods collect data directly from Weibo. In short, the data collected from the #IAmGay# movement are treated as public, and therefore, informed consent is not obtained from individual users who participated in the movement.

Such a decision has been made after a careful assessment. Firstly, I examined Weibo's the User Protocol and User Privacy Policy, which users must agree to register and use accounts on Weibo. The User Protocol states that upon registration, users agree that they 'can confirm and control the disclosure method and visible scope of the information submitted, published, or displayed in the process of using Weibo's service' (Weibo, n.d.-b). The User Privacy Policy, then, specifies that users' personal information includes 'the content that [users] publish (including texts, images and videos) when [users] post, repost, comment or send private messages to other users', and such personal information 'will not be shared with, transferred to, or disclosed to third parties' unless under special circumstances that include the situation when and where users 'voluntarily disclose personal information to the public' (Weibo, n.d.-a). Combining both the protocol and the privacy policy, therefore, it can be understood that Weibo users agree and possibly expect that their posts, reposts, and comments that they choose to publicly disclose can and will be used by others. However, it is common that many users of SNSs have not read those terms and conditions properly or even at all (A. Smith, 2014; Townsend and Wallace, 2016), which suggests that data on SNSs may not be public and further assessment may be needed.

Thus, secondly, I looked at the #IAmGay# movement itself. The movement has its special basis on a particular hashtag, which distinguishes itself from posts, reposts, and comments that users publish day to day, i.e. without using any hashtag. Such a particular context has been discussed by Fuchs (2017), who argues that:

the use of a popular Twitter hashtag during specific mass events (e.g. the use of the hashtag #BBCDebate during the European Union referendum campaign's first televised TV debate) is aimed at public outreach, so that the user cannot reasonably expect to remain unobserved. It would therefore be acceptable to quote these tweets without asking for informed consent. (p. 46)

Although Fuchs' (2017) argument addresses the use of hashtags in research specifically on Twitter, the argument can be also applied to other SNSs including Weibo. When participants of the #IAmGay# movement used the hashtag to publish their content, they aimed to reach a broad audience in the public. Therefore, what they have published, despite the involvement of personal stories and emotions, is not intended to be private.

In conclusion, the data in content analysis and observation are treated as public for two reasons after the assessment. Firstly, all users have agreed to Weibo's User Protocol and User Privacy Policy, which makes them accept their content being used by third parties including researchers, despite some of them being passive and unaware of the acceptance. Secondly, using the hashtag for the movement shows that they actively put their content into the public realm and expect public observation.

4.3.2 Sensitive data and risk of harm

The use of sensitive data in research, especially those ones on SNSs, is another process that often involves ethical issues related to potential risk of harm. The British Psychological Society (2017) has mentioned such issues, and Townsend and Wallace (2016) also comment on them by saying that:

[t]his risk of harm is most likely where a social media user's privacy and anonymity have been breached, and is also greater when dealing with more sensitive data which when revealed to new audiences might expose a social media user to the risk of embarrassment, reputational damage, or prosecution.

(p. 7)

Data that are collected from SNSs face particular difficulties when they are represented in research, especially in the form of verbatim quotes taken from SNSs, because data

are stored on servers and can be traced back to their origin via search engines – this means that even anonymisation may not prevent the risk of harm (Townsend and Wallace, 2016; Townsend and Wallace, 2017; Fuchs, 2018; British Psychological Society, 2017).

In this research, the issue mainly concerns gender and sexual identities and political opinions, which are commonly categorised as sensitive data (M. Wang and Jiang, 2017). The breach of such data may cause problems ranging from online hate speech to personal prosecution.

Content analysis is considered to be less relevant in this case compared to digital ethnography, because only numbers and words are used for analysis. However, the data consist of content of posts and reposts in the movement, which do contain identifiable and sensitive information. Therefore, the data are safely stored.

On the other hand, the issue of sensitive data is significant in observation data collection and representation. This is because, in the #IAmGay# movement, many participants shared their personal stories of being LGBTQ+ and their political opinions related to the state and the society. However, the translation process involved in data representation that is mentioned earlier in this chapter mitigates some of the data protection risk. As quotes are translated into English, they are no longer in their original verbatim form, i.e. in Chinese. Therefore, they cannot be searched to identify users from which they originate.

Other than in observation, the issue of sensitive data also arises in interview. Interviewees have also shared information about their gender and sexual identities as well as their political opinions. In the same way, not only are the data safely stored, but also the way in which they should be represented has been carefully considered. To ensure that the representation of data is not identifiable, anonymisation is adopted.

4.3.3 Anonymity

Anonymisation is the key approach to data protection in this research. Anonymising data, as Sun et al. (2011) suggest, is not just simply removing seemingly identifiable information when they are released, but also to disguise all attributes of data that can be used to identify individuals, including names, addresses, and other quasi-identifier

like race, age, and so forth. The process requires an examination of what identifiers there are in data sets.

In this research, there are several identifiers in the data. Firstly, names, including usernames on Weibo in content analysis and observation and interviewees' names (even though most of them did not provide their real names) in interview, are the most prominent identifier. They are replaced by pseudo names when represented, except for a few that have played key roles in the movement and have been represented in previous research projects and news reports, such as Zhudingzhen and the Voice of Comrade. Secondly, gender and sexual identities are another prominent identifier in the data. They are significant pieces of information in this research, and without them, analysis of the relationship between personal and social identities and the collective identity in the #IAmGay# movement cannot be achieved. Gender and sexual identities are, therefore, not removed in data representation. Since other identifiers are either removed or disguised when represented, gender and sexual identities cannot be used solely to identify individuals. Apart from those two major types of identifiers, there are a few other types in the data, such as time of publishing and numbers of engagements of original posts, reposts, and comments. Most of those data are not represented in data analysis. However, when it is necessary to represent them, precise time and numbers are not provided.

After such a process of anonymisation on top of the translation of direct quotes, this research ensures that none of the data represented can be used to identify individuals. In addition, all the data are securely stored to prevent any possible situation of breach.

4.3.4 Informed consent

Lastly, based on all the issues, decisions, and actions that I have discussed related to research ethics so far, informed consent was obtained from interviewees in this research. This is because, unlike content analysis and observation that are based on data treated as public, interview aimed to collect data that are treated as private, such as personal experience that had not been disclosed.

A participant information sheet and a consent form in both English and Chinese versions (see [Appendix](#) for both) were sent to potential interviewees with whom I

confirmed for interview. The participant information sheet includes all the information that may be concerned about participating in the research, such as the title of the research, the institution where the research is conducted, the purpose of the research, people who would have access to the data, the specifics of participants' involvement, what data would be collected, how data would be handled, potential risks, participants' right to withdraw, and the contact for more information. Consent forms, then, were signed by the interviewees prior to interview. At the beginning of interview, I also made sure that interviewees understood everything in the participant information sheet and the consent form and provided them with opportunities to ask further questions. After that, verbal consent was obtained again.

4.4 Positionality

At the end of this chapter, it is also important for me to reflect my positionality in this research. Positionality, according to Holmes (2020), refers to:

an individual's world view and the position they adopt about a research task and its social and political context. The individual's world view or 'where the researcher is coming from' concerns ontological assumptions (an individual's beliefs about the nature of social reality and what is knowable about the world), epistemological assumptions (an individual's beliefs about the nature of knowledge) and assumptions about human nature and agency (individual's assumptions about the way we interact with our environment and relate to it).
(p. 1)

Before and during conducting research, it is necessary for researchers to 'identify, construct, critique, and articulate their positionality' (Holmes, 2020, p. 2), as our personal positions influence the ways in which we conduct research (Holmes, 2020; Corlett and Marvin, 2018), especially in qualitative research (Olukotun et al., 2021).

When I was designing and conducting this research, I was aware of a few aspects of my positionality that may have influence on this research. Most importantly, I am an 'insider' (Wiederhold, 2015) of my research subject, i.e. the Chinese LGBTQ+ community. My personal identity as a Chinese gay man is my motivation for conducting this research, which means that I have had very similar experiences as my

research participants'. As a result, on the one hand, it was not difficult for me to recruit interviewees and they were rather comfortable and open with me during the interview; but on the other hand, I inevitably empathised with them and found it difficult to maintain any criticism towards Chinese LGBTQ+ activism. As such, I have positioned myself as an empirical sociologist. Namely, I conducted my research by making evidence-based analysis while acknowledging the fact that my personal attachment to the community may have influence on this research.

Meanwhile, conducting the research in the United Kingdom, I am also an 'outsider' (Wiederhold, 2015) who is physically away from the Chinese LGBTQ+ community. I am privileged because of my geographical location. I have social mobility and academic freedom to be able to research Chinese LGBTQ+ activism, compared to many of my peers and colleagues who are physically in China where researching and teaching about LGBTQ+ issues are 'in a constant struggle for institutional legitimacy and recognition' (W. Wei, 2020, p. 335).

However, it means that I am also heavily influenced by my surroundings that are predominated by western scholars of political science and sociology and liberal ideology. I share Bao's (2013) experience of being a member of Chinese queer diaspora who studies the Chinese LGBTQ+ community. Despite the fact that I have not undergone a phase of questioning my own Chineseness as Bao (2013) has, it is inevitable for researchers like us to compare China and western societies regarding the freedom of being LGBTQ+ and researching LGBTQ+ related matters. Viewing western societies, especially the United Kingdom where I am currently located, as places of much more LGBTQ+ freedom, I often treat China as 'needing to be liberated'. While it may be true that we ought to be pursuing LGBTQ+ equality in China, the understanding that the political, social, and cultural context of pursuing LGBTQ+ equality in China is often distinct from western societies has helped me to not simply regard China as inferior. Instead, as many of my peers and colleagues who are engaged in Chinese studies (e.g. Q. Wang, 2020) may argue, like western societies, China is complicated, but in different ways.

Nevertheless, the reflection of my positionality is not about attempting to minimise my personal influence on the research but acknowledging that my personal position has been and will continue to be something that motivates, helps, and limits

my research. Overall, this research is part of my scholar activism. Namely, it embodies my personal political goal of advancing LGBTQ+ equality in China.

Chapter 5 The #IAmGay# protest: quantitative analysis

In this chapter, I aim to untangle the #IAmGay# protest through quantitative content analysis. Although the protest lasted for only four days, from the 13th to the 16th April 2018, the formation of the collective identity was rather complex. The protest was seemingly a connective action of massive participation, which means that there was not an apparently structured protest organisation and the ways of participation were individualised and greatly diversified (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). The quantitative analysis, therefore, helps to identify important facts from which the protest can be understood on the whole.

Based on the 22,111 original posts and reposts that were published during the four days of the #IAmGay# protest, I have discovered some fundamental facts manifested through statistics revolving around the collective identity formed in the protest, including the components of the collective identity, mainly the ‘we’ and the antagonist (Hunt et al., 1994), and how they were likely to be framed. The analysis will be presented in three sections.

Firstly, by comparing the numbers of engagements, I found 27 potential soft leaders in the protest. Amongst the 27 users, most of them have large numbers of followers and some are also verified users. The finding suggests that the likely soft leaders in the protest were those who are usually influential on Weibo.

Secondly, 100 keywords that were used most frequently during the protest are identified. Those keywords suggest that the collective identity formed in the protest was likely to be rather complex, with potentially multiple constituents of the ‘we’ and the antagonist. The discourse of the protest had a focus on censorship, but beyond censorship, it also involved other issues concerning LGBTQ+ people in China. Strategies that participants collectively deployed during the protest were also complex, which emphasised celebration and support while expressing dissent.

Thirdly, by further examining the context of keywords of potential antagonists, I affirm Weibo’s role as the main antagonist in the protest. However, it is not very clear whether or not other parties – such as the state and the society – were recognised as antagonists by participants.

5.1 Potential soft leaders

As Gerbaudo (2012) suggests, influential participants may become soft leaders in digitally mediated protests that are increasingly decentralised (Bennett and Segerber, 2012). Yet, to what extent one can be seen as influential becomes a question, especially in movements entirely based on SNSs like the #IAmGay# protest. One indicator of influence is how much engagement that one receives on SNSs (B. G. Smith and Taylor, 2017), which can be measured by its quantity, i.e. numbers of reposts, comments, and likes. A post having many engagements means that it is viewed by many and creates discussion, and therefore, has potential to influence those who have seen and engaged with it. Additionally, another element that may affect the degree of influence, particularly on Weibo, is users' offline social status that is represented by their identity verification. Q. Wang (2020) suggests that people on Weibo are more likely to trust and follow verified users especially during significant public events. Therefore, to identify potential soft leaders in the #IAmGay# protest, the numbers of engagements, including reposts, comments, and likes, of the original posts and reposts collected were compared, and the verification status of those whose original posts and reposts were engaged the most was also checked.

Amongst 22,111 posts and reposts collected, most of them do not have relatively high numbers of engagements, which range from zero to a few hundred. A distinct threshold of numbers of engagements seems to be 1,000. In total, 29 posts and reposts were engaged with more than 1,000 times across the four-day protest. They were posted by 28 users (see Table 5.1 in [Appendix](#) for the full list). Two posts are from the Voice of Comrade, though those two posts were published at the end of the protest, as the Voice of Comrade's account was suspended until the censorship was lifted. Thus, excluding the Voice of Comrade, who could not have much influence on participants during the protest, there were 27 users who were potentially soft leaders.

Amongst these 27 users, 10 of them are verified on Weibo. However, it is noteworthy that even though 17 of them are unverified users, most of them have considerably large numbers of followers, from 10 thousand (Miminggui) to 5 million (MrYan). The exceptions are KenJU, Li333, Yocky, DoggyB, Pozhang and Alex20, who are followed by less than two thousand people, and therefore, can be seen as ordinary users on Weibo. The reason for highlighting such a fact is to demonstrate that

the statistics suggest that there was likely to be a hierarchy among participants in the #IAmGay# protest. Users that are usually more influential, i.e. those who have verified status and more followers, had more interaction with other participants during the protest. What they posted, therefore, was more likely to lead the protest.

However, the statistics cannot be used to reveal whether they did become soft leaders or not, and if so, how the protest was led by them. Qualitative analysis is required for further examination of such details. The statistical results provide only a list of potential soft leaders to help my further qualitative analysis.

5.2 Keywords

The content of all posts and reposts collected was then analysed for keywords, i.e. most frequently used words and phrases, by using Sketch Engine. The results include 100 keywords used during the protest (see Table 5.2 in [Appendix](#) for the full results). The results were interpreted through the lens of collective identity, i.e. the composition of collective identity and elements of a protest that reflect collective identity such as goals, mobilisations and strategies. From the results, I discovered six thematic facts across the keywords: 1) a relatively high inclusion of gender and sexual identities, 2) a wide range of potential antagonists, 3) common goals of LGBTQ+ activism, 4) a limited call for action, 5) a general positive tone, which is interpreted more precisely as celebration and support, and 6) two influential participants.

5.2.1 A relatively high inclusion of gender and sexual identities

Firstly, several terms of gender and sexual identities appear to be used frequently and this shows that the discourse in the protest tends to be relatively inclusive. ‘Homosexual’ ranks 1st (‘同性恋’) and 16th (‘同性戀’) in its forms of simplified and traditional Chinese, which is not surprising, since the identity term is used as part of the hashtag. ‘Comrade’ (‘同志’), the term that Chinese homosexuals or sometimes queer people use to refer to each other (Bao, 2019a), also appears in 31st place. ‘Heterosexual’ (‘异性恋’) and ‘bisexual’ (‘双性恋’) were used less but still prominent during the protest, ranking 27th and 50th respectively. ‘Same sex’ (‘同性’) and ‘opposite sex’ (‘异性’), which are likely to be used in a context of discussing sexual

orientation, are also found in the list. However, the use of ‘same sex’ was much higher than the use of ‘opposite sex’ during the protest, as the former is 3rd, whereas the latter is only 98th in the list.

Compared to sexual identities, gender identities seem to be less used. ‘Woman’ (‘女’) ranks 43rd, whereas ‘man’ (‘男’) is 80th. However, it is worth noting that ‘sister’ (‘姐妹’), which has a connotation of gender identity, was used more often, appearing in 29th place. In addition, ‘LGBT’, the acronym referring to gender and sexual minorities, ranks 90th in the list.

Although such frequent uses of different gender and sexual identities do show a certain level of discursive inclusiveness, it seems that not all marginalised social groups were equally included. Homosexuals were certainly the centre of participants’ discussion, followed by heterosexuals, bisexuals, and gender identities. A binary gender system seems to dominate the discussion. Transgenders and gender non-binaries are seemingly less included, with transgenders being mentioned only in ‘LGBT’ and gender non-binaries being absent from the top 100 keywords.

Such findings, however, may not directly show the configuration of the ‘we’ in the protest, as being mentioned frequently can also indicate that the identity group was seen as an antagonist. Heterosexual, for instance, is the dominant sexual identity in the society with whom gender and sexual minorities may not necessarily form solidarity. The identification of ‘we’, therefore, needs to be further examined qualitatively based on the findings.

5.2.2 A wide range of potential antagonists

Secondly, several keywords suggest that there was potentially a wide range of antagonists in the protest. Since the protest was launched to respond to Weibo’s censorship, Weibo was undoubtedly the main antagonist identified by the participants. Not only is ‘Weibo’ (‘微博’) the 11th most frequently used word, but also ‘crappy Sina’ (‘渣浪’) and ‘Sina’ (‘新浪’) were used incredibly often to discuss Sina, the operation company of Weibo. The phrase ‘crappy Sina’ shows participants’ obvious negative attitude towards Weibo. It was used even more frequently than ‘Weibo’ and ranks 6th in the list.

Looking through the list of keywords, I have noticed that Weibo may not be the only antagonist. Other keywords used by participants that are also likely to be antagonists are ‘society’ (‘社会’, 15th), ‘state’ (‘国家’, 21st), ‘China’ (‘中国’, 45th) and ‘corporation’ (‘企业’, 53rd). However, it cannot be determined whether those parties were seen as antagonists solely by the frequent use of them. Therefore, they were put back into Sketch Engine to test their word collocation. The collocation results will be discussed in the next section. Although ‘world’ (‘世界’, 17th) is less likely to be used to refer to an antagonist in the protest, as it seems too general, given its high rank in the keyword list it was also included in the collocation test.

Furthermore, related to the identification of antagonists in the protest, several issues, which Chinese homosexuals or LGBTQ+ people face, drew much of participants’ attention. Importantly, they are not limited to censorship. Censorship related words are ‘recover’ (‘恢复’, 39th) and ‘ban’ (‘封’, 40th), whereas other issues include ‘discrimination’ (‘歧视’, 13th) and ‘violence’ (‘暴力’, 73rd). The direct implementer of the censorship was Weibo and the frequent discussion about it can again prove that Weibo was recognised as an antagonist in the protest. Discrimination was discussed very prominently, possibly because it was perceived as the cause of censorship. ‘Violence’, however, is unlikely to be used in a context of discussing violence towards Chinese LGBTQ+ people. Instead, as it was used in Weibo’s censorship announcement, ‘violence’ is more likely to be used to refer to Weibo’s act of listing homosexual-themed content along with violence as censorial targets in the announcement.

5.2.3 Common goals of LGBTQ+ activism

Thirdly, some common goals of LGBTQ+ activism can be found amongst the keywords, reflecting the issues raised. As the issues were not limited to censorship, the goals were also not merely about ‘recovering’ the ‘ban’. ‘Freedom’ (‘自由’, 26th), ‘respect’ (‘尊重’, 32nd), ‘equality’ (‘平等’, 33rd), ‘acceptance’ (‘接受’, 46th) and ‘tolerance’ (‘包容’, 94th) were used frequently by participants during the protest words which. They are often used in LGBTQ+ activism in general to describe goals. These goals, however, tend to be rather general and ambitious. There may not be a very

specific way to achieve them, or in other words, anything that LGBTQ+ activism does contributes to the achievement of them. Therefore, how those goals were framed in the protest – perhaps in a strategic or symbolic way – needs to be examined.

5.2.4 A limited call for action

Fourth, participants called for only discursive actions that can be taken in the digital space, which suggests that there was unlikely to be a mobilisation of offline action. The keywords used by participants during the protest that may indicate action were ‘support’ (‘支持’, 8th and ‘撑’, 49th), ‘speak out’ (‘发声’, 14th) and ‘stand’ (‘站’, 74th). While supporting and speaking out can be easily understood as various actions in which participants can engage on Weibo, such as publishing original posts, reposting, commenting, liking, and so forth, standing was likely to be used in a metaphorical way rather than as a physical action, i.e. ‘standing with someone’ or ‘standing up against injustice’. Therefore, standing in this case may be a similar action to supporting and speaking out, which again can be taken online.

The fact that the protest remained almost entirely online can also back up the argument that there was rarely mobilisation of offline action. However, such a situation might be caused by several factors including the reason for the protest, that being the censorship on Weibo, the strategies that participants deployed, and the restrictions and risks of taking collective action offline in China. Meanwhile, although the call for action was limited and action was not transferred offline, it does not necessarily mean the critique of slacktivism is valid in this case, as the effectiveness of online action was not limited, which is at least suggested by the success in lifting the censorship. Regardless, it is important to investigate the specifics of the mobilisation and find out to what extent it was influenced by the collective identity in the protest.

5.2.5 A general positive tone

Fifthly, there is a stronger positive tone than an oppression-focused one across the keywords during the protest. Such a positive tone manifested in primarily two ways: *celebration* and *support*. The former focused on affirmative emotional attributes towards relevant issues, whereas the latter was more concerned about supportive actions between participants in the protest.

The category of celebration consists of several words that describe affirmative emotions. Amongst those words, ‘hope’ (‘希望’) was the most prominent one, ranking 4th in the list of keywords. Although the word does not directly describe an affirmative emotion, the frequent use of ‘hope’ can imply that participants held a somewhat positive attitude towards solving the issues in the future. Three words ‘幸福’ (38th), ‘开心’ (97th), and ‘美好’ (100th) that all mean ‘happy/happiness’ were frequently used by participants. ‘Pride’ (‘骄傲’), the word that has been commonly used in LGBTQ+ activism to celebrate marginalised gender and sexual identities (Ghaziani, 2008; Peterson et al., 2018), is also found in 89th place. It is worth noting that relative to those words, no word that directly describes any negative emotion or feeling, e.g. ‘anger/angry’, ‘disappointment/disappoint’, or ‘sadness/sad’, was used as frequently. In fact, none of this type of words is found in the list.

Other than the words that directly describe celebratory emotions, there also seems to be a celebration of human affection during the protest, which is very likely to be related to marginalised sexualities. In different forms of both Chinese and English, the word ‘love’ appears in 2nd (‘爱’), 18th (‘爱情’), 19th (‘love’), 25th (‘be loved’), and 75th (‘Love’) places. The word ‘like’ (‘喜欢’) also appears in 5th place. Such frequent uses of these two words show that a significant part of the protest was dedicated to talk about sexuality, emphasising it as fundamentally human affection. By doing so, participants created spaces in the protest that might seem less confrontational than those condemnatory discussions about oppression. However, by comparing the frequencies between keywords used for human affection (‘love’ and ‘like’) and oppression (potential antagonists like ‘Weibo’, ‘Crappy Sina’, ‘Sina’, ‘society’, ‘state’, ‘China’, and ‘corporation’, and issues that might be associated with them like ‘discrimination’, ‘ban’, and ‘violence’), it is found that, apparently, both topics were explored extensively during the protest. While the purpose of discussing oppression – to express dissent and demands – can be understood more easily, why participants discussed human affection in relation to its context and how the discussion was situated in the protest need to be further explored.

There were other keywords that also suggest a general positive atmosphere, yet they may not have a theme of celebration. To be more precise, those keywords are

often used in contexts where people provide support, encouragement, or comfort for each other, emphasising positive relationship building rather than addressing issues with affirmative emotions. Keywords of this type in the protest include ‘support’ (‘支持’, 8th and ‘撑’, 49th), ‘go for it’ (‘加油’, 44th), ‘endeavour’ (‘努力’, 47th), and ‘hug’ (‘拥抱’, 76th and ‘抱’, 95th). The use of these keywords may suggest something important in relation to the construction of collective identity, in particular the construction of ‘we’. As they could be used to build positive relationships between participants during the protest, it is imperative to explore who were involved in this type of communication – including people who both provided and received such support – to reveal some likely parts of the ‘we’. In particular, whether the support transformed into solidarity between different social groups in the protest should also be of significance for exploration.

The use of both celebratory and supportive keywords, then, exceeded the use of negative ones during the protest. Except for the keywords associated with oppression that have been mentioned earlier, other keywords with negative connotation are ‘fault/wrong’ (‘错’, 10th), ‘break the law/illegal’ (‘违法’, 51st), ‘compliant’ (‘合规’, 55th), ‘obey/obedient’ (‘听话’, 56th), ‘misinterpret’ (‘曲解’, 57th), and ‘completely negate’ (‘一棍子打死’, 71st). Notably, the antonyms of ‘support’ (8th and 49th), ‘opposition/oppose’ (‘反对’) and ‘oppose/against’ (‘反’), are also found in 77th and 79th places. The much more frequent use of ‘support’ than the use of ‘opposition/oppose/against’ suggests that participants focused more on building positive relationships than expressing dissent. Figure 5.1 shows the total numbers of use of the keyword categories.

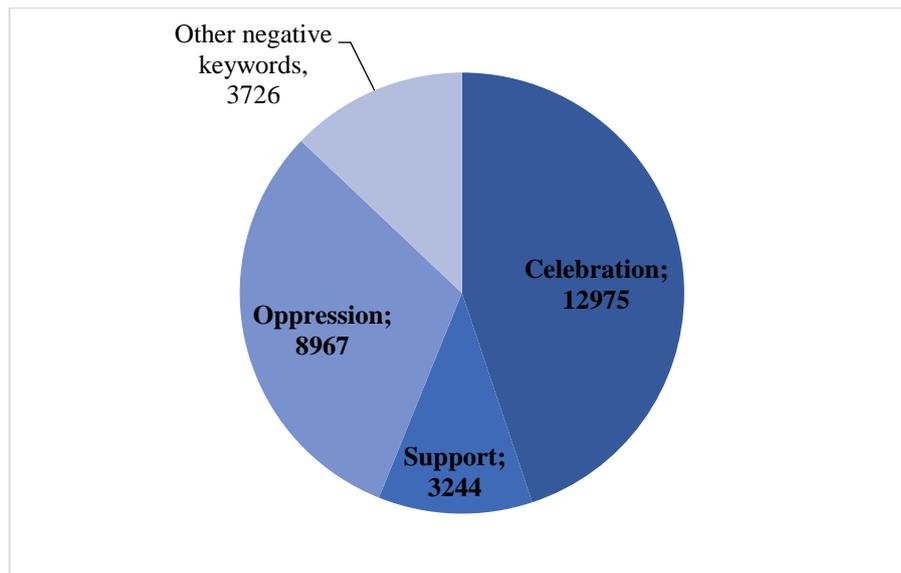


Figure 5.1 The total numbers of use of positive (celebration and support) and negative (oppression and other negative keywords) keywords

Therefore, the protest overall was intended to be more positive, emphasising celebration and support. Celebration, more specifically, had a focus on celebrating human affections, whereas support was provided by participants with each other via several types of action to build positive relationships. However, it is also important to highlight that a significant part of the protest was still dedicated to expressing dissent, calling out antagonists, and identifying societal issues that caused the censorship.

Mixing positivity and political confrontation, such a way of performing LGBTQ+ activism has been observed across the globe. Typically, most pride parades follow the tradition of combining celebration and confrontational politics (Peterson et al., 2018; Ghosh, 2014; Browne, 2007). While increasing the visibility of LGBTQ+ people and addressing discrimination, pride parades also celebrate LGBTQ+ identities (Bruce, 2013). Meanwhile, some LGBTQ+ activist organisations have also deployed positive messaging as one of their strategies to communicate with LGBTQ+ individuals and the public (Ciszek, 2018; Ciszek, 2017; Mano, 2021), creating optimistic atmospheres in LGBTQ+ communities (Ciszek, 2018; Ciszek, 2017). For instance, in 2010, the ‘It Gets Better’ campaign on YouTube was launched to promote hope amongst suicidal LGBTQ+ youngsters (Gal et al., 2015; Grzanka and Mann, 2014; Goltz, 2013). Despite being criticised for being exclusionary (Gal et al., 2015; Goltz, 2013) and homonormative (Grzanka and Mann, 2014; Goltz, 2013), ‘It Gets

Better' successfully mobilised mass participation to campaign for anti-bullying. Pink Dot, an annual event in support of LGBTQ+ people in Singapore, strategically integrates positivity into its activist discourse, which has effectively gained mass support from the Singaporean society (Mano, 2021).

Therefore, although from a political economy perspective, Chinese LGBTQ+ organisations and individuals are increasingly independent from the international LGBTQ+ community and activism due to the government's tightening policy on international funding (Hildebrandt, 2012; Bao, 2020), there are still cultural linkages between Chinese and international LGBTQ+ communities. The ways in which LGBTQ+ activism is strategised in China are sometimes similar to others across the world. However, the Chinese context, especially the political environment, restricts LGBTQ+ activism and requires Chinese organisations and individuals to adapt strategies used in other regimes. Some strategies may be not suitable in China (e.g. offline protests), so those 'gentler' strategies are more likely to be adapted. By 'gentler', I mean strategies that are less radical and more likely to focus on developing a better LGBTQ+ community from within. To promote positivity between each other, participants in the #IAmGay# protest were mainly building a more supportive and hopeful LGBTQ+ community in China.

5.2.6 Two influential participants

Finally, two usernames appear in the list of keywords, which means that those two users were often mentioned (either through the @ function or not) by participants during the protest. Those two users are MrYan ('燕公子', 34th) and GoodSister ('好妹妹', 59th).

As mentioned in the section of potential soft leaders earlier in this chapter, MrYan's post was engaged by many during the protest. The appearance of the username in the list of keywords, therefore, bolsters the discovery that MrYan was one of the influential users who potentially contributed to leading the protest. However, GoodSister's post was not included in the data set. Through tracing the username on Weibo, it was later discovered that the account is no longer accessible. This may have been caused by Weibo's censorship or the user's self-censorship. Fortunately, the content of GoodSister's post can still be found in threads of other users' reposts.

Therefore, the user and the post has also been added to the list of potential soft leaders for later analysis.

To conclude, the analysis of keywords has provided fruitful fundamental and statistic facts to understanding the #IAmGay# protest. The statistics suggest that not only the ‘we’ but also the ‘others’ formed as parts of the collective identity in the protest potentially had multiple constituents, rather than being limited to homosexuals and Weibo respectively, as seemingly suggested by the hashtag and the direct cause of the protest. Various issues and goals related to gender and sexual diversity and equality in China were discussed, rather than being limited to lifting censorship on SNSs.

Furthermore, although the protest was likely to be confined to the digital sphere and did not transfer into a protest on the street, the strategies deployed in the protest were multifaceted. As different categories of keywords suggest, other than expressing dissent towards recognised antagonists and discussing issues associated with them, participants were even more active in creating a positive space in the protest. Specifically, their discourse had two themes, which are celebration and support. The former is understood as positive emotions, feelings, and attitudes towards issues centred around gender and sexual diversity and equality. Marginalised sexualities were particularly emphasised through the celebration of human affections. The latter, on the other hand, can be seen as positive relationship building between participants, which was less likely to directly address the issues discussed during the protest.

However, it is important to note that there are certainly limitations in the keyword analysis. The interpretation is made only based on the numbers through the lens of collective identity. There are some presumptions, which are yet to be further explored. For instance, the constituents of the ‘we’ and the antagonists identified are only potential ones. When discussing participants’ discourse of celebration, the keywords that describe human affections may not necessarily lead to a celebration of marginalised sexualities. Moreover, even though some findings are factual, they need to be explored more thoroughly. For instance, it is important to examine how soft leadership was formed and influenced other participants, how the ‘we’ and the antagonists were framed, and what specific strategies were deployed (e.g. even dissent can be expressed in different ways towards different antagonists).

5.3 Potential antagonists

The keywords that were used to potentially refer to antagonists were also put back into Sketch Engine for collocation test to find the contexts in which they were used. By doing so, my aim is to identify the antagonists framed in the protest in a more precise way, consolidating the basis for the later analysis of qualitative data. The keywords include ‘crappy Sina’ (‘渣浪’), ‘Weibo’ (‘微博’), ‘Sina’ (‘新浪’), ‘society’ (‘社会’), ‘world’ (‘世界’), ‘state’ (‘国家’), ‘China’ (‘中国’), and ‘corporation’ (‘企业’). In short, the results prove that Weibo was certainly the main antagonist recognised by the participants in the protest, whereas the world was very unlikely to be one of the antagonists. Other than Weibo and the world, it is unclear whether the society, the state, and corporations were treated as antagonists by the participants, but the results suggest that the participants might see an interplay between the society and the state and believe that corporations were controlled by something or someone more powerful.

5.3.1 *Weibo*

‘Crappy Sina’, ‘Weibo’, and ‘Sina’ were tested first as a group (see the full results in Table 5.3, Table 5.4, and Table 5.5 in [Appendix](#)), since all of them refer to Weibo and were the keywords used most frequently during the protest. The results validate the presumption of Weibo being the main antagonist in the protest.

Specifically, all three of the keywords are associated with ‘apology/apologise’ (‘道歉’) to various extents as different parts of speech such as the subject, the object, and the modifier. This shows that participants explicitly demanded Weibo apologising for its misconduct of censorship, treating Weibo as an antagonist in the protest. Apart from ‘apology/apologise’, there are also many other words and phrases that indicate participants dissent towards Weibo. Associated with ‘crappy Sina’, there are ‘boycott’ (‘抵制’), ‘oppose’ (‘反’ and ‘反对’), ‘be out of the line’ (‘过分’), ‘disgust’ (‘恶心’), and ‘problem’ (‘问题’). The word ‘dog’ (‘狗’), which is found being used together with ‘crappy Sina’ several times, may also be some participants’ way of insultingly comparing Weibo to an animal. As for the word ‘Weibo’, there are not as many words and phrases found indicating dissent except for ‘scare’ (‘害怕’) and ‘uninstall’ (‘卸载’). This may be mainly because the word ‘Weibo’ is not only the name of the SNS

but also what is used to call each post (compared with Twitter, 'Twitter' is the name of the SNS, but each post is call a 'tweet'). Finally, many words and phrases found associated with 'Sina' show that some participants were clearly angry with Weibo and the company. Not only are some words and phrases that express dissent, including 'provoke' ('挑衅'), 'curse' ('辱骂'), 'upset' ('心酸'), 'condemn' ('谴责'), 'uninstall' ('卸载'), 'disappoint' ('失望'), 'blame' ('怪'), 'reject' ('拒绝'), 'be out of control' ('无法无天'), 'infuriate' ('激怒'), and 'disgusting' ('恶心'), found being used together with it, but also it is associated with some explicit Chinese cursing words and phrases that are often used online, such as 'your mother died' ('nmsl' or '你妈死了'), 'fuck your mother' ('甘霖凉', 'cnm' and '操你妈'), 'crappy' ('垃圾'), 'idiotic' ('沙雕'), 'orphan' ('孤儿'), and 'fuck' ('卧槽'). Such use of explicit cursing words and phrases is not found in any other collocation test.

It is also worth noting that a few rather positive words were used together with these three keywords. Weibo seems to be 'thanked' ('感谢'), 'welcomed' ('欢迎'), and 'supported' ('支持')'. This may be because either those words were used ironically or there was indeed a little endorsement of Weibo. In any case, these words are much less prominent compared with the ones mentioned above.

5.3.2 *The society*

The results of the collocation test of 'society' (see the full results in Table 5.6 in [Appendix](#)) do not seem to provide much evidence that can help to determine whether the society was recognised as an antagonist in the protest. However, the results show that there was a strong association between discussions of the society and the state.

Some participants seem to discuss whether the society had 'advanced' ('进步') or 'regressed' ('倒退' and '退步') during the protest. The use of 'regress' (10 times) is greater than the use of 'advance' (7 times). However, even though more people believed that the society had regressed in terms of gender and sexual diversity and equality, it may not necessarily suggest that they treated the society as an antagonist, especially given that there is no other word or phrase that indicate any strong emotion of participants towards the society. The only exception is that some participants

described the society as ‘harmful’ (‘危害’) and in need of ‘change’ (‘改变’), but such a description is still not sufficient to prove the recognition of the society as an antagonist. Statistically, participants focused on discussing the acceptance and the tolerance of the society, as indicated by the frequent use of ‘accept’ (‘接受’ and ‘接纳’) and ‘tolerance/tolerate/tolerant’ (‘包容’ and ‘容’) together with ‘society’. How participants thought about the acceptance and the tolerance of the society and whether such a discussion contributed to the recognition of an antagonist need further exploration.

5.3.3 *The world*

The collocation test (see the full results in Table 5.7 in [Appendix](#)) suggests that the world was very unlikely to be seen as an antagonist in the protest, as anticipated. ‘World’ was mostly used in sentences as the object of some verbs that are connoted with positive emotions, such as ‘like’ (‘喜欢’), ‘hope’ (‘希望’), ‘wish’ (‘愿’), ‘love’ (‘爱’), ‘support’ (‘支持’), and ‘light up’ (‘照亮’). Although ‘confront’ (‘对抗’) and ‘oppose’ (‘反对’) were also occasionally used when ‘world’ was the object, no other word or phrase that indicates dissent or any other negative emotion is found associated with it. Therefore, in addition to the generality of the word, the world does not seem to be the participants’ target during the protest.

5.3.4 *The state*

Both ‘state’ and ‘China’ were tested for collocation to examine the state’s role in the protest discourse. The test results (see in Table 5.8 and Table 5.9 in [Appendix](#) for the full results) are similar to those of the test of ‘society’, which means that it is unclear whether the state was treated as an antagonist in the protest merely based on the results. However, the results seem to show that participants discussed not only censorship but also various issues during the protest.

Regardless, it is found that the uses of the two words differentiate to some extent. Participants seem to express more emotions, which are multifaceted rather than merely positive or negative, when they use the word ‘state’. According to the results, the ‘state’ was often ‘loved’ (‘爱’ and ‘热爱’) and expressed with ‘hope’ (‘希望’) and

it was often the subject of verbs such as ‘love’ (‘爱’), ‘accept’ (‘接受’ and ‘接纳’), ‘tolerate’ (‘容纳’ and ‘容’), and ‘support’ (‘支持’). Yet, it was also discussed by participants using words like ‘abandon’ (‘抛弃’), ‘regress’ (‘倒退’), and ‘disappoint’ (‘失望’). Such multifaceted emotions embedded in these words towards the state have made it unquestionably difficult to find out whether the state was seen as an antagonist in the protest.

Unlike the way in which ‘state’ was used in contexts associated with different emotions, the uses of ‘China’ in contexts, on the other hand, show very few prominent emotions of participants. Words like ‘love’ (‘爱’), ‘hope’ (‘希望’), and ‘tolerate’ (‘容纳’) were still used by participants when discussing ‘China’, but they were used only occasionally. Moreover, there is no word or phrase that indicates any strong negative emotion found associated with it.

The results, however, provide some insights regarding which aspects of the state that participants might think to be important to LGBTQ+ people in China. The uses of ‘legalise’ (‘合法化’), ‘law’ (‘法律’), ‘regulate’ (‘规定’) and ‘policy’ (‘政策’) – the former two are found being used together with both ‘state’ and ‘China’ and the latter two are found being used together with ‘state’ – suggest that participants were concerned about the state’s law and policy making. Presumably, participants discussed the protection of LGBTQ+ people that the state could provide through law and policies. Furthermore, the occasional uses of ‘development/develop’ (‘发展’), ‘communism’ (‘共产主义’), and ‘the Ministry of Health’ (‘卫生部’) may also suggest some participants’ attention to issues of development, ideology, and health in relation to LGBTQ+ people in China. Therefore, it is, again, evident that the discourse of the protest was not only about censorship.

5.3.5 Corporations

Lastly, the collocation test of the term ‘corporation’ (see the full results in Table 5.10 in [Appendix](#)) does not provide any new evidence that suggests participants’ identification of any antagonist in the protest. It is rather unclear whether participants were using it to refer to any particular corporation such as Sina or as a general term for

all types of corporations. There are a few words that were used together with ‘corporation’, which may suggest participants’ emotional attributes towards ‘corporation’, such as ‘conscientious’ (‘良心’), ‘evil’ (‘作恶’), ‘crappy’ (‘垃圾’), ‘support’ (‘撑’ and ‘支持’), and ‘thank’ (‘感谢’), but they were used only a few times. Therefore, the uses of those words may not necessarily represent the protest collective’s stance.

However, amongst all the words and phrases that collocate with the keyword, the word ‘obedient’ (‘听话’) was used much more vastly than the rest, by participants to describe ‘corporation’. It was used 352 times, compared to others that were used at most 3 times. The vast use of the word suggests that many participants potentially regarded a particular corporation, or some corporations, as a passive one that followed orders rather than an active one that made decisions. If participants were using the ‘corporation’ to refer to Sina, the use of ‘obedient’, then, may imply participants’ recognition of another antagonist with greater power. It is crucial, therefore, to explore what ‘corporation’ participants were discussing and to whom they thought that ‘corporation’ was obedient.

5.4 Conclusion

Overall, the quantitative content analysis has helped to establish a basic understanding of the protest on the whole, which may not be easy to achieve by qualitative analysis. It has showed the complexity in participants’ actions during the protest. The protest was, of course, centred around homosexuals, censorship, and Weibo, but participants engaged in discussions beyond them and covered other groups of gender and sexual identities, broad issues relevant to Chinese LGBTQ+ people, and other parties that might had been oppressing LGBTQ+ people in China. Thus, the collective identity formed was also likely to be complex.

Despite the diversity of activities in the protest, participants were not inclined to realise an offline protest. All they did were seemingly minor political activities confined within the SNS platform. However, my quantitative analysis has shown signs going against the slacktivist critique, which argues that minor political activities online are not impactful (Morozov, 2009). Regardless of the visible impact, being that the

mass protest successfully pressured Weibo to reverse its censorship, participants of the #IAmGay# protest were forming a collective identity, which at least involved identifying homosexuals as part of the 'we' and Weibo as part of the antagonist. Based on this, my qualitative analysis in the next chapter will further show how the collective identity was framed and why it was meaningful to the Chinese LGBTQ community even after the protest.

Furthermore, the discovery that participants dedicated a large space in the protest where they provided each other with hope and maintained a positive atmosphere is of particular importance. This is because my qualitative analysis focusing on the collective identity formed in the protest has not paid significant attention to this aspect of the protest. Rather, it reads as the protest being overall negative, especially in the way participants identified the antagonist by condemning various oppressors. Therefore, it is necessary to firstly understand the positivity amongst participants in the protest.

It is also worth mentioning that positive messaging was not the only strategy deployed by participants during the protest, similar to how LGBTQ+ activists and organisations strategise across the world. In my qualitative analysis, I will show that participants' celebration of human affection, in which 'love' and 'like' were frequently discussed, was similar to the 'love is love' discourse, which was massively used in its hashtag form after the Orlando Nightclub Shooting, a horrendous mass shooting that happened in a gay nightclub in 2016 (Meyjes, 2016). The 'love is love' discourse sees love as a fundamental right of human beings that ought to be protected and respected despite gender and sexual identities (Lyons, 2016). Such a discourse was strategically used to play a key role in framing the 'we' in the #IAmGay# protest.

Chapter 6 The #IAmGay# protest: qualitative analysis

The quantitative analysis has provided fruitful insights into the #IAmGay# protest. However, as repeatedly emphasised, there are still many aspects of the protest that may be rather difficult to understand solely based on the statistics. In this chapter, therefore, the qualitative analysis of digital ethnographical data will be presented, aiming to untangle the complex collective identity that was framed by participants in the protest.

Overall, I have discovered that participants collectively framed an inclusive ‘we’, several antagonists, and a broad audience. To frame such a collective identity, participants deployed multifaceted strategies. Firstly, the ‘we’ included people of all gender and sexual identities who supported gender and sexual equality in China, centring around homosexuals. Such framing was mostly achieved by several approaches of inclusive mobilisation. Secondly, three antagonists were recognised in the protest, which all shared the characteristic of heterosexism. Weibo was undoubtedly the main antagonist, to which participants expressed strong dissent and specific demands. The state and the society were also recognised as antagonists and participants expressed dissent but no demand towards them. Since participants made demands only to Weibo, I categorise Weibo as the primary antagonist and the state and the society as the secondary antagonists. Lastly, the audience was framed rather obscurely by participants in the protest. It reflected the inclusive ‘we’ to be very broad. Therefore, the audience can be understood to be the general public on Weibo.

Furthermore, there are some other findings in relation to the slacktivist critique. The examination of participants’ risk assessment shows that even though the effort and threshold of participating in the protest were low, many participants did not consider the risk to be low. They recognised two types of risk that their participation was likely to entail: firstly, coming out as gender and sexual minorities, and secondly, acting against authorities in the oppressing political, cultural, and social conditions in China. Meanwhile, despite some concerns, many interviewees expressed strong inclination toward participating in offline LGBTQ+ activism, which is the opposite to the argument of the slacktivist critique. However, most of them considered that it would be extremely difficult to organise and participate in offline political events in China, and therefore, digital forms of activism were essential for them.

6.1 The collective identity in the #IAmGay# protest

6.1.1 The inclusive 'we'

As suggested by the keywords, several terms of gender and sexual identities were used frequently by participants during the protest, including homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, man, and woman. Based on such a fact, I explored the role of each of them in the discourse of the protest and in the interview data. It is found that participants of the protest collectively framed people of all gender and sexual identities who supported LGBTQ+ rights in China as the 'we'. In other words, the collective identity was inclusive, regardless of one's personal and social identities. There were some common mobilisation strategies that were deployed by participants to achieve the inclusiveness as well as some different strategies that aimed to mobilise specific groups. As a result of the inclusiveness, participants also felt a rather strong sense of connectedness in the protest, which suggests that the 'we' was uniform and compact to a great extent.

Homosexuals

Homosexuals, including both gay men and lesbians, were undoubtedly the primary composition of the 'we' in the protest. Although this may seem apparent, since Weibo's censorship was targeting homosexual-themed content, it is still imperative to find out how this part of 'we' was framed by participants. Three main approaches are found contributing to it: the choice of term in the hashtag that launched the protest, the leadership that mobilised homosexual participants, and the collective effort in coming-out action.

Firstly, the hashtag #IAmGay#, by which the protest was launched, directly put homosexuals as the subject of the discourse. Even though #IAmGay# is the common English translation of the hashtag in most English news reports (e.g. Dalton, 2018; Kuo, 2018b; Shepherd, 2018; Michell, 2018; BBC, 2018), a more precise translation of the hashtag, #我是同性恋# in its original Chinese form, should be #IAmHomosexual#. This means that the hashtag initially included only gay men and lesbians, rather than queer people in general as the term 'gay' may often imply. By using 'homosexual' in the hashtag, the protest was clearly aimed to mobilise homosexuals.

However, the launch of the protest was not only done through using the hashtag. What was posted along with the hashtag by Zhudingzhen, the user who launched the protest, was also vital in framing the collective identity. The use of ‘homosexual’ in the hashtag was, in fact, not in opposition to the framing of an inclusive collective identity. Such a matter will be discussed later. Nevertheless, the hashtag using ‘homosexual’ was a response to Weibo’s censorship announcement in which the same term was used, which explicates the role of homosexuals as a part of the ‘we’ in the protest.

Secondly, homosexual participants were prominent in the leadership of the protest. Amongst 29 influential users, including 27 found with highly engaged posts, one found in the keywords, and Zhudingzhen, at least 11 of them expressed their homosexual identity in their posts, compared with two users who expressed their heterosexual identity and two users who expressed their bisexual identity. Other than Zhudingzhen who used the hashtag to state his identity as homosexual, the other users who wrote explicitly about being homosexual or a member of the group are:

Shilande: #IAmGay# Being a member of the group, I’m proud, and I’m glorious. No more hiding. Say no to discrimination and misunderstanding. Let’s keep going!

Erving99: #IAmGay# I didn’t break the law or commit any crime. I work hard, love my life, and contribute to the society. I’m happy to make friends with others, despite their sexual orientations. I love my parents and family. I didn’t do anything I should feel sorry for and I’m not ashamed. I’m a normal person, a male, and a man. My sexual orientation is homosexual.

Yocky: #HelloCrappySina,IAmGay# #IAmGay# I’m a homosexual who drinks, smokes, and has tattoos, but that doesn’t change the fact that I’m willing to help old people, kids, the homeless and stray animals...

Pozhang: #IAmGay# Have been holding back for a long time and was afraid to speak out, because I’m deep in the closet. I have been with my girlfriend for almost a year, but there’s only one friend who knows it. I’m afraid to show our love in public or take her home. I heard about the situation this morning from a friend and have been quiet for the whole morning. But now, I just can’t stand it anymore. Love is not about gender. #IAmGay#

Alex20: #IAmGay# #HelloIAmGay# I'm a homosexual currently studying in Melbourne. I'm wearing the T-shirt from Levi's [in the photo], which was designed to commemorate the legalisation of same-sex marriage in Australia. Although homosexuals are not fully accepted in China, I'll still go back. We welcome people who understand us. Those who don't understand, we don't need you in our lives! [with a photo of himself wearing the T-shirt]

One particular user not only explicitly identified as homosexual, but also called for solidarity of homosexuals:

Tonmei: #IAmGay# Don't feel anxious because you're homosexual! Don't be afraid because you're homosexual! Don't give up anything you love because you're homosexual! Because we didn't do anything wrong! Being silent will only make them more ruthless and do whatever they want. We hope everyone still has hope now, because as long as you and I and millions of homosexual friends are together, no one can shut us up! Hope we can stick together and make each other warm. I am homosexual, how about you?

Apart from using the hashtag, a few others did not explicitly emphasise their identities as homosexual again like the ones quoted above did. Instead, they mentioned their same-sex partners:

Impal: #IAmGay# This is me and my wife [with a photo of herself and her wife]

KenJU: #IAmGay# Checked posts with this hashtag one by one and I nearly cried. Thanks to every stranger's encouragement and understanding. When I see people say 'let's do it together!', I just feel all this bullshit is nothing. I'll continue to hold my girlfriend's hand and live in the sun. Wish everyone happiness.

Liamkiki: #IAmGay# Whoops, posts are blocked and not shown to people! Weibo is so sick! But I still have my boyfriend and my cat here with me, no matter whether you block me or not! My life is still fabulous and I'm not afraid of you!

Cloud_V: We're married and will have a baby soon. What can you do to me? [with a photo of herself and her wife]

Altogether, the presence of those influential homosexual participants served to mobilise other homosexual users on Weibo to participate in the protest. However, it seems that Tonmei was the only one who called for solidarity. What others did was more personalised expression. More specifically, Shilande, Erving99, Yocky, and Alex20 posted about their thoughts on the incident; Impal and Cloud_V posted about their affectional relationships; Pozhang, KenJU, and Liamkiki posted both their thoughts on the incident and their affectional relationships. Such a phenomenon corresponds with Bennett and Segerberg's (2012) conceptualisation of connective action, which characterises digitalised collective action as based on personalised expression. Personalised expression often mobilises participants through emotions (Zeng, 2020), such as group-based anger and affection (van Zomeren and Iyer, 2009), rather than offering instructions. In this case, what those participants posted, therefore, mobilised and connected other homosexual users – and even users of other gender and sexual identities – through emotions mainly like support, encouragement, and hope within the homosexual group as well as some anger towards oppression.

Thirdly, such emotional mobilisation evidently took effect and was further amplified by participants who came out in their posts. Most of those participants came out as homosexuals, solidifying homosexuals as the primary part of the 'we'. By using the hashtag, many participants did not take part in discussions about oppression or express dissent during the protest, a fact which is also suggested by previous quantitative analysis. Rather, they used the hashtag as a coming out statement and some even posted photos showing themselves, following that which Zhudingzhen, Alex20, Impal, and Cloud_V did in their posts.

The action of coming out may be seemingly less confrontational than discussing oppression and expressing dissent, if the context is not considered. However, since the protest initially started against Weibo's censorship of homosexual-themed content, such action was indeed driven by participants' political purpose. By doing so, participants were making homosexual-themed content and claiming their legitimate existence on Weibo. The claim was also soon extended by the protest collective to LGBTQ+ people's legitimate existence in the Chinese society. This will be discussed later with other compositions of the collective identity.

Overall, homosexuals were the most prominent group in the protest, forming the protest collective that centred around them. However, this does not mean that homosexuals were the only group that made up the ‘we’ in the protest. Not only did heterosexual users massively participate in the protest, but users of other gender and sexual identities were also noticeably present in the protest collective.

Heterosexuals and other groups of gender and sexual minorities

The framing of heterosexuals and other groups of gender and sexual minorities as compositions of the ‘we’ in the #IAmGay# protest was also achieved by the launch of the protest, the leadership, and collective effort.

Firstly, when Zhudingzhen posted to launch the protest, other than the hashtag, he also asked a question that invited users of all gender and sexual identities – not only homosexuals – to participate in the conversation, along with another repost of the initial post that further encouraged people to use the hashtag. The initial post of his was:

Zhudingzhen: #IAmGay# How about you?

and the following repost said:

Zhudingzhen: Let’s use this hashtag to have some fun~

As mentioned earlier, the term used in the hashtag was not contradictory to framing an inclusive collective identity. This is because the question in Zhudingzhen’s initial post let people of other gender and sexual identities participate. By answering the question with posts starting with forms like ‘#IAmGay# I’m straight/bisexual/pansexual/transgender/etc.’, many users who were not homosexual could easily participate. Therefore, the launch of the protest was intended to include more participants, despite their personal and social identities.

Secondly, Zhudingzhen was not alone in mobilising an inclusive collective and there were more influential participants who represented and mobilised other groups. Four users whose posts were massively engaged stated their identities that were not homosexual:

MrYan: #IAmGay#'s family, friend and sister. I hope that loving and being loved by someone who's gay will not be seen as something wrong one day.

poky098: #IAmGay# I'm bi. I like boys, and girls too. Growing up, my best friends are almost all gays, lesbians, and people who are the same as me. It's so upsetting that we're denied existence like this. People around me, out or not, I hope I can protect you.

DoggyB: #IAmGay# I'm not homosexual but someone who wants to help them because they deserve it! Hope they will be accepted!

Miminggui: #IAmGay#'s bisexual supporter. I'm proud, I'm free, I exist!

Although there were only heterosexuals and bisexuals who stated their identities in the leadership of the protest, they together showed potential participants that it was not necessary to be homosexual to participate in the protest.

It is worth noting that the content that those four influential users posted was, again, personalised expression. However, unlike those influential homosexual users who tended to mobilise participants through emotions, they emphasised more on relationship building, more specifically, their relationships with homosexuals. As they mentioned in their posts, MrYan was a family member, a friend, and a sister to homosexuals; poky098 was best friends with homosexuals; DoggyB and Miminggui were supporters of homosexuals. Furthermore, poky098 and Miminggui, the two bisexual users, also implied that they were the same as homosexuals in terms of being part of the LGBTQ+ community, and therefore, shared similar social and political issues with homosexuals. Importantly, poky098 thought it was upsetting that both bisexuals and homosexuals were denied existence, whereas Miminggui claimed that bisexuals were also proud, free, and existent. This means that even though the censorship was specifically targeting homosexuals, they considered the LGBTQ+ community an inseparable group facing such an issue altogether. Through relationship building, therefore, other groups also had opportunities to join the protest collective and potentially became part of the 'we'.

However, compared to the massive collective of participants, the actions of Zhudingzhen and the four influential users were not enough to frame an inclusive collective identity of the whole protest. Therefore, thirdly, the collective's effort contributed to decidedly include all other groups in the collective identity. To further

connect all other groups with homosexuals in the protest, participants emphasised similarities between homosexuals and all other groups.

On the whole, two similarities were emphasised by participants, to mobilise an inclusive collective. A huge number of participants argued that homosexuals were the same as everyone else being ordinary people, and therefore, their love was equal to every other couple's love. Such discourse can be found in a few influential users' posts, such as Erving99's and Yocky's, but there are more that can be found posted by other participants. For instance, one heterosexual participant shared a story about a homosexual friend, saying that LGBTQ+ people are ordinary people who should be respected:

FoodieX: #IAmGay# I had a classmate in university who came out as gay. He was hosting the graduation ceremony. A few boys from the school shouted his name and said they loved him from the audience. All the lecturers applauded. It was the warmest moment in the entire four years. I read about homosexuals and met them in my real life. I know they're just ordinary people. I have many friends who are heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual. Together, we hang out, drink and even curse. They're not different. We're the same human beings. Please respect them even if you don't accept them.

Other similar posts can also be easily found:

Miso_Y: #IAmGay# Everyone is born to be equal. Everyone has the right to love and be loved, whether it's same-sex or opposite-sex. LGBT people aren't monsters. We're all the same, just ordinary people (Censor me however you want).

LceWYZ: [...] #IAmGay# It doesn't matter if you're homosexual or not, because we're all the same. We can all pursue the happiness that we want. Being homosexual is not a crime, so why deprive their rights to pursue happiness? [...]

Yan_SS: #IAmGay# love is love. We don't have to distinguish between each other. All love should be respected.

By doing this, participants included not only homosexuals but also other gender and sexual minorities.

Essentially, this discourse of equalling all groups of people and all types of love shares a similar logic with the prevalent ‘love is love’ discourse, which attempts to legitimise and celebrate love despite people’s genders and sexual orientations (Lyons, 2016). Since its massive use around the world in 2016 after the Orlando Nightclub Shooting, ‘love is love’ and its hashtag form, #loveislove, have often been used by LGBTQ+ activists and organisations, for example in Pride Parades, such as London Pride (Myers, 2017) and Taipei Pride (V. Ho, 2016), the anti-Trump Love and Equality Rally (W. Lu, 2016), a marriage equality campaign initiated by Mr. Gay Japan (Horbelt, 2020) and so forth. A campaign called LoveisLoveisLove was created (LoveisLoveisLove, n.d.) as well as other similar campaigns such as Love Has No Labels (Love Has No Labels, n.d.). Advocating equality through such a discourse, LGBTQ+ activists and organisations can effectively unite a front of people of all gender and sexual identities, though it should be noted that the ‘love is love’ discourse is another ‘soft’ strategy, which is similar to positive messaging. It focuses on building the ‘we’, rather than radically confronting oppression.

On the other hand, many participants campaigned for solidarity between all groups by explaining that everyone could be seen as a minority in some sense, and therefore, could potentially be a target of censorship – or even all kinds of oppression – like homosexuals at the time. For instance, one participant posted to connect the issue with women’s rights and freedom of speech that arguably concerns every user of social media:

DLS7788: #IAmGay# They banned us homosexuals today, so they can also ban people who don’t want to get married and have children tomorrow. They banned the platform where homosexuals speak out today, so they can also ban other platforms they think are against authorities tomorrow. They beat homosexuals to the ground today, so they can also force women to submit to men. If today homosexuals are disappearing from social media, anyone can disappear tomorrow. Whoever you are, you always have a part that belongs to a minority. Look, if we’re not allowed to exist, no one can escape.

Other examples include:

Limi233: #IAmGay# I'm heterosexual, but I stand for my brothers and sisters. When voices of minorities are stifled, people of majorities, don't you feel a sense of risk too? Under some circumstances, when we become minorities, won't we be the same? Won't our voices be stifled too, just because others think our voices shouldn't be there?

HDttt: Speak out because there will be days when everyone can become a minority. I hope no one will never have to worry about being different.

#IAmGay#

Hue0217: If minorities are stifled every time when they speak out, eventually it will become the situation for anyone of us. Because we're all human beings and definitely have something that's different from others. If you think homosexuals are none of your business and don't speak out for them, when it comes to you, no one will speak out for you either. #IAmGay# I could be homosexual or bisexual too, if that's what it means to speak for them. Voices should be respected, especially when they're about human rights.

This type of discourse can be effective in mobilising people of all identities and backgrounds. It breaks up the oppositional relationship between the majority and the minority and connects all types of minorities. If the majority, heterosexuals in this case, was convinced by this discourse, they might look for their own differences according to which they could be categorised as minorities. They could instead consider a goal that served their own interests, rather than feeling irrelevant to the issue. Meanwhile, it is very likely that other minorities or oppressed groups, such as bisexuals, transgenders, non-binaries, women and so forth, resonated with such an approach of mobilisation, as issues like censorship and discrimination could predictably happen to them.

As a result of the inclusive framing of collective identity by Zhudingzhen, influential participants, and the participant collective, the demographic of the protest consisted not only of homosexuals but also of users of other gender and sexual identities. The massive participation of heterosexual users greatly contributed to scaling up the protest, amplifying the voice of homosexuals. Many interview participants who identified as homosexual highlighted the participation of

heterosexual users, saying that they felt emotional about the support. For instance, two of them said:

I felt pretty moved at the time, as many people who were not homosexuals – straight people – came to help and spoke out for us. It was really touching. (Interviewee.27)

I kept refreshing the feed on that night, and saw so many people, men and women, even straight people, who all spoke up for the hashtag and expressed their own opinions, saying things like there should be diversity. I felt really moved by that. (Interviewee.33)

Meanwhile, participants of other gender and sexual minorities were also prominent. My interviewees included four people who identified as heterosexual, four people who identified as bisexual, one person who identified as transgender, and one person who identified as pansexual. One of those who identified as bisexual spoke about how she felt about the participant demographic and the reason why she participated:

I remember I saw so many people using the hashtag, who weren't homosexual themselves or even LGBT. They spoke out for homosexuals. I was really impressed. Although I'm not a member of the group [of homosexuals], I felt a sense of responsibility that was pushing me to do it. I thought it was not just about the group [of homosexuals]. It was also about our country and the welfare of all human beings. (Interviewee.5)

Not only was she emotionally inspired by the diverse participant demographic, but she also showed that the inclusive framing of the collective identity was effective in mobilising participants of all gender and sexual identities. Other than bisexual users, pansexual, transgender, and asexual users are found participating in the protest as well:

Krisandbridget: #IAmGay# More precisely, I'm pansexual. I'm here because I heard the call about the hashtag. I think it's ridiculous that people are discriminated, excluded and hurt because of sexual orientations, races, beliefs and appearances by others who are the same human beings, not to mention it's 2018 already. If I can't even say who I am here, then I won't use Weibo anymore. I will always support LGBTQ.

DingDingTingTing: Hello, crappy Sina, #IAmGay#. Pansexual here. I don't care whether my future partner's going to be man, woman, trans or even animal! Hope the future is bright, not dark.

Peaceful_J: # IAmGay# #IAmTransgender# hope this is not a place where love is hurt and all colours are dim. [with a photo of the rainbow flag and a photo of the transgender flag]

Plasticlife: #IAmGay# I'm transgender & asexual.

DaveSA: #IAmGay# as an asexual, I absolutely support LGBT.

Therefore, overall, the 'we' in the collective identity did not consist of only homosexuals. Rather, it centred around homosexuals and included all people who supported homosexual rights in China despite their gender and sexual identities. Although the hashtag #IAmGay# used the identity term 'gay', which in fact means 'homosexual' as illustrated, the identity term was rendered insignificant by participants' inclusive framing of the collective identity. It means that any participant could use the hashtag without necessarily identifying themselves as homosexual. The hashtag, thus, was more symbolic than literal. It symbolised a shared belief of the legitimate existence of homosexuals in China against the censorship. Furthermore, with the later analysis of antagonists of the collective identity, it will be demonstrated that the hashtag also evolved as a shared belief of the legitimate existence of all LGBTQ+ people in China.

Sense of connectedness

Before the analysis of the antagonists, there was also a strong sense of connectedness amongst participants found from interview data. The interviewees provided information from which participants' perception of the 'we' in the protest can be further understood from within the participant collective. A common topic that had been frequently mentioned by interviewees was that they felt that they were not alone. Such a sense of connectedness was important for them, as it was one of the main reasons why they participated.

Interviewees who identified as homosexual and bisexual had expressed the sense of connectedness. For homosexual participants, the sense of connectedness manifested through two ways. Firstly, 13 participants (including Interviewee.2,

Interviewee.3, Interviewee.7, Interviewee.8, Interviewee.13, Interviewee.16, Interviewee.17, Interviewee.20, Interviewee.21, Interviewee.33, Interviewee.34, Interviewee.35, Interviewee.39) talked about belonging to the collective of homosexuals or sexual minorities. Some of them also highlighted the importance of the collective being resistant to oppression. For instance, one of them said that the protest helped her to find the group of her own people, with whom she could speak out together:

You saw so many people, even though they were behind screens, but you all belong to the same group. You just feel you could do things together. There was a solidarity between us, so each of us was not that alone anymore. [...] By finding your own group, knowing there were people who were the same as yourself, you would have more courage to speak out together. (Interviewee.17)

Secondly, two participants, Interviewee.24 and Interviewee.35, specifically mentioned that being part of the collective could also help people to normalise their identity of homosexual, which was meaningful even beyond the protest. For instance, one of them talked about her journey of understanding herself through participating in the protest:

Speaking about myself, after I followed what happened with the hashtag – in fact, before following it, I had some doubts about myself and thought I was somehow abnormal. But after following it, I realised I was not the only one feeling like that. There are so many people like me, and I just didn't know about it. Then, I started to know I'm normal. Those previous misunderstandings about myself are gone. I also feel gradually more confident in myself, because I know who I am. (Interviewee.24)

Bisexual participants also expressed similar feelings. Two bisexual interviewees mentioned this. The first one talked about it from the perspective of homosexuals by referring to her homosexual friend:

If you're a homosexual who doesn't accept yourself, after seeing many people speaking out for homosexuals, you'd probably feel it's actually not a big deal [to be homosexual]. 'I'm actually very normal', you'd probably think. I talked to a friend who's homosexual before. They told me they saw other friends

posting about anti-discrimination, so they thought if others were doing it, there was no reason that they couldn't do it as well. (Interviewee.11)

What this interviewee mentioned about her friend's situation is similar to how other homosexual participants connected to the collective, that is, through finding their own group with which they could act together and through normalising their sexual identity as homosexual. The second bisexual interviewee who felt connected during the protest talked about the connectedness from a bisexual perspective:

I just feel, like, I'm not alone. There were so many people, people who were sexual minorities. I don't really get to meet many sexual minorities in real life, but I met so many of them on Weibo [in the #IAmGay# protest]. That really made me feel I was not alone. (Interviewee.27)

Interestingly, what Interviewee.27 described is, again, similar to the way in which homosexual participants felt connected with the collective. However, instead of the group of homosexuals, Interviewee.27 felt connected to the group of sexual minorities. This suggests that the inclusive framing of the collective identity was to some extent effective, as this bisexual participant did not see any difference by which bisexuals and homosexuals could distinguish from each other in the protest. Rather, the participant treated bisexuals, homosexuals, and perhaps other people of marginalised sexual identities, as a group that shared one identity, that of being sexual minorities. Such a similarity between people of different identities, which was the core of the inclusive framing, achieved a sense of connectedness under the umbrella of sexual minorities.

The sense of connectedness, which was perceived by both homosexual and bisexual participants, shows that the 'we' in the #IAmGay# protest was uniform and compact to some extent, unlike those fractured and loose collective identities constructed through SNSs that previous studies have shown (Gerbaudo, 2015; Kavada, 2015; Stephansen, 2017; McClelland-Cohen and Endacott, 2020). This needs to be highlighted, as the 'we' in collective identity is concerned about not only who is involved but also how people within the 'we' relate to each other. After all, as Melucci (1995) stresses, collective identity is relational. The ties between individual participants and also between groups of gender and sexual identities were strong. This

might have been caused by several factors. For instance, the #IAmGay# protest was the very first LGBTQ+ mass collective action in China and participants had been oppressed for a long time without many ways of expression. The mobilisation strategies could be another factor, since most of them aimed to mobilise potential participants by building relationships and providing support. Also, the perceived risk of participating in the protest was not likely to be low, which stands against the slacktivist critique that treats activism on SNSs as low-risk and low-commitment. Participants' risk assessment will be included for discussion in a later section. Due to those likely causes, the strong connectedness was evidently a significant part of the 'we' in the protest.

6.1.2 The antagonists

The antagonist in the #IAmGay# protest was, overall, framed by participants to be centred around heterosexism in China. Based on the potential antagonists suggested by quantitative analysis, it is discovered from the observation and interview data that three heterosexist oppressors were identified as antagonists: Weibo, the state, and the society. While Weibo was certainly the main antagonist that was directly made demands upon by participants, the state and the society were treated differently. Participants considered the state and the society to be more powerful heterosexist oppressors who caused the censorship on Weibo, and therefore, expressed significant dissent towards them. However, participants did not make specific demands on the state and the society in the same way as toward Weibo. Hence, I categorise Weibo as the primary antagonist and the state and the society as the secondary antagonists in the #IAmGay# protest. Furthermore, the identification of all antagonists in the protest was led by influential users, yet it could not be achieved without the collective's effort. Due to the inclusive framing of the 'we', the antagonists were seen as not only homophobic but also heterosexist, which means that the inclusive collective recognised the antagonists to be oppressing all gender and sexual minorities in China.

Weibo

Firstly, participants in the protest identified and framed Weibo as the primary antagonist since the very beginning of the protest. This is not surprising, since Weibo

implemented the censorship and was the direct reason why the protest was launched. As explained before, the use of the identity term in the hashtag was responding to Weibo's censorship announcement. Moreover, the collocation test has also shown that participants were certainly angry about Weibo. When they mentioned Sina, the company that owns Weibo, many participants even used extreme cursing words. In particular, the noticeably frequent use of 'crappy Sina' ('渣浪') was an apparent indicator of Weibo being the primary antagonist.

Apart from those pieces of evidence, it is observed that a large number of participants posted to condemn Weibo for its misconduct. Two influential participants directly mentioned Weibo in their posts. Except for Liamkiki who said that 'Weibo is so sick', another one was BryantGHD:

BryantGHD: my grandma is 84 years old and even she supports homosexuality.
Crappy Sina is too disappointing. #IAmGay# love is love [with a video in which the grandmother talks about supporting homosexuality]

Some participants even posted to explicitly confront Weibo, challenging Weibo to censor them. For instance, one participant posted:

WindowL001: #IAmGay# Ban me right now. I am homosexual, so why don't you ban me, asshole Sina? @WeiboAdministrator

Those posts further prove Weibo's role as an antagonist in the protest.

Despite participants' dissent that was widely expressed towards Weibo, specific demands were also made by participants. At the beginning of the protest, participants had solely one demand, which was the apology from Weibo for its decision on censoring homosexual-themed content as well as treating homosexuality in a similar way to pornography and violence. As the incident escalated, after the Voice of Comrade was suspended from posting, and the hashtag was also banned from access, participants made new demands on Weibo. Other than apologising, participants demanded Weibo lift the suspension of the Voice of Comrade and the ban of the hashtag. Even after Weibo's announcement of ending the censorship, participants were still posting to pressure Weibo to fulfil other demands. Many participants put together

and circulated three demands after Weibo announced the decision not to censor homosexual-themed content anymore. For instance, one participant posted:

Cucumber7cs: #IAmGay# This is not over yet. 1. Please recover the #IAmGay# hashtag. 2. Apologise publicly and recover all accounts that have been banned. 3. Stop categorising 'homosexual' as a sensitive keyword and stop blocking or censoring any content that contains it.

As this participant stated, the collective's demands on Weibo had evolved from the initial apology to removal of all types of censorship on Weibo that targeted homosexuals and homosexuality at the later stage of the protest.

Those demands can be seen as the main goals of the protest. The goals reflected participants' identification of Weibo as the primary antagonist that constituted a part of the collective identity. Eventually, amongst all the demands, Weibo fulfilled three of them, which were reversing the decision on the censorship, reinstating the Voice of Comrade, and lifting the ban of the hashtag. It seems that Weibo attempted to isolate the incident and addressed only superficial issues that concerned the protest collective. It should also be noted that Weibo did not make an apology. Neither did it respond to any demand about its censorship on the platform outside of the incident. Some participants kept voicing their demands, yet their voice gradually lessened due to the partial success of the protest.

Regardless, Weibo was framed as the direct and primary antagonist in the protest, to which the collective expressed dissent and demands. However, Weibo was not the only antagonist in the protest and other antagonists were also found to be framed by participants. The others were not framed in the same way in which Weibo was framed, but all of them shared a characteristic, that is, being identified by participants to be heterosexist and the cause of the censorship.

The state and the society

Although both the state and the society were mentioned frequently in participants' posts and reposts, it is unclear whether they were antagonists or not based on only the quantitative data. The data suggested that participants were likely to have mixed feelings in relation to them. My observation and interviews have shown that the state

and the society were indeed framed as antagonists in the protest. Unlike Weibo, the state and the society were secondary antagonists, as participants expressed dissent but no prominent and specific demand towards them. In general, participants believed that the state was more of a political oppressor who was accountable for the implementation of Weibo's censorship, whereas the society was ultimately the cause of heterosexism that socially and culturally oppressed gender and sexual minorities in China.

The state was mentioned by both influential participants and many ordinary participants. Amongst all the influential participants, two mentioned the state. The first was Panito whose post got the most engagements, over 500 thousand, amongst all the posts and reposts that were collected. Panito posted:

Panito: #IAmGay# If nobody speaks out now, there probably won't be any more chances in the future. The video of our hugging event was 404ed¹⁵ because of the General Regulation. I really want to post it again today. [with a video of homosexual people wearing blindfolds, holding signs of identity statement, and waiting for strangers' hugs in public]

Although the post did not directly mention the state or any specific department of the government, it highlighted a previous incident of censorship and connected the incident with the General Rules that was released by CNSA under the supervision of the government in 2017. As described in the context of the #IAmGay# movement in the introduction chapter, the General Rules dictated that media organisations must censor video content containing homosexuality and it was considered by many to be the main reason why videos related to homosexuality were censored at the time. By mentioning such a previous incident in the post, therefore, Panito implied that the general cause of censorship was the government's media policy. Although Panito did not directly confront the government, some participants commented or reposted Panito's post and directly expressed dissent towards the government. For instance, one participant reposted and wrote:

¹⁵ '404' is an error code in Hypertext Transfer Protocol, which means 'page not found'. Chinese Internet users often use it to refer to the disappearance of content or profiles caused by censorship on SNSs.

CannyOP: Share the video @Panito #IAmGay# [...] To some rubbish government department: this is none of your business!

Another influential participant who also mentioned the state was GoodSister. However, GoodSister's post was rather different from Panito's. GoodSister posted after the publication of the People's Daily's article in which the government stated support for sexual diversity, explicitly condemning the state for being the power behind Weibo that caused the censorship:

GoodSister: If the hashtag #IAmGay# is still not recovered and homosexual publications are still not allowed, I won't ever believe the saying that 'the authorities mean well and Weibo just misunderstood them [by implementing the censorship]'. How can Weibo be such a disobedient media corporation in our communist society? It's just one playing the good cop and another playing the bad cop. If they feel like it, they will still completely negate us.

In the post, GoodSister tended to discuss the state's attitude towards homosexuality in general rather than focusing on the one article from the state that supported sexual diversity. The article was interpreted in the post as, according to the phrases 'play the good cop' and 'play the bad cop' used, a superficial action that meant to only appease the protest collective. This post received enormous support from other participants who agreed with the expression. The fact that multiple words and phrases in the post, including GoodSister's username ('好妹妹'), 'recover' ('恢复'), 'publication' ('出版物'), 'misunderstand' ('误解'), 'obedient' ('听话'), 'corporation' ('企业'), 'communist' ('社会主义'), 'play the good cop' ('扮红脸'), 'play the bad cop' ('扮白脸'), and 'completely negate' ('一棒子打死'), all appear in the keywords list shows that the post was reposted a huge number of times. In particular, this post shows that 'corporation', the word that underwent a collocation test, was indeed used to refer to Weibo, not corporations in general. It should also be noted that GoodSister's account is now deleted, but whether the deletion was related to such an explicitly confrontational post is unknown.

Apart from influential participants, there were many other participants who also widely considered the state to be the main reason why the censorship was

implemented, and therefore, expressed their dissent. For instance, in a discussion of the censorship, one participant's comment about the cause of the censorship was 'liked' by many:

Aixiaobee: Actually... I think if there was no one from the above supporting it, Sina wouldn't dare to act like this. There must be powerful people behind Sina.

Replying to this comment, another user also agreed:

NotCA: Even Boss Lai's [the CEO of Sina Weibo] posts are censored sometimes, so this is not entirely crappy Sina's fault.

Other examples of posts include:

Slowhorse888: #IAmGay# In fact, the most disgusting thing is there are conservative and lazy people in the government who want to solve all problems with one simple solution. Weibo as a platform took the easy way following them and made a stupid decision implying that minorities are all illegitimate. The state could just arrest 70 million LGBT people in the country then. We could all be erased, with all the discussions about sex that are also not allowed in this country, if you think we're all just about pornography and vulgarity.

SaucyMM: #IAmGay# No matter if I'm homo, bi or straight, I should have my rights to freely enjoy love. Why are we living in a place where we're demonised and listed together with violence and pornography, when the other side of the channel [Taiwan] is waving the rainbow flag? When your own country excludes you, how can you love it?

Earllime6666: #IAmGay# I'm not homosexual. To be honest, I love China and I'm always proud of China, but in terms of the issue of homosexuality, I'm always disappointed. [...] In our politics textbooks, we're a socialist country of democracy and we protect our citizens' rights. Homosexuals are real people living among us, but because they're not protected by the law, many of them have to face discrimination. The government keeps talking about democracy, but have they really cared about homosexuals' demands?

As those examples of posts show, participants expressed dissent towards the state because not only the state was believed to be the reason for censorship, but also

because the state had been constantly oppressing homosexuals. Also, homosexuals were not the only group that concerned participants. As in the first and second examples, participants saw the state's oppression as forced onto all gender and sexual minorities.

The interview data also show that participants saw the state as a powerful oppressor that was not just a cause of the censorship but also one of the significant reasons for the existence of discrimination and inequality. Weibo was, in fact, not discussed much by interviewees in relation to the censorship, which again shows that many participants in the protest believed that Weibo was following the state's instruction. Specifically, where interviewees expressed dissent towards the state, they mentioned several aspects of the state, including the state's control over the Internet and offline political activities, legal protection (e.g. the legalisation of same-sex marriage and anti-discrimination laws), gender and sex education, media policies and so forth:

Homosexual people, like all other Chinese people, are living inside the Great Firewall, so we lack mobilisation and imagination to fight for our rights. We don't know what else to do except for loudly saying that 'we're homosexual'. We can demand the legalisation of same-sex marriage, but the government is not really responding to that. [...] In #IAmGay#, I feel we were still talking to ourselves. At the end, the government media just released a pacifying article and superficially addressed the existence of the group, which actually stopped the discussion from reaching the real public. (Interviewee.0)

Everything's very sensitive and fragile in mainland China at the moment. Even though people can be anonymous on the Internet, your information will be obtained by the government very quickly. Especially if you're in Beijing, you may get arrested. [...] It's also not allowed to 'unlawfully' rally in China. (Interviewee.14)

From a legal perspective, not to mention same-sex marriage, there is still nothing in our law about anti-discrimination, adoption [of same-sex couples] or transgender people's transition. Our law is basically blank on those issues, so we have no way to get legal protection. [...] And another problem is education. I think education is even more important than the law, because we just started to have sex education in China and there is no such a thing as gender education.

That causes people to avoid talking about sex and gender. The worst is that homosexuality is still treated very negatively in some sex education textbooks in China. (Interviewee.2)

We all hope it'll get better, but actually I think in China, our 'special socialism' doesn't tolerate homosexuals. Our government-owned central media will never mention homosexuals. The only exception was when same-sex marriage was finally legalised in Taiwan, and it was very brief. There is basically no mention of anything else. If we can't get coverage, people don't know the group exists, so people don't treat us seriously. (Interviewee.25)

Compared with posts on Weibo, interviewees' discussion of the state tended to more general, not solely focused on the censorship that led to the protest. This further indicates that although censorship was one of the most prominent issues that Chinese LGBTQ+ people were facing, participants' dissatisfaction, frustration, and even anger about the state were developed upon all kinds of inaction and misconduct of the state, likely long before the protest. Those participants' negative emotions towards the state outside of the protest, therefore, were channelled through the protest and expressed collectively by participants as dissent towards the state.

On the other hand, the heterosexist society was identified by participants as another antagonist in the protest, as it was seen as the ultimate reason for oppression of LGBTQ+ people in China. There was no influential participant who explicitly expressed dissent towards the society or emphasised the society in their posts. The identification of the society as one of the antagonists was mostly achieved through the protest collective's effort.

Many participants posted to point out that the society in China was predominantly discriminative against LGBTQ+ people. For instance, one participant posted to claim that the society was accountable for discrimination against minorities:

Glove41: #IAmGay# I'm not homosexual, but I felt quite sad when I saw what happened on Weibo, sad about the status quo of the society. The majority of people see minorities as people born with original sins, but they have done nothing wrong. What's wrong is the society.

Some discussed the fact that talking about sex was still almost a taboo in Chinese society, which created significant obstacles to the advancement of gender and sexual equality in China:

SofieHLM: #IAmGay# Why is sex always hidden and unspeakable? It's ridiculous that even textbooks of sex education are doing this. Don't parents want their children to learn how to protect themselves when violation happens and to wear condoms when having sex? [...] If heterosexual sex behaviours are too filthy to talk about, how can we even discuss homosexuality?

09zbx87: #IAmGay# Support comrades! Love shouldn't be discriminated. Chai Jing, 'why doesn't our society accept homosexuals?' Beichuan Zhang, 'because in our sex culture, reproduction is the objective; ignorance is the pure; foolishness is the virtue; and prejudice is the principle.' – *Kanjian*¹⁶

Some also argue that the society was fuelling the heterosexist state to implement censorship of homosexuals. For instance, one participant wrote an article titled *What Should We Do When Facing Crappy Sina's Ban*, which was circulated within the protest. In the article, the participant asserted:

LXNpup: Is the main conflict here between us and crappy Sina? Or between us and the government authorities? [...] In fact, I think we all surely understand that the real conflict is between us and the society, how the public perceives us. In other words, simply, our enemy is 'the whole society'. [...] As we all know, the current societal environment doesn't tolerate homosexuals enough, so the real problem is that the majority of people in the society don't know enough. This is the most fundamental conflict.

Similarly, most interviewees, 31 out of 39 of them, also criticised the society for it being intolerant and discriminative. Except for talking about intolerance and discrimination in the society, they also mentioned some specific issues within Chinese

¹⁶ This participant quoted an interview segment from the book *Kanjian* (看见) by Chai Jing (2013), a famous Chinese journalist. Beichuan Zhang mentioned in the quote is a renowned scholar who studies HIV/AIDS amongst MSM in China. The quote was used by many participants during the protest.

society that affected gender and sexual minorities in China to various degrees. For instance, heteronormative pressure was highlighted by several interviewees:

Because of the pressure from the society and parents, most gay men will eventually choose to get married [to heterosexual women]. I think this is really bad for those women, for those families and for their children in the future.

(Interviewee.10)

My friends and people who I mostly socialise with were born around 1980. Back in our time, we didn't know much about performative marriage¹⁷, so gay men had to get married to straight women, and lesbians would marry straight men. Then, you'd divorce after having children. Nowadays, people who were born after 1985 or 1990 know performative marriage from the Internet, so a lot of them choose to do that. [...] You owe your family an explanation and you must have children. [...] In the workplace, your colleagues will discuss and make rumours about you [if you don't get married and have children]. Some may even ask you directly, like, why you're not having children. It's a lot of pressure. (Interviewee.20)

Some pointed out that there was a binary gender and sexual system amongst Chinese LGBTQ+ people, which can be seen as the consequence of heteronormativity:

People can't distinguish what's sexual orientation and what's gender identity. People still understand gay men as tops and bottoms and lesbians as tomboys and femmes, in such a binary gender system. I think they need to expand their knowledge. (Interviewee.2)

What's the common situation between comrade partners or couples? [...] One stronger, one weaker, which means one is top and one is bottom. So frankly, it's just directly copying the relationship pattern of straight couples.

(Interviewee.35)

The taboo of talking about sex was mentioned again:

¹⁷ Performative marriage (形婚) refers to the type of legal marriage 'contracted between a gay man and a lesbian to give the appearance of heterosexuality' (Choi and Luo, 2016, pp. 260-261).

I think we really need to promote knowledge of sexual orientation, because sex is still a rather shameful topic to talk about. People are very conservative about it. When I was young, I didn't have anyone who could tell me what to do, or anything about sex. (Interviewee.13)

Let's talk about sex first. In the Chinese social environment, many people will suddenly change their faces if they hear others talking about sex. Lots of parents can't even teach their children about sexual protection, let alone knowledge about homosexuality. (Interviewee.24)

Lastly, some interviewees also discussed the stigmatisation of homosexuality in the society:

In such an environment in China, many people would naturally pathologise homosexuality when they see it. They'd immediately relate it with mental illness. (Interviewee.15)

People are so scared of AIDS and think homosexuals are promiscuous. This is what homosexuals are facing – or you can say, what's troubling homosexuals. My opinion is, this directly causes the situation that the public doesn't accept homosexuals. (Interviewee.40)

From those posts on Weibo and information provided by interviewees, it may seem difficult to understand the process in which participants identified the society as an antagonist. This is because participants' framing of the society as an antagonist was more subtle, compared with the framings of Weibo and the state. Rather than explicitly and strongly expressing their dissent, most participants gravitated to the discussion of issues embedded in the society that led to injustice and inequality. Those issues may seem not so closely linked with the censorship, but participants believed that they contributed to the creation of an intolerant social and cultural environment where the censorship was cultivated. In other words, the censorship was a manifestation of the intolerant and discriminative society. As one interviewee also explained, Chinese gender and sexual minorities had been living in the oppressive society for a long time without any major outlet of emotional expression. The #IAmGay# protest provided them such an outlet to finally express their dissent towards the heterosexist society.

Furthermore, it is also found that participants did not collectively make specific demands on the state and the society, unlike those made on Weibo. There were some individual participants whose posts can be seen as vague demands. Those vague demands were mostly on the state. For instance, a limited number of participants demanded that the state should set up rating systems for media industries in China so that the view of media content could be restricted by age, and therefore, media content could be more diversified. However, demands like this did not become part of the antagonist framings of the state and the society in the protest. Namely, those demands were sporadic and not picked up by many other participants or the collective as a whole. Most participants mainly expressed dissent.

Some interviewees had also commented on the matter. As they explained, to survive all kinds of prosecution, such as censorship and arrests, LGBTQ+ activism in China perhaps had to avoid irrationally and robustly confronting the state and challenging certain traditional values deeply embedded in the society. What happened in the #IAmGay# protest with the state and the society, therefore, can be seen as partially a strategic choice. By not making any specific and strong demand on the state and the society, the protest was more likely to survive. However, it should be also highlighted that due to the loose and decentralised protest structure, such a strategy was unlikely to be made with much organisational intention. There is no evidence found on Weibo that can indicate participants' intention of not making strong demands on the state and the society. Some individual participants might have considered such a matter, like the interviewees, but not voiced their consideration on Weibo. Additionally, the hashtag was blocked in less than a day, which means that the strategy had seemingly failed to some extent. Such a phenomenon is also important in regard to exploring control in LGBTQ+ activism in China, and therefore, shall be discussed more extensively.

6.1.3 The broad audience

The framed audience in the #IAmGay# protest is found to be rather obscure. Amongst all interviewees, only one of them commented on this matter, saying that it was rather difficult to have a targeted audience. Moreover, I did not find any apparent sign that could indicate participants directly talking to any particular group of people, other than

the antagonists and potential participants. Therefore, the audience forming part of the collective identity can be understood as the general public on Weibo, which reflects the inclusive ‘we’ in the protest.

In detail, to find out the audience, I have particularly inspected to whom participants were talking in a collective manner during the protest. Participants were certainly talking to the antagonists. Distinctly, they talked to Weibo the most and some even used the @ function to tag Weibo’s administrator account in their posts, hoping that their demands could be seen by Weibo.

Apart from the antagonists, some participants aimed to mobilise more people to participate in the protest, which means that they were likely to target a specific audience. This happened to be the case for some of those participants. As Tonmei did in their post, they explicitly called for solidarity between homosexuals, mobilising homosexual users on Weibo to participate. In those participants’ posts, therefore, the audience was homosexual users on Weibo.

However, many participants mobilised not only homosexual users but also all other users who supported gender and sexual equality. One typical example is Zhudingzhen who launched the protest by using the hashtag to state his own identity as homosexual and asked about others’ identities. In this mobilisation approach, there was not a specifically targeted audience. As the mobilisation contributed to framing an inclusive ‘we’ in the protest, the audience of it was also inclusive. In other words, the audience was framed to be any user on Weibo. Such an approach of mobilisation was also widely adopted by many participants during the protest, especially those who did not identify as homosexual. Therefore, as a whole, the audience in the protest was framed to be the general public on Weibo. By framing the audience so broadly, the protest collective attempted to mobilise as many participants as possible so that there was going to be more pressure on Weibo to react.

Furthermore, the framing also potentially helped voices in the protest to enter the public discourse on Weibo. The various voices, then, could be heard by bystanders, or even users who held opposite opinions, and could influence them to some extent. For instance, when participants were trying to normalise gender and sexual minorities in Chinese society in their posts, such a goal could not be achieved unless their voice was heard and agreed with by the public. Bystanders and opponents in the general

public on Weibo, who were not likely to become participants in the protest, were also important components of the framed audience, although they were not as specifically and vastly mentioned as the antagonists and potential participants in the protest.

6.2 Risk assessment

To explore participants' action in relation to the slacktivist critique, I have also analysed their process of risk assessment. The slacktivist critique argues that minor political activities on SNSs are low-threshold, low-effort, and low-risk, and therefore, slacktivists are not committed to further contributions to political causes (Morozov, 2009; Christensen, 2011; Dennis, 2019). Participants' action in the #IAmGay# protest was indeed relatively low-threshold and low-effort, since one needed only a digital device that could connect to the Internet, i.e. a smart phone or a computer, and some basic abilities and knowledge of using Weibo to participate¹⁸. However, it is found that there were at least two types of risk perceived by participants to be involved in participating in the protest. Firstly, the interview data show that some participants, particularly homosexuals, had concerns about coming out as gender and sexual minorities in public. Secondly, both observation and interview data show that almost all participants faced the risk of being socially and politically oppressed. Therefore, it is evident that participating in the #IAmGay# protest was not perceived as low-risk. Participants' perception of risk was also validated throughout the protest.

The first type of risk concerning coming out as gender and sexual minorities in the public was expressed by multiple interviewees who self-identified as gender and sexual minorities. The hashtag was used by many to disclose their own identities and coming out stories were a significant part of the protest. The interviewees, however, did not feel ready or comfortable enough to participate in those ways that could be seen as coming out in public. They avoided coming out during the protest mainly because of the connection between their online and offline lives, i.e. having families, friends, or colleagues who followed them on Weibo. Thus, they participated in the

¹⁸ Digital divide still plays a significant role in China, especially between rural and urban areas (D. Wang et al., 2021) and between people with and without disabilities (Z. Lin et al., 2019). Hence, participation in the #IAmGay# protest was not unconditionally low-threshold and low-effort. It is important to note that the protest necessarily excluded people who could not access the Internet and use Weibo.

protest through ways that were not likely be seen as directly coming out, or even in ways hidden from their followers. For instance, one interviewee who self-identified as bisexual did not publish an original post with the hashtag and considered using an alternate account:

I was afraid to post using my main account, I mean, posting something original using the hashtag with my main account, because I had friends [from offline life] on Weibo. I can't remember if I used my alternate account [to post anything original]. But anyway, it wasn't completely anonymous, so I wouldn't dare do it. [...] I only reposted, commented and liked others' posts. (Interviewee.11)

Similarly, another interviewee who self-identified as homosexual said that she mainly participated by commenting on others' posts, presumably because unlike original posts, reposts, and likes, comments are not shown on users' profile pages:

I normally just browse and don't tend to write my own posts or repost anything, because I'm afraid I'd be seen [as homosexual] by my classmates on Weibo. So technically, I might have not really participated [in the protest]. I did comment on other people's posts, but rarely reposted or liked anything. (Interviewee.24)

The interviewee who self-identified as transgender had the same experience:

I didn't repost anything because it's very difficult to bring up such a matter in China. It's especially because I have so many friends on my social media platform, so I chose to not repost or like anything. But of course, I did comment on others' posts. (Interviewee.29)

Their ways of participating were, therefore, resulting from their risk assessment. They were aware that their participation could potentially reveal their identities as gender and sexual minorities, leading to issues outside of the protest.

Meanwhile, there were also interviewees who were aware of such a risk and still chose to post and come out in the protest. As they explained:

Before participating [in the protest], things I posted on Weibo were all normal, because there were some friends and colleagues following me on Weibo. Then I participated in the event, I thought I'd just throw myself all out there, and posted my own post. So, I kind of came out to those friends. (Interviewee.3)

I came out to my mum before the event and she accepted it quite easily, but I had never told a lot of people in the public. I was really pissed off on that day [so I posted and came out in the protest], and after that, everyone started to know I was gay. It has made me very open about telling others that I'm gay now, especially when I make new friends. (Interviewee.6)

Compared to those who attempted to hide their traces of participation from the offline life, the two interviewees here decided to take the risk of coming out. Their experience is likely to be similar to the experience of other participants who also came out in the protest.

However, some other interviewees did not have such a concern. This is because most of them had come out as gender and sexual minorities to their families and friends prior to the protest. Those interviewees included one (Interviewee.4) who self-identified as pansexual and others who self-identified as homosexual:

I told everyone before that I didn't really care about gender [when it comes to having a relationship with someone], so it [participating in the protest] didn't make a big difference to me. But I think it must also be because I had come out already. (Interviewee.4)

It [participating in the protest] didn't affect me much, because my close friends knew [that I was gay] already. (Interviewee.7)

I think it [participating in the protest] didn't affect me at all, because all my friends knew my sexual orientation already. They knew I was gay and didn't discriminate against me or anything. (Interviewee.22)

Weibo was actually fine for me, because most people I follow on Weibo are my classmates and friends. They all had known my identity already, except for those who hadn't – I didn't mind if they knew it [from my participation in the protest] anyway. (Interviewee.23)

All my friends knew I was gay, including classmates as well, so posting [in the protest] wasn't going to make a big difference in that regard. (Interviewee.38)

One interviewee also thought it was not of a significant risk, as she did not have people from her offline life following her on Weibo:

I think my Weibo is kind of private. Although I do sometimes share some information from Weibo with close friends, doing this type of thing doesn't normally cause any trouble for me. [...] I don't have any colleagues or people around me on Weibo, so I wasn't afraid to post or repost anything.

(Interviewee.20)

Therefore, it should be noted that the risk of unexpectedly coming out by participating in the protest was not perceived by everyone. The risk was mainly a concern of LGBTQ+ participants who had not come out and had connections between their online and offline lives. Thus, through exploring participants' perception of the risk, it is also found that there was likely to be a threshold of participation. To be able to fully participate in the protest, i.e. to freely post, repost, and interact with others, LGBTQ+ participants needed to fit at least one of the following criteria: 1) being already out prior to the protest, 2) having no family, friend, or colleague following them on Weibo, or 3) being willing to take the risk and come out to the public in the protest. Not fitting any of the criteria did not prevent them from participating and contributing to the cause, but like the interviewees, their participation had to happen in limited ways.

The second type of risk is found to be relevant to probably all participants in the protest, not only LGBTQ+ participants. Participants, despite their gender and sexual identities, faced the risk of being oppressed, when they spoke out for gender and sexual diversity and equality in the protest. Socially, many interviewees claimed that they expected backlash from other users on Weibo, which in fact did happen to some of them. Politically, it is evident from many posts in the protest that many participants were prepared for likely censorship of their posts and accounts, which according to one interviewee, did happen, too.

As the hashtag was free to access and use by any user on Weibo, participants were exposed to the possibility of online discrimination and hatred once they participated in the protest. Although LGBTQ+ participants who came out in the protest were most likely to be the target, heterosexual allies were also a potential target, since

they were all active and vocal in supporting the equality of gender and sexual minorities in China. Therefore, potentially, every participant could face such a risk. According to many interviewees, the risk was perceived and experienced by them. For instance, some mentioned their experience of homophobia during the protest:

People who started the event were abused badly. [...] The person who started it was Zhudingzhen. [...] There were a group of people against him. They thought it was kind of a trend and hated him for it. (Interviewee.6)

There were a lot of people who started to curse me and abuse me. [...] There were a lot of posts with opinions, homophobic ones, or ones of hatred towards LGBT. (Interviewee.7)

You can't ignore that there were people on the extremely opposite side. They tried to deliberately provoke fights and it could easily get out of control, which could then lead to the public's misunderstanding of our group. (Interviewee.28)

I heard some homophobic voices. [...] I think because people didn't know each other, so they just said whatever they wanted without paying any price for it. (Interviewee.38)

One interviewee also talked about her experience of discrimination offline because of her participation in the protest:

My classmates thought I was a very normal girl before, like everyone else who read books and listened to music, that kind of normal. But after I came out [in the #IAmGay# protest], I was suddenly abnormal to them. It was such a difficult thing to do, to come out. (Interviewee.13)

Therefore, for LGBTQ+ participants, the risk of coming out to the public and the risk of social oppression were also tightly linked. The former could lead to the latter if their participation was seen by anti-LGBTQ+ people around them offline.

Censorship was mentioned the most in the protest. Although collectively speaking out for the equality of gender and sexual minorities in China was relatively new to participants, they were no stranger to digital censorship. Most Chinese netizens, especially activists on SNSs, had been familiar with and probably battling with digital

ensorship on SNSs for a long time (J. Lu and Zhao, 2018; D. Wang and Mark, 2015; G. Yang, 2014) before the #IAmGay# protest.

Participants in the protest, therefore, foresaw all forms of censorship that could happen to them, such as the deletion of comments, posts, and accounts and being banned to post. This is evident in many posts in the protest. For instance, the post of Miso_Y quoted earlier in this chapter particularly emphasised censorship, saying ‘censor me however you want’. Some other examples of posts that also expressed participants’ perception of the risk include:

OnionLLLW: #IAmGay# I want to experience the deletion of my account too.

BaaaM427: #IAmGay# [...] want to use the hashtag and speak out for you. Just censor me! Whether you’re homosexual or LGBT, you’re all normal people!

BladeWL123: #IAmGay# just delete my account, it doesn’t matter.

Such a risk was also proven to be a valid concern. Censorship indeed happened as participants anticipated. Despite the fact that the hashtag was blocked, participants also experienced censorship individually. Some participants posted to say that their comments and posts were deleted:

BaseballerRM: #IAmGay# Crappy Sina, why did you delete my comment?

p_pix: My post was deleted, but I can just post it again. I’m so proud of being who I am! #IAmGay#

According to an interviewee, his account was deleted during the protest:

I did my own post using the hashtag and then my account was deleted.

(Interviewee.7)

Therefore, from the above, the two types of risk demonstrate that participating in the protest was by no means low-risk. Not only were most participants aware of the risks, but some of them had also experienced the consequences of taking the risks. In particular, LGBTQ+ participants faced both types of risk. There were also some thresholds regarding coming out for LGBTQ+ participants to fully participate in the

protest. This means that participating in the protest was not entirely low-threshold, either. The slacktivist critique, thus, is not valid in this case.

6.3 The online and the offline

Finally, the slacktivist critique argues that minor political participation online leads to lower willingness to participate in offline activism due to the fulfilment of participants' desire for political participation (Morozov, 2009). Therefore, I explored participants' views of both online and offline forms of LGBTQ+ activism through interviews. Most participants saw online and offline activism as different from each other because of their different types of impact. A high willingness to participate in future activism, both online and offline, was found amongst most interviewees. However, they also acknowledged difficulties in participating in offline activism in the Chinese political environment, which seem to be the main reason why Chinese LGBTQ+ individuals participate in significantly less offline political activities, rather than the fact that they have already participated in minor political activities online.

Comparing online and offline forms of LGBTQ+ activism, interviewees believed that they both had pros and cons. According to them, online forms of activism are easier to participate in, since there is no significant restriction regarding when and where people can participate, and the anonymity can help protect those who have not come out. They can also have much wider impact, as they can commonly reach more people. However, they considered online activism to be extremely vulnerable facing the restrictions and controls on SNSs, i.e. online censorship. For instance, one interviewee said:

It's so easy to get banned. Those things [speaking out] on the Internet are weak. Once they turn [the comment section and the repost function] off or ban you, then you can't see any repost or comment¹⁹. Everything you did would be in vain. (Interviewee.14)

¹⁹ Here this interviewee mentioned a specific approach of online censorship on Weibo. Weibo can make a post invisible to the public or shut down repost and comment functions of a post to prevent users' interaction.

On the other hand, interviewees regarded offline forms of LGBTQ+ activism to be generally more impactful on individual participants, mainly because people need to attend them physically. Talking about her own experience of participating in both online and offline events, an interviewee told me that she never felt such a strong sense of involvement in online events as she did in offline events:

Offline ones are much more specific, which suit me more. For example, if I want to know something about a specific topic, there are professional lectures about it. I can meet a lot of people and know much more by going to those offline events. [...] I don't participate in many online events. Sometimes there are some surveys, like yours now. I'd participate. But I haven't felt a strong sense of participation [in those online ones]. (Interviewee.25)

On the other hand, many interviewees found time and location of offline events to be an issue, as most of them are held in more progressive cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai, and travelling can be expensive and time-consuming. What's more, it is also risky for people who have not come out to attend any physical events. One interviewee concluded the pros and cons of participating in offline events, saying that:

[Participating in] anything offline, like I said before, there's an issue of time. In addition, there are people still having doubts about themselves. They'd worry if they'd be seen by friends and worry about coming out. They must be afraid of that. This is another problem, but overall, I feel offline events are more helpful. (Interviewee.22)

Thus, it is evident that they saw online and offline LGBTQ+ activism as both advantageous and disadvantageous and neither of them necessarily better than the other.

Most of the interviewees were also very much inclined to participate in offline LGBTQ+ activism. A few of them had been already participating in offline events, e.g. Interviewee.25 who implied so in the quote above, but most of them did not have much experience in offline activism. Yet, they expressed strong intention to involve themselves in offline activism, given that they could afford the time and travelling. For

instance, one participant wished that China had its own pride parade so that she could participate in it:

I'm thinking, if we had those big [pride] parades, would I be courageous enough to participate? If I were to go – I'm absolutely envious of those ones overseas. I like them very much! If we really had something like that in China, I would surely go. (Interviewee.20)

Their strong willingness to participate in offline activism was to a great extent connected to their experience of participating in the #IAmGay# protest. When I asked them whether their experience of participating in the #IAmGay# protest had helped or would help them participate in subsequent LGBTQ+ activism, most of the interviewees answered affirmatively. However, they claimed that such help mainly manifested through emotional inspiration. More specifically, they felt inspired by the support and encouragement in the protest, which led them to knowing that they were not alone fighting against sexual and gender inequality. One interviewee, for example, answered:

Definitely yes, because I never expected so many people to participate in the hashtag [protest]. So many people were paying attention [to the issue], which made gave me more courage to keep moving forward. If it was only me alone, I'd have no way [to achieve anything]. No matter how loud I shouted, no one would listen, but with so many people, we can try together to have a better future. (Interviewee.13)

Thus, the sense of connectedness that underpinned the 'we' in the collective identity was the primary drive for them to continuously participate in LGBTQ+ activism in China.

Several interviewees had also told me that despite how much they wanted to participate in more offline activism, it was extremely difficult to do it. Regardless of issues about time, cost, and coming out, they stressed that the political control greatly limited the number and types of offline LGBTQ+ activities. As a result, they did not have many opportunities to participate in offline LGBTQ+ activities. Those offline activities in which my interviewees had participated mostly focused on developing

local LGBTQ+ communities, such as social events (e.g. gatherings, dinner parties, and hiking) and lectures (e.g. about health and legal knowledge). Therefore, rather than not being willing to participate in offline activism, participants of the #IAmGay# protest, in fact, were significantly limited in participating in offline activism, even though they were inspired by the protest to do so.

6.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, my qualitative analysis of digital ethnographical data has showed that the collective identity framed in the #IAmGay# protest consisted of an inclusive ‘we’, an antagonist of heterosexism, and a broad audience. It was through those seemingly minor involvements that participants collectively framed such a collective identity. My finding of the inclusive collective identity coincides with Gerbaudo and Treré’s (2015) argument that digitally formed collective identity is often marked by expandability and inclusivity, as well as Ghaziani’s (2011) claim that in contemporary gay activism:

activists construct their collective identity using an inclusive, distinction-muting logic of ‘us *and* them’. This shift from opposition (us ‘versus’ them) to inclusion (us ‘and’ them) implies that activists today are motivated less by drawing boundaries against members of the dominant group and more by building bridges toward them. (p. 101)

By highlighting similarities between homosexuals and other groups of sexual and gender identities, participants of the #IAmGay# protest focused on blurring boundaries between homosexuals and others to achieve a maximised scale of protest collective and support.

Such framing of the ‘we’ was proven to be effective in scaling up the protest and successfully pressured Weibo to reverse its censorship. Regardless of the visible success, the collective identity was also meaningful to the Chinese LGBTQ+ community beyond the protest. Before the #IAmGay# protest, most Chinese LGBTQ+ activism tended to improve local LGBTQ+ communities and lives of LGBTQ+ individuals through a non-confrontational approach (J. Cao and Guo, 2016), i.e. an approach focusing on helping the community from within rather than addressing external discrimination or fighting for rights. For instance, many scholars have

discussed Chinese HIV/AIDS activism that aimed to disseminate health knowledge and care within local LGBTQ+ communities (e.g. Chua and Hildebrandt, 2014; J. Cao and Guo, 2016; S. Y. Wang, 2021). There was rarely confrontational activism, let alone any protest as large as #IAmGay#. Thus, in terms of confrontational activism, Chinese LGBTQ+ organisations and individuals did not have much experience. The #IAmGay# protest was the first mass confrontational collective action across the nation done by Chinese LGBTQ+ individuals. Even though their participation was mostly through minor political action online, participants collectively practiced strategies to effectively mobilise a framed ‘we’ and identify antagonists. As Whittier (2004) contends:

collective identities that emerge from collective action can become independently available for adoption, modification, or influence on other activists. Collective identities are in this sense a cultural product of movements, similar to frames, that can influence contemporaneous or subsequent movements (p. 538)

Therefore, participants’ experiences of framing the collective identity in the #IAmGay# protest – which involved not only identifying the ‘we’, the antagonist, and the audience but also deploying suitable strategies and setting common goals – became a valuable legacy of the protest that could be adapted for future confrontational LGBTQ+ activism in China.

The legacy was embedded in two major aspects. Firstly, participants gained experience in mobilising an inclusive ‘we’ through emphasising similarities between homosexuals and other groups of gender and sexual identities. This can potentially help subsequent Chinese LGBTQ+ activism when a large collective is needed. Secondly, the experience in identifying primary and secondary antagonists can help subsequent Chinese LGBTQ+ activism to set achievable goals while also recognising the fundamental oppression derived from the state and the society. This is particularly important for Chinese LGBTQ+ activism. Situated in an increasingly restricted political environment, Chinese LGBTQ+ activism is more likely to survive and avoid political prosecution when a single organisation or person, like Weibo in the case of

the #IAmGay# protest, is made demands upon, yet by having secondary antagonist(s), it does not remain superficial and is also able to tackle systematic inequality.

Moreover, exploring participants' risk assessment and views on online and offline forms of LGBTQ+ activism in China, I have further found that the slacktivist critique does not apply to the #IAmGay# protest. This is because there were several types of risks perceived by participants and some thresholds for LGBTQ+ users to participate, and further, experience of participating in the protest did in fact emotionally inspire participants to participate in subsequent LGBTQ+ activism.

What I have found validates my argument that the slacktivist critique is problematic. By describing digital activism as 'feel-good', 'zero impact', and 'lazy' (Morozov, 2009), it simplifies digital activism and treats all forms of online political action as the same, ignoring contexts in which complex political, social, and cultural elements can be at play. In the Chinese context, or in other authoritarian regimes and conservative societies that restrict or even prosecute liberal activism, by participating in digital activism, people may face various degrees of risks. While practicing offline activism can often be difficult in those contexts, participating in online activism becomes a more suitable option and can lead to subsequent political participation as it prepares participants with emotional inspiration and experience in framing collective identity.

Chapter 7 The post-protest period of #IAmGay#: quantitative analysis

Although the use of #IAmGay# decreased drastically after the success of the #IAmGay# protest on the 16th April 2018, the hashtag was not simply abandoned by users on Weibo. Using the hashtag, users continued to post and interact with each other. With the protest finished and no more clear political goal embedded in the usage of the hashtag, what did users do? In addition to that, what were the rationale and meaning behind their further activities? Was there any relation between their activities and the collective identity formed in the protest? There are many questions that shall be addressed regarding the continuing use of the hashtag, especially considering that the use of the hashtag was greatly diversified after the #IAmGay# protest.

Therefore, attempting to answer the question about the types of activities that were carried out through using the hashtag in the post-protest period, I have conducted quantitative analysis of the collected data, i.e. original posts and reposts containing #IAmGay# from the 17th April 2018 to the 30th April 2019. The analysis has been done and will be represented in two approaches in this chapter.

Firstly, I will compare the monthly numbers – and the daily numbers in the case where identification of precise dates is necessary – of original posts and reposts in order to find out potential time periods during which the hashtag was likely to be used in a collective way. In general, any sudden increase of monthly original post and repost number can be seen as an indicator of a potential collective use of the hashtag. To improve the precision and to gain some basic understanding, e.g. the causes of those potential collective uses, I have also incorporated some preliminary examination of the post and repost content once the time periods are identified. In short, I have identified two time periods during which collective action likely happened, which are around *the 13th and the 17th May 2018* and *from the 13th to the 22nd April 2019*. While the former collective action was likely to be related to the IDAHOTB, which was on the 17th May 2018, the latter had a potential new focus on lesbian activism, as users largely employed a new hashtag, #IAmLes#.

Secondly, the content of all original posts and reposts was analysed for keywords with the assistance of Sketch Engine. 100 keywords that were used most frequently in the post-protest period of #IAmGay# were identified, which I have then

practically categorised into three themes: 1) *gender and sexuality*, 2) *everyday social life*, and 3) *oppressions and issues*. The keywords show that the general discourse in the post-protest period of #IAmGay# partially differed from that during the protest. Rather than treating gay men and lesbians integrated as homosexuals, users tended to distinguish between them in discussions. Lesbians were more specifically discussed than during the #IAmGay# protest, whilst gay men were in a more dominant position. Gay men's dominant position was also particularly prominent in discussions about everyday life. As the protest finished, the overall use of words and phrases related to oppression and issues faced by Chinese LGBTQ+ people significantly decreased. This suggests that the use of the hashtag was more diversified in the post-protest period. Namely, explicit and confrontational activism was no longer the only use of the hashtag and more activities, such as everyday activism, were carried out by users.

7.1 Collective uses of #IAmGay#

To identify time periods during which #IAmGay# was likely to be used in a collective way for possible new incidents or causes after the protest, I have compared the monthly numbers of original posts and reposts collected from the post-protest period. According to [Figure 4.2](#), there were three periods that saw noticeable increases in the use of the hashtag. They were May 2018, from September to November 2018, and April 2019. It is likely that some forms of collective action using the hashtag happened during May 2018 and April 2019, as there were dates in the two months that might seem important to LGBTQ+ users and their supporters on Weibo, namely, the IDAHOTB on the 17th May 2018 and the one-year anniversary of the #IAmGay# protest on the 13th April 2019. On the other hand, it is not likely that there was a collective use of the hashtag during the period from September to November 2018, because the data show a large number of repetitive posts that are suspected to be bot-generated.

The first period is identified to be around the 13th and the 17th May 2018. The #IAmGay# protest seemingly finished on the 16th April 2018, because of the achievement of a set of goals, including Weibo's reversal of the ban of homosexual-themed content and the hashtag as well as the reinstatement of the Voice of Comrade. Shortly after that, the use of the hashtag decreased significantly. From the 17th to the

30th April 2018, the total number of original posts and reposts collected is 1,333, compared to 22,111 during the protest from the 13th to the 16th. It is, therefore, expected that the use of the hashtag would continuously decrease after April 2018. However, the use of the hashtag saw a surprising increase in May 2018. The total number of collected original posts and reposts containing the hashtag in May 2018 is 2,102. This suggests that something probably happened, causing users to use the hashtag more frequently on Weibo.

Therefore, I investigated the daily numbers of original posts and reposts in the month to find a more precise period during which the hashtag was used more frequently. It is found that there was prominently more use of the hashtag on the 13th and 17th May, with respectively 298 and 389 original posts and reposts. Although 298 and 389 are not as many as the daily numbers of original posts and reposts during the protest, compared with the daily numbers of other days in May 2018 (which is at most slightly over 100, e.g. 100 on the 10th, 118 on the 18th, 106 on the 19th), they indicate a significant increase in use of the hashtag. The 17th May is the IDAHOTB, and therefore, it is unlikely to be a coincidence that a hashtag like #IAmGay# was used by many on Weibo. However, the increased use of the hashtag on the 13th initially seemed rather unusual. My exploration of the posts on the day has later revealed that there was an event for the IDAHOTB on the 13th, as it was the Sunday before the IDAHOTB. Thus, the content of posts on both the 13th and the 17th was connected by the theme of the international awareness day.

The second period of spiked usage of the hashtag is found to be from September to November 2018, during which the monthly numbers of original posts and reposts soar drastically. Respectively, 13,728, 21,701, and 6,054 original posts and reposts published in September, October, and November 2018 were collected. The numbers are shockingly huge, as they are close to the number of original posts and reposts collected from the protest period itself. However, while I was expecting another massively participated collective action that happened across three months, my preliminary examination of the data led to the realisation that something rather peculiar happened. During the three months, many more original posts than reposts were published, and most of those original posts were repetitive. In other words, the same content was posted by numerous users. Those repetitive posts often contain

#IAmGay# and several other hashtags that are seemingly unrelated. The content itself makes little sense in terms of why it was posted repetitively. For instance, one type of such posts says:

#IAmGay# #LikeLove# Have been to two gay bars in #Wuhan#. There was another one like a sauna, which I didn't go to. It was so loud inside, like something was exploding.

This exact content was posted nearly 8 thousand times by different users randomly across the three months.

It is very likely that those posts were bot-generated rather than published by real users on Weibo. The use of bots on SNSs is not a new phenomenon. They are usually used for specific purposes, such as generating direct messages to mobilise participants in digital activism (Savage et al., 2016), boosting ones' follower levels so that they can be seen more influential and trustworthy, and flooding news streams and spamming political conflicts to drown out oppositional voices (Woolley, 2016). However, it seems that the posts in the case of #IAmGay# here, like the one shown above, do not serve a clear purpose. They are mostly about personal experiences and opinions that are seemingly irrelevant to any political contention. While the purpose of them is unclear, it can be said with certainty that they did not contribute to forming any collective action. Therefore, those repetitive posts and this time period, i.e. from September to November 2018, are not specifically explored in this research. This phenomenon, which may differentiate from other uses of bots on SNSs that have been studied, remains intriguing for future research to explore.

The final period of investigation is found to be April 2019, the one-year anniversary of the #IAmGay# protest. According to the monthly numbers of collected original posts and reposts, the use of #IAmGay# started to gradually decrease after November 2018, and in March 2019, the total number of collected original posts and reposts dropped to 72, the fewest since the protest in April 2018. However, the use of the hashtag had a sudden increase again in April 2019, with 800 original posts and reposts collected.

Through my preliminary examination of the data, it is found that many users started to use the hashtag again on Weibo from the 13th April 2019, on the exact date

when the #IAmGay# protest was launched a year ago. Yet, it seems that the anniversary was not the only or main reason why there was a new collective use of the hashtag. Prominently, a new hashtag, #IAmLes#²⁰ (#我是les#), was used by almost all users along with #IAmGay# in their posts. The new hashtag suggests that there was likely to be some new collective action taken with a focus on lesbian issues in China.

Hence, based on the numbers of original posts and reposts collected, I have identified two time periods during which the hashtag was likely to be used in a collective way by users on Weibo: firstly, on the 13th and the 17th May 2018, and secondly, in April 2019. I have qualitatively analysed the use of the hashtag for the IDAHOTB as part of my qualitative analysis of the post-protest period of #IAmGay#, which will be discussed in the next chapter. However, I have decided to not include the analysis of #IAmLes# in this thesis. I discovered that through using the hashtag, users indeed lunched another massively participated protest on Weibo, but it happened whilst I was conducting my research. This means that I was not fully prepared to analyse the #IAmLes# protest in the same way as I did with the #IAmGay# protest. Nonetheless, I will briefly discuss the #IAmLes# protest in the conclusion chapter and pinpoint some important aspects of it for further research.

7.2 Keywords

The 48,393 original posts and reposts collected from the post-protest period of #IAmGay# were also analysed through Sketch Engine for keywords, i.e. the most frequently used words and phrases. By doing so, I aim to grasp some basic, factual, and overall understanding of participants' uses of the hashtag during such a long period of time. The initial results, however, were significantly disrupted by the large number of the repetitive and possibly bot-generated posts. Therefore, I have manually removed the words and phrases that are used frequently in those repetitive posts from the keyword results, attempting to make the keyword results reflective of what users posted on Weibo as authentically as possible. Consequently, 100 keywords are identified (see Table 7.2 in [Appendix](#) for the full results).

²⁰ The 'les' in the hashtag is the abbreviation of 'lesbian', which is commonly used by Chinese people to casually refer to lesbian(s).

Following this, I have categorised most of the keywords into three main themes, which are 1) *gender and sexuality*, 2) *everyday social life*, and 3) *oppressions and issues*. The second theme, everyday social life, also has two sub-themes, which are firstly *friend making and dating* and secondly *affection and relationship*. Overall, the keywords in the post-protest period differentiate from the keywords identified in the protest to a great extent. The keywords in the post-protest period appear to be less political in a confrontational way, compared to many keywords in the protest that directly address issues, oppressions, and antagonists. It seems that everyday activism, which supposedly made up a large part of the use of the hashtag in the post-protest period, was more subtly and diversely performed.

Identity terms and gendered words still make up a large part of the keywords. However, while the terms and words closely related to gay men are more prominent, there is a significant increase of uses of lesbian terms. This suggests that there was a separation between gay men and lesbians in users' discourse. Discussions about affection and relationships during the protest were strongly political, trying to normalise affections of and relationships between LGBTQ+ people in China, whereas in the post-protest period, more diverse and day-to-day keywords about affection and relationships are found. In particular, according to some certain keywords, people were also using the hashtag for friend making and dating, which is prominently a new use of the hashtag. Lastly, there are still some keywords about the oppression and issues related to LGBTQ+ people in China, yet they were much less mentioned in the post-protest period. Following this overview of the keywords, I will now demonstrate specifically how each theme of keywords informs people's various uses of #IAmGay# on Weibo after the protest, from the 17th April 2018 to the end of April 2019.

7.2.1 Gender and sexuality

Firstly, diverse gender and sexual identity terms appear in the keywords. It is unsurprising that, due to its use in the hashtag, 'homosexual' ('同性恋') is the most frequently used term amongst all the keywords. Following 'homosexual', different forms of 'gay' and 'lesbian' also rank highly. Respectively, 'gay', 'gays' ('gay 们'), and 'Gay' rank 2nd, 25th, and 60th, and 'les' and 'Les' rank 9th and 63rd. Importantly, 'lala' ('拉拉'), the identity term that was invented by Chinese queer people to refer to

lesbian, is also found in the 83rd place. Although the use of lesbian terms was less than the use of gay terms, there was a significant increase of the use of lesbian terms in the post-protest period, considering the fact that that none of the lesbian terms appears in the initial protest keyword list. The increase was likely to be mainly caused by the new collective action that largely used the new hashtag #IAmLes# in April 2019. It suggests that rather than treating lesbians and gay men integrated as homosexuals in the way that most participants did during the #IAmGay# protest, many participants in the collective action using #IAmLes# were more inclined to separate the two groups in their discourse for some reason. Such a change is highlighted for further qualitative exploration.

Some other sexual identity terms and relevant phrases and words, which are found as keywords in the #IAmGay# protest, were also used frequently in the post-protest period. They include ‘comrade’ (‘同志’, 18th), ‘same sex/same-sex’ (‘同性’, 39th), ‘heterosexual’ (‘异性恋’, 41st), and ‘bisexual’ (‘双’, 92nd). Apart from those, there are also new keywords that are often used more informally regarding sexuality. ‘Straight’ (‘直’, 11th) and ‘bent’ (‘弯’, 21st) appear to be used rather frequently by users to describe whether a person was heterosexual or homosexual. ‘Bottom’ (‘受’, 45th) and ‘top’ (‘攻’, 61st), are the words used by many to refer to gay men’s roles in their sexual relationships²¹. The frequent use of those informal words suggests that #IAmGay# was used broadly for casual discussions in relation to marginalised sexualities, which most likely happened outside of the collective actions.

As for gender identities, different forms of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ appear across the keyword list. ‘Man’ is found to be in 6th (‘男’), 12th (‘男人’), and 78th (‘man’) places, whereas ‘woman’ is found to be in 46th (‘女’) and 77th (‘女性’) places. Several gendered words and phrases, including ‘boy’ (‘男孩’, 36th), ‘elder brother’ (‘哥哥’, 37th), ‘elder sister’ (‘姐姐’, 70th), and ‘younger sister’ (‘妹妹’, 86th), were also prominently used. Although the latter three phrases seemingly refer to siblings in a

²¹ In English-speaking cultures, ‘top’ and ‘bottom’ are not exclusively used by gay men to refer to sexual roles. They are also sometimes used by lesbians (Bailey et al., 1997). However, the Chinese terms, ‘攻’ and ‘受’, specifically refer to gay men’s sexual roles, namely ‘top’ and ‘bottom’ (L. Zheng et al., 2017).

family relationship, they can also be used as gendered address terms for people who are not related and are around similar ages to show respect and closeness in the Chinese context (Gu, 1990), implying that people are in a ‘family’. It is also worth noting that the gender-neutral pronoun ‘ta’²² appears in the keyword results, ranking the 68th. The frequent use of the pronoun shows an even higher inclusivity in the language used by people who participated in the #IAmGay# conversation, as the language includes not only both men and women but also potentially non-binary people.

Finally, ‘LGBTQ’ (48th), the acronym of gender and sexual minorities, is again found in the keyword results, as well as ‘rainbow’ (‘彩虹’, 28th) and ‘rainbow flag’ (‘彩虹旗’, 88th), the common symbols of gender and sexual minority inclusivity. It is evident that inclusivity of people of different gender and sexual identities was emphasised through various ways in people’s use of #IAmGay#. In the case of the post-protest period of #IAmGay#, all the keywords listed above show that discussions were not limited within the dichotomies of heterosexual and homosexual and man and woman, and there was in fact abundant mentioning of other gender and sexual identities on the broad spectrum. The occurrence of the term ‘gay’ – or more precisely ‘homosexual’ as I demonstrated before – in the hashtag did not create a barrier that limited discussions beyond homosexuality.

However, it should also be underlined that, overall, gay men were dominantly the centre of discussion. The use of words and phrases that are more likely to be about gay men – including ‘gay’ (2nd), ‘gays’ (25th), ‘Gay’ (60th), ‘bottom’ (45th), ‘top’ (61st), ‘man’ (6th, 12th, and 78th), ‘boy’ (36th), and ‘elder brother’ (37th) – greatly exceeded the use of words and phrases about every other group of people in both the number of words and phrases and the total frequency of use. Such a phenomenon did not happen during the #IAmGay# protest in which, according to the keywords, homosexuals including both gay men and lesbians were placed in the centre. This is perhaps the most significant change between users’ discourses in the protest and the post-protest periods of #IAmGay#. Gay men and lesbians were no longer seen by many as an

²² ‘Ta’ is one of the gender-neutral pronouns commonly used in mainland China, as it is the pinyin romanisation of the masculine and feminine third-person pronouns, 他 (he/him) and 她 (she/her), which are both pronounced ‘ta’ (L. Zhao, 2021).

integration of homosexuals but distinct social groups that needed to be addressed separately.

Therefore, under the keyword theme of gender and sexuality, I have identified two areas for further qualitative exploration: the diverse discussion of different groups of gender and sexual identities, and the reason why and the way in which the distinction between gay men and lesbians was made by users.

7.2.2 Everyday social life

The results show many keywords that are usually used for talking about everyday social life of LGBTQ+ people in China. To explain them more clearly and precisely, I have categorised them into two sub-themes. The first one, friend making and dating, focuses on activities of seeking friends and partners, which are similar to what people do on dating apps. Meanwhile, the second one, affection and relationships, is more concerned about discussions surrounding affection and relationships, more like what people do in a community forum. There is no fixed distinction between the two sub-themes. That is, many of the keywords can easily fit into either of them. The categorisation, therefore, is more practical than definite, applied to show different everyday uses of #IAMGay#. Overall, those keywords are an indicator of the major shift in the use of the hashtag. They show rather undoubtedly that after the protest, the hashtag was no longer used for only explicit and confrontational activism but also various everyday activities. Those new everyday activities may seem less political, but they were conveying political meanings through subtler ways.

There are many keywords that are often used for friend making and dating in the post-protest period. First of all, ‘friend’ (‘朋友’) ranks highly again as the 4th most used keyword, which is slightly higher than its previous place as the 7th during the protest. Certainly, the use of the word ‘friend’ alone may not necessarily suggest that users were actively seeking new friends. It can be used to refer to their existing friends, which was how the word was used mostly during the protest. However, another keyword shows that it is likely to be the case that users were indeed practicing friend making. Found in 29th place, ‘make friends’ (‘交友’) literally shows that such an activity was rather common in people’s use of the hashtag.

However, some may think that the phrase ‘make friends’ is used to refer to seeking not only friends but also dates in the Chinese context, as it is also often used in the dating scene. For instance, dating apps are usually called ‘friend-making apps’ (‘交友软件’) in Chinese. This is, then, proven to be what many were doing by several other keywords that are often used by Chinese LGBTQ+ people for dating. Both ‘look for’ (‘找’, 10th) and ‘make an appointment’ (‘约’, 14th) are found to be used very frequently in the post-protest period. They are two of the most typical words and phrases that people use for dating on SNSs. While the former is used in the situation where people describe types of people or encounters that they expect, the latter is used exclusively for hook-ups in the Chinese dating scene. Then, there are also other keywords that are commonly used for introducing oneself or describing desired types of people in dating. Those keywords include the previously mentioned ‘bottom’ (‘受’, 45th) and ‘top’ (‘攻’, 61st), which refer to gay men’s sexual roles, as well as ‘year(s) old’ (‘岁’, 49th) and ‘age’ (‘年龄’, 62nd). Through using those keywords, users – perhaps mostly gay men according to the use of ‘bottom’ and ‘top’ – could make online profiles of themselves to seek potential dates.

Although they may be less associated with friend making and dating, there are also a few keywords that are usually used to complement one’s appearance. Amongst the three keywords found in the results, ‘good-looking’ (‘好看’, 16th) is a gender-neutral word for such a use, whereas ‘handsome’ (‘帅’, 24th) and ‘beautiful’ (‘美’, 82nd) are usually more gender specific. It should be noted that the use of ‘handsome’ was much more than the use of ‘beautiful’. Based on this fact and the frequent use of ‘bottom’ and ‘top’, it seems that gay men were the majority who participated in the activities of friend making and dating during the post-protest period, or at least, the discourse was more about gay men. Either way, gay men were in a dominant position, corresponding to the finding of the gender and sexuality keywords analysis in the last section.

Meanwhile, there are also other keywords found in the results, which have a common theme of affection and relationship. Some of those keywords are likely to be also used for friend making and dating. For example, the word ‘boyfriend’ can be used in a context like ‘looking for a boyfriend’. Despite that, all of them are words and

phrases that people often use or mention when discussing affection and relationships. The most prominent ones are ‘love’ (‘爱’) and ‘like’ (‘喜欢’), which are found in 3rd and 7th places. Considering their high ranks amongst the keywords in the protest and their potentially flexible use in various contexts, it is no surprise that they were used very frequently again in the post-protest period.

Apart from ‘love’ and ‘like’, there are also some new keywords about affection and relationships. Not only does ‘affection’ (‘情感’) rank 30th in the list, but also another word ‘consultation/consult’ (‘咨询’), which is often used together with ‘affection’, is found in 59th place. The phrase ‘affection consultation’ (‘情感咨询’) in Chinese is a common name for discussions about all kinds of questions and problems regarding affection and relationships. The fact that both of them are found in the keyword results, therefore, suggests that users were indeed having those discussions using #IAmGay#.

More specifically, regarding the content of discussions about affection and relationships, there are several types of keywords identified. Firstly, ‘partner’ (‘对象’, 13th), ‘lovers’ (‘情侣’, 52nd), and ‘boyfriend’ (‘男朋友’, 54th) were used frequently, which show that users’ discussions had a focus on couples. Again, only ‘boyfriend’ but no word like ‘girlfriend’ is found in the results. This provides further evidence supporting my earlier point that gay men were the dominant social group in the post-protest period of #IAmGay#. Then, ‘break-up/break up’ (‘分手’, 31st) and ‘lonely’ (‘寂寞’, 72nd) are more likely to be used in a type of discussions opposite to the first one about couples, i.e. about single people who might deal with loneliness. Additionally, ‘get married’ (‘结婚’) ranks 100th, being the very last keyword highlighted in the post-protest period. Given that same-sex marriage is yet to be legalised in China, a discussion about marriage using #IAmGay# can be potentially political.

Thus, it seems that the second theme of keywords – everyday social life including the two sub-themes of friend making and dating and affection and relationships – is less explicitly political. They suggest that a large part of the use of the hashtag was not about identifying issues or confronting people, organisations, or

institutions who were responsible for the issues, i.e. what participants did in the #IAmGay# protest. Rather, the hashtag was partly transformed by users for social activities, potentially becoming a virtual LGBTQ+ community where casual bonds could be formed between users. When such activities were carried out by users in this space that had been a previous protest ground, on the very SNS that attempted to censor homosexuality, how could users distance themselves from political involvement? It may be nearly impossible, not to mention that the prevalent use of the hashtag per se was playing a part in increasing queer visibility, challenging the dominant discourse of heteronormativity in the digital public (Berlant and Warner, 1995; Duguay, 2016). Based merely on the keywords, however, it is certainly difficult to explore how political meanings were conveying through users' everyday activities. Therefore, I will explore this underlined aspect of #IAmGay# in the post-protest period in my qualitative analysis.

7.2.3 Oppressions and issues

Lastly, there are also several keywords that are closely related to the oppression and issues that LGBTQ+ people face in China. Some of them are the same as those found in the protest keyword results, for example 'Weibo', 'society', 'state', 'ban' and 'discrimination/discriminate', but the use of most of them – with 'ban' being the only exception – significantly declined during the post-protest period of #IAmGay#. Regardless, there are also new keywords like 'phobia/phobic', 'marriage fraud/deceive to get married', 'anti-corruption/fight against corruption', 'public opinion', and 'media', which suggest users' shifting attention to wider issues concerning LGBTQ+ people in the Chinese society.

Specifically, the three antagonists identified in the #IAmGay# protest are found in the keyword results again. 'Weibo' ('微博'), 'society' ('社会'), and 'state' ('国家') rank 23rd, 27th, and 84th respectively. As explained before, 'Weibo' is a generic word that people use to refer to not only the SNS but also each post on the SNS. Therefore, the frequent use of the word may not necessarily suggest a prevalent discussion of the SNS itself. Furthermore, other words and phrases that were used frequently during the protest to specifically discuss the SNS – especially the negatively connoted phrase 'crappy Sina' – are no longer found as keywords in the post-protest period. Thus, it is

evident that the discussion of Weibo lessened after the protest. Similarly, the post-protest period also saw decreases in apparent discussions about the society and the state. The word ‘state’, notably, had a dive in the keyword results, dropping from 21st to 84th. The decline of the use of the words about the antagonists shows that there was indeed a shift regarding users’ ways of using the hashtag. More diverse activities, such as everyday activism that is usually less confrontational, were carried out by users through using the hashtag.

Other than the antagonists, ‘ban’ (‘封’) and ‘discrimination/discriminate’ (‘歧视’) are found again in the keyword results, being 34th and 97th ranked keywords. The use of ‘discrimination/discriminate’ decreased significantly, dropping from 13th place during the protest to 97th place in the post-protest period. Such a drastic decrease suggests that explicit discussions of discrimination against LGBTQ+ people subsided, and discrimination was no longer one of the central issues attracting users’ attention. Potentially, there were other pressing issues that users prioritised, e.g. those suggested by other keywords that shall be discussed hereafter. Yet, since discrimination is relevant to almost all issues that LGBTQ+ people face, a better way to explain the decrease is probably that users were less inclined to link other issues with discrimination. However, it is also worth mentioning that another new keyword ‘phobia/fear/phobic’ (‘恐’, 55th), which also implies the issue of discrimination, is found in the results. Its frequent use is likely to be mainly caused by the possible collective action that happened around the IDAHOTB, as the name of day contains the word ‘phobia’. Therefore, the drastically decreased use of the term ‘discrimination/discriminate’ may not necessarily suggest that discrimination was not an issue anymore or users did not see it as serious. It is more likely to be the case that discussions were diversified during such a long period of time, and relatively, there was less specific mentioning of discrimination.

On the other hand, compared with its use during the protest, ‘ban’ seems to be used slightly more in the post-protest period, as it has moved up from 40th place to 34th place. However, ‘ban’ was not the only word used frequently to discuss the issue of censorship during the protest. There was also the term ‘recover’ referring to the lifting of the ban, which was used almost the same number of times as ‘ban’ during the protest. Therefore, the discussion of censorship during the protest was no less during the post-

protest period. Despite this, it is evident that censorship was still one of the most, if not the most, concerning issues discussed by users during the post-protest period. This is factually compelling, since the censorship was eventually lifted in the #IAmGay# protest. It is possible that other incident(s) of censorship happened again, which drove users to discuss it continually. My later qualitative analysis has revealed that this was indeed the case in the collective action of #IAmLes#.

There are also other keywords that suggest users' new concerns about issues including 'marriage fraud/deceive to get married' ('骗婚', 85th) and 'anti-corruption/fight against corruption' ('反腐', 87th). The former refers to homosexual people marrying heterosexual people without disclosing their sexualities. As the use of 'fraud' and 'deceive' suggest, it is used in a condemnatory context and often in the situation where gay men marry straight women in China (J. Zhu, 2018). Then, it is surprising that a keyword about corruption is found in the results, as corruption is usually not an issue directly addressed by LGBTQ+ people. Regardless, users' discussion of anti-corruption is most likely to be about the corruption in the government, which concerns the state, i.e. one of the antagonists in the #IAmGay# protest. Therefore, the discourse of anti-corruption may link to users' recognition of the state as an antagonist. Finally, although 'public opinion' ('舆论', 81st) and 'media' ('媒体', 90th) are not directly related to issues faced by LGBTQ+ people, they are also found in the keyword results. They show users' increasing attention on the perception and representation of LGBTQ+ people in the public, which can often be vital to LGBTQ+ activism.

Those new keywords suggest that while discussions about previous antagonists and some certain issues – except for censorship – during the protest lessened, the space of #IAmGay# was also dedicated to more diverse and specific issues and topics that were either directly or indirectly relevant to LGBTQ+ people in China.

7.3 Conclusion

To conclude, in this chapter, I have illustrated an overview of the use of #IAmGay# in its post-protest period through the quantitative analysis, which appears to be more diverse than during the #IAmGay# protest. There are also gaps identified for further

qualitative analysis, as they cannot be explored in depth by quantitative analysis alone. Amongst those gaps, some of them need to be highlighted, due to their high relevance to my research's analytical framework, namely collective identity.

However, before restating them, it should be noted that I have not so far explicitly applied the concept to the quantitative analysis in this chapter. This is unlike what I do in Chapter 5, in which the analysis purposefully looks at potential makeups of the 'we' and antagonists, i.e. the compositions of collective identity (Hunt et al., 1994). The reason I chose to approach the data in the post-protest period of #IAmGay# in a more general way was that compared with the length of the protest, the post-protest period is a lot longer. As my analysis has shown, there were potentially more than one occurrence of collective action as well as everyday activities throughout the period. It is possible that multiple collective identities were formed, which could also differ from each other. Nevertheless, even within one connective action, which is the concept developed by Bennett and Segerberg (2012) to describe individualised and decentralised digital collective action, collective identity can be volatile (Gerbaudo, 2015), unclear (Stephanson, 2017), fragmented (McClelland-Cohen and Endacott, 2020), and conflictual (Kavada, 2015). Although the collective identity formed in the #IAmGay# protest was rather unified, it is still possible that later collective actions formed unstable and fractured collective identities. Therefore, attempting to identify compositions of a single collective identity based on the data throughout the whole post-protest period of #IAmGay# would be futile. The analytical concept of collective identity will be applied in the following chapter of qualitative analysis.

Primarily, the likely separation between gay men and lesbians in users' discourse is one of the most important findings here. Previously in the protest, the 'we' formed as part of the collective identity was inclusive and there was no pronounced distinction between gay men and lesbians. As I have explained, the hashtag #我是同性恋# can be more precisely translated as #IAmHomosexual#, and partly because of its use in the hashtag, 'homosexual' was the term used widely during the protest, which included both gay men and lesbians. This also explains why there is no keyword that specifically refers to lesbians found during the protest. However, during the post-protest period, the prevalent use of various forms of 'lesbian' suggests that users felt a need to specifically discuss lesbians. The use of a new hashtag #IAmLes# in April

2019 may suggest the same. Therefore, it is possible that some users were deliberately distinguishing lesbians from gay men, which then led to the formation of a less inclusive collective ‘we’ centring around lesbians instead of homosexuals. This assumption, of course, needs to be testified in my qualitative analysis.

The seemingly dominant position of gay men, or men in general, is also worth emphasising along with the likely separation between gay men and lesbians in the discourse. Based on the keyword analysis, it may be difficult to draw a concrete conclusion regarding whether gay men were actively taking a dominant role in the collective ‘we’, as it can be the case that people of other gender and sexual identities were frequently using the keywords referring to gay men. In other words, gay men were the object of discussions, not necessarily the subject. The dynamics between identity groups and how they contributed to the formation of collective identity are one of the key aspects in the post-protest period of #IAmGay# for exploration. Moreover, it seems very likely that gay men were active in using the hashtag for everyday activities, especially for friend making and dating, according to the keywords including ‘bottom’, ‘top’, and ‘boyfriend’. In this regard, it is imperative to examine how the use of the hashtag transformed and what political implication in relation to the (re)formation of collective identity there was behind such an everyday use.

Nevertheless, antagonists are of equal importance in collective identity. Although the use of words and phrases referring to the previous antagonists in the protest – Weibo, the state, and the society – significantly decreased in the post-protest period of #IAmGay#, some of the words are still found in the keywords. There are three keywords, ‘Weibo’, ‘society’, and ‘state’, and each of them refers to one of the antagonists. Of course, the decreased use of them was caused by diversified activities carried out using the hashtag, but does this suggest that framing antagonists was later less important to users? My assumption is that users had to frame antagonist(s) to some extent in collective action, as the construction of ‘we’ necessarily constructs ‘others’ who are not ‘we’ (Hunt et al., 1994; Melucci, 1995; Snow, 2001). The importance of framing antagonists should still be rather high. However, outside of collective action, it may be the case that most activities focused on building bonds between users rather than challenging oppressions and issues, especially considering the fact that Chinese

LGBTQ+ everyday activism often takes soft approaches to avoid censorship and focuses on self-helping within the community (J. Cao and Guo, 2016).

Overall, my quantitative analysis has provided fruitful statistical facts about people's use of the hashtag after the protest, building the foundation upon which I can conduct the qualitative analysis. Importantly, I shall look at both everyday activities and collective action facilitated by the hashtag. They were distinct from each other, and therefore, produced different political, cultural, and social meanings. However, their connection between each other – as well as the connection between them and the #IAmGay# protest – should not be overlooked.

Chapter 8 Everyday activities and the IDAHOTB in the post-protest period of #IAmGay#

As we have now had an overview of users' activities via #IAmGay# in the post-protest period, the next step is to further explore this period through qualitative analysis. By doing this, I aim to answer some questions from the last chapter, including those about rationales and meanings behind users' diverse activities as well as the (re)formation of collective identity through those activities. Essentially, considering the complexity of this period, i.e. evidently different activities that happened across a long time, I have divided my analysis into two parts: everyday activities and the IDAHOTB.

It should be noted that almost none of my interviewees participated in any everyday activity using the hashtag or emphasised the incident related to the IDAHOTB. Therefore, my analysis of everyday activities and the likely collective action around the IDAHOTB is mostly based on the observation data.

My analysis has discovered that after the #IAmGay# protest, a community based on the hashtag was created. This relatively confined online community provided participants of the #IAmGay# protest with a social space where they could continuously interact with each other. However, it was quickly dominated by Chinese gay men for their own social purposes such as dating, which consequently excluded most people of other gender and sexual identities. Gay men's domination of the community potentially reformed the collective identity associated with the hashtag that was constructed in the #IAmGay# protest. Centring around gay men, the 'we' became less inclusive.

Such a reformed collective identity influenced the ways in which users performed everyday activism within the community, consisting of a majority of participants of gay men. Yet, it was not employed by everyday activism outside of the community. The collective identity in everyday activism outside of the community remained inclusive. Nevertheless, most users' everyday activism through the hashtag during the post-protest period focused on advocating for LGBTQ+ equality in China without necessarily addressing any antagonist. Therefore, those activism practices mainly contributed to maintaining the momentum of the #IAmGay# protest,

reinforcing the political essence of the hashtag and ensuring that it was available for subsequent LGBTQ+ activism on Weibo.

Furthermore, the collective action around the IDAHOTB was a small-scaled and short-lived one. It happened because of an offline discriminatory incident in Beijing, mostly on one day, the 13th May 2018. The collective action had identified some antagonists. However, being small-scaled and short-lived, it did not form a clear collective identity. Regardless, its significance laid within the connection built between offline and online activism. It showed that the hashtag could be used to facilitate online activism to confront offline injustice, expanding the ways of using the hashtag.

8.1 Everyday activities

I checked the hashtag again yesterday and found there were some ads, some trashy, sensitive, or revealing ads. I think this is a common problem in the online space. (Interviewee.1)

There were homophobic people who deliberately posted pornographic pictures in the super topic, and then reported them to Weibo so that they could ban the super topic. There were quite a lot of people like that. (Interviewee.27)

Some accounts shared pictures of handsome boys and they'd interacted with their followers. They asked things like 'what kind of boyfriend are you looking for?' I checked those conversations every time, and found nine times out of ten, people only cared about big penises. (Interviewee.35)

During my interviews with the 39 people, those short comments above were the only ones mentioning their experience with #IAmGay# outside of collective action. At the time, I was surprised that my interviewees' impression of the hashtag outside of collective action was unanimously about sex, especially considering the fact that I did not observe any discussion about sex during the #IAmGay# protest. Afterwards, when I was going through the posts in the post-protest period of #IAmGay#, I realised that there were indeed many pictures and discussions that could easily give the audience such an impression. I initially felt the same, too. However, as my observation progressed, I gradually noticed the complexity of all the activities that users were doing through the hashtag on a daily basis. Sex was one of the main topics that made up

users' everyday social lives via the hashtag, but certainly not the only one. There were other activities, including friend making and everyday activism. Moreover, it is important that I understand those activities' influence on the collective identity.

The reason I discuss everyday activities carried out by users throughout the whole period at first is because they built the common ground upon which collective action happened in the period. They played various roles contributing to LGBTQ+ activism associated with #IAmGay#, such as creating new social spaces and connecting the hashtag with broader issues that were relevant to Chinese LGBTQ+ people. Yet, most importantly, as there was significantly less confrontational activism, they mainly served to shape the 'we' instead of the 'others' in users' collective identity. In other words, while using the hashtag, users focused more on their own interpersonal and intergroup relationships, reforming inner dynamics of the participant demographic of the #IAmGay# protest. Consequently, gay men established their dominance of the hashtag – especially in the online community created based on the hashtag – during this period through various social activities, and therefore, the 'we' in the collective identity shifted from being inclusive with a centre of homosexuals to being increasingly exclusive to gay men.

An #IAmGay# online community, the 'super-topic community' ('超话社区') alluded to by Interviewee.27, was created on Weibo. Initially facilitated by the Voice of Comrade and later by a group of ordinary users, the community was loosely organised as a public social space for LGBTQ+ users on Weibo. Members – the majority of whom were gay men – formed and strengthened casual bonds with each other by carrying out diverse everyday social activities, such as dating (in which most of the sex talks happened), friend making, and chatting. Apart from the occurrences of collective action, confrontational activism subsided in people's use of the hashtag. Users practiced activism through less confrontational ways, focusing on information sharing and spontaneous equality advocacy without addressing any specific antagonist. Yet, there were still occasionally some users who were involved in exposing homophobia and lobbying for the legalisation of same-sex marriage during the government's collection of suggestions to the Civil Code of the People's Republic of China (the Civil Code). Following this brief overview, I shall now explore each of the everyday activities at length.

8.1.1 The #IAmGay# super-topic community and social activities

The #IAmGay# super-topic community

Upon its return to Weibo on the 16th April 2018, the Voice of Comrade also announced that they had made #IAmGay# a ‘super topic’ (‘超级话题’ or ‘超话’) and that they were its ‘host’ (‘主持人’). Essentially, super topics are a function based on hashtags that was introduced by Weibo in 2009 (Y. Chen et al., 2021). Users can request hashtags to become super topics. The more popular hashtags are, the more likely they can become super topics. Then, once approved by Weibo, a super topic can have ‘its page and serves as a community for users with common interests to gather and discuss’ (Y. Chen et al., 2021, p. 2). The ‘host’ is the name of the moderator of the community. One community can have multiple hosts and the position can be applied by any member in the community, though certain criteria need to be met, e.g. being real-name verified and aged above 18, being frequently involved in the community, and serving as a host for no more than three super-topic communities (Weibo, n.d.-c).

An ordinary hashtag and a super topic, therefore, are distinct from each other. While an ordinary hashtag is completely public and accessible with only moderation from the platform, a super topic can have a certain threshold of participation and be under extra moderation from the host. This is because a super-topic community not only has its own page, which is similar to a Facebook community page, but also the host has some power over the community. The host can adjust who gets to publish original posts based on members’ ‘super-topic levels’ (‘超话等级’). Through various ways of participation, such as daily check-in, interacting with other members, and publishing original posts, members can gain ‘experience’ and ‘level up’ in super-topic communities. Being able to adjust the level at which members are allowed to publish original posts, the host has power over the threshold of participation. For example, many super-topic communities have chosen level six to be the threshold, as it takes a moderately long time for users to reach that level. Under such circumstances, any user can freely access, join, and browse any super-topic community and interact with other members but is not necessarily able to publish original posts immediately after joining. The host is obligated to moderate posts and interactions in the community according

to Weibo's Super-topic Community Convention (微博超话社区公约). More importantly, the host also has the power to set up additional rules for moderation, provided that the additional rules are accepted by other members. For instance, as X. Wu (2021) has noticed, one rule that super-topic communities of popular idol fans often have is that members are not allowed to mention other idols in their posts, and in the case of violation, their posts can be deleted and their accounts can be banned from the community. How a super-topic community is organised, therefore, largely depends on the host's will. The host can choose to exercise their power to a given extent and guide activities within the community.

When the Voice of Comrade created the #IAmGay# super-topic community, they were the only host of it and decided to make it a rather inclusive community following the inclusive framing of the #IAmGay# protest. Thus, the community did not have any threshold that limited low-level members from publishing original posts, nor were there any additional rules to regulate members' activities. All users on Weibo, regardless of their gender and sexual identities, were welcomed to join the community. All members were free to post anything on the condition that they adhered to the basic regulations of the platform. The super-topic community, therefore, was loosely organised. The intent of the Voice of Comrade of creating such a community was likely to be no more than just providing a space, i.e. the community page, where participants of the protest could continuously interact with each other.

However, there is another important feature of super-topic communities that should also be highlighted. When members post in super-topic communities, they can choose whether their posts will be displayed on their personal pages. This means that if they choose not to display them, members' posts in super-topic communities are not shown in their followers' feed and other users cannot see their activities within super-topic communities on their personal pages. Although super-topic communities are still public and all posts can be seen by non-members if they simply visit the community pages, such a feature offers super-topic community members to be discreet to some extent. In other words, they have the opportunity to get involved in those communities without non-members, especially their followers, necessarily knowing about it.

This may not seem so important to members of some super-topic communities, such as those of food, music, television series, films and other common hobbies and

interests, as disclosing those common hobbies and interests rarely entails any risk. On the contrary, for many members of certain super-topic communities like the #IAmGay# community, some discretion may be crucial. In the #IAmGay# super-topic community, it is found that most members chose to only display their posts in the community, significantly reducing the chance of their followers noticing their involvement in the community.

There are several possible reasons why such a choice was prevalent amongst members of the #IAmGay# community. Firstly, some LGBTQ+ members were not out online and/or offline, which led them to be rather careful regarding disclosure of their identities and talking about anything relevant to LGBTQ+ in online social spaces. It is, therefore, understandable that they chose to hide their involvement to prevent accidentally coming out to people in other online and offline social networks.

Secondly, even for heterosexual members – who I rarely observed in the community – and LGBTQ+ members who were already out, there were still other potential risks. That is, by also displaying posts on their personal pages, they could potentially face different forms of discrimination, such as hate speech, judgement, and alienation. The community was very likely to be a target of discrimination, as pointed out by Interviewee.27 who speculated some malicious behaviours in the community (see the quote of Interviewee.27 at the beginning of [8.1 Everyday Activities](#)). Yet, in such a case, discriminatory behaviours were likely to be directed to the whole community rather than any particular individual. The circumstances might differ greatly when individual members display posts on their own personal pages. They faced potential harm on an individual level from outside of the community, especially from their followers who could directly see the posts in the news feed.

Lastly, there was no reason for members to display some of their activities to non-members, as those activities were specifically aimed to happen between LGBTQ+ members in the community. The most prominent of such activities is dating. When LGBTQ+ members posted to seek potential dates, they surely aimed to have other LGBTQ+ members in the community as the audience, rather than just anyone in their follower list or in the wider public on Weibo. Similarly, such an intention is likely to be behind some other popular social activities in the community, such as friend making and chatting about affection and relationship. As the community was created as a social

space for LGBTQ+ users and their allies, most of the social activities happened within the community between its members.

Thus, the #IAmGay# super-topic community remained largely confined, unlike the #IAmGay# protest that was framed to have an audience as wide as the public on Weibo. Furthermore, as mentioned briefly before, heterosexual members were rarely observed in the community. Why did heterosexual users, who were a large and strong force in the #IAmGay# protest, not involve themselves much in the community? This seems to be partially caused by the fact that many social activities in the community were aimed at LGBTQ+ members – or more precisely, members who identified as gay men, and I shall discuss this matter later. In other words, although the Voice of Comrade, as the community host, did not set any threshold regarding who could participate in the community or limit types of activities, many activities were rather exclusive. Therefore, such exclusivity resulted from most members' choice of activities in the community, instead of the host's purposeful organisation. Moreover, it seems that LGBTQ+ members did not deliberately exclude heterosexual users. There were no evident signs indicating that heterosexual users were rejected, yet neither did LGBTQ+ members actively invite heterosexual users to participate in their activities or carry out many activities that could be easily engaged in by heterosexual users. Consequently, even though the community was publicly accessible, soft boundaries were gradually established between the general public on Weibo and the #IAmGay# super-topic community as well as between LGBTQ+ members and heterosexual users within the community.

Social activities

By further looking into the activities carried out by members in the community, I also noticed that the relationship between LGBTQ+ and heterosexual users was not the only thing that had changed since the #IAmGay# protest. The dynamics between LGBTQ+ identity groups had also shifted. In short, gay men became the dominant group in the community with some presence of lesbians and very little presence of other groups. To elaborate this shift, I shall demonstrate the main social activities in the community, including dating, friend making, and chatting, as it was through those

social activities that members of gay men had occupied a large space of the community, which then led to the establishment of new dynamics.

The first thing that I noticed when exploring the different social activities in the community was that gay men were the majority of participants in every one of them. This means that although the initial membership of the community, which mostly came from the #IAmGay# protest, could be highly diverse and inclusive of users of all gender and sexual identities, the community appeared to be a space mostly for gay men because of the active members who frequently engaged in social activities. Thus, upon their first visit to the community, non-members were likely to have an impression that the community was specifically for gay men. Such an impression, then, could potentially stop users of other gender and sexual identities to join the community, simply because it did not seem to be for them. On the other hand, existing members who were not gay men could also have difficulties in navigating and participating in the community. While there was not much space created specifically for their identity groups, they might also find it difficult to participate in activities revolving around gay men. Certainly, they were free to create their own content in the space, as the virtual community was not limited in space unlike an offline one. Yet, it seems that this did not happen much, at least not enough to be noticeable, especially compared with the sheer quantity of posts that were catering to gay men.

Of course, many may think that it is not necessarily difficult for people of other gender and sexual identities to participate in social activities initiated or mostly engaged in by gay men – there are still many similarities between gay men and people of other gender and sexual identities, which can prompt engaging conversations. For instance, popular culture, including films, television series, music, video games, and novels, can be a common interest amongst LGBTQ+ people and can foster discussions. In fact, some members posted in the community to recommend films or to share their thoughts about films. *Call Me by Your Name* (2018) and *Carol* (2015) were two films frequently mentioned by members. Discussions about those two films – one about a love story between two men and the other about two women – were indeed not exclusive. Any member, regardless of their gender and sexual identity, could easily engage in the discussions. However, this type of activity did not make up a large

proportion of members' social life in the community. It was through those main social activities that gay men emphasised identity boundaries and dominated the community.

Amongst the main social activities, dating was undoubtedly the underlying contributor to gay men's dominance of the community. Not only did gay men engage in most of the dating activities, but also the ways in which they engaged in dating were rather alienating to members of other gender and sexual identities, who might not have experienced much of the online dating scene of Chinese gay men. Those gay members often posted 'dating profiles' of themselves, which included information such as their sexual positions ('top' and 'bottom' in the keywords), ages ('year-old' and 'age' in the keywords), heights, weights, locations (often being which city or area they were living in and sometimes by using the 'check-in' function of Weibo), hobbies, one or multiple photos of themselves, and their desired types of dates ('look for' in the keywords), much like those profiles on dating apps. To demonstrate how those posts look, here is one example:

Browniemi: OMG, there're really no tops? #IAmGay# Born in 97, second-year uni student. Any bears or young cute boys? Gonna give up if I can't find a boyfriend. Not looking very good in the photo [with a photo of himself]

The fact that several keywords found in my quantitative analysis that are very likely to be used in this context, especially 'top' and 'bottom' that specifically refer to gay men's sexual positions, has also shown the prevalence of gay members' dating posts in the community. In simply making posts like this, gay men had already occupied much space in the community where members of other gender and sexual identities were not particularly welcomed.

Furthermore, although I refer to this type of activity as 'dating', what many gay members did, in fact, was also very similar to what people do on gay men's 'dating' apps. Looking through those dating posts, I noticed that rather than serious dates or relationships, many were looking for more casual encounters such as hook-ups. Those posts often used sexually explicit language, sometimes accompanied with photos with strong sexual implications. For instance, here are a few examples of the posts:

HelloooooH: #IAmGay# Looking for a cutie to jerk off together for long term.

We can also chat and be friends. I'm 20, kind of cute too.

CarrotB: #IAmGay# Any slutty bottoms up to jerk off?

Wirednotebook: #IAmGay# Any slutty slaves? ... I dominate

The original term used in the first two posts in Chinese to mean 'jerk off' is '飞' ('fly'), the abbreviation of '打飞机' ('shoot the plane'), which is a common Chinese slang referring to male masturbation. The third post, then, was speaking to an even narrower audience, i.e. gay men who were interested in sexual dominance, submission and maybe sadomasochism. Other than those examples, it is also found that some gay members posted photos to sexually attract others, such as photos of covered crotches (as sexually explicit photos are not allowed on Weibo), naked body parts (torsos, legs, feet, etc.) and popular sexual fetishes amongst Chinese gay men (socks, underwear, sportswear, etc.)²³.

Such hypersexual content – especially those that incorporated languages and visual symbols derived from the sex culture of Chinese gay men – was probably commonplace to most gay members in the community who had used any Chinese gay dating app. However, to some gay members who were not so familiar with the culture and members of other gender and sexual identities, it was likely to be strange or even intimidating. On the one hand, they might either have no interest or find it rather difficult to engage in those conversations, and on the other hand, some of them voiced their dissatisfaction, frustration, or even resentment about the atmosphere that gay men dominated the space for extensive sex talks in the community. For instance, a lesbian member posted:

GGGowen: Why does it seem like people using the super topic are all men... I want to find a girlfriend hahaha

It is worth noting that there were some lesbians who posted in the community to seek dates, but their posts were significantly fewer than gay men's. I also did not observe

²³ For ethical reasons, examples of such photos are not included here, as photos posted online may have information such as location, time and device embedded within the files as well as some social and physical contexts in the photos that can be used to identify individual users (Ahern et al., 2007).

any lesbian's dating post being sexual in any way. There were also some members channelling their displeasure in their posts, for example:

0910Laa: #IAmGay# feeling here has almost become a place just for dirty talk and hook-ups, emmmmmmm

5566ray: #IAmGay# so here is now a 'corner for matchmaking and hooking up' 🤔🤔🤔 well, as long as you're happy about it. Good luck... really

Moreover, one member saw this as a pressing concern for the community and asked for moderation on gay members' sexual content in a rather emotional way, as they posted:

Bunnyredandblue: #IAmGay# ads have tended to flood into the super topic again, which hosts are using their leisure time to moderate. But at the same time, I see so many 'freaks' here. Hosts, please spare some time to moderate the filth too!! Come on, to those who are looking for jerk mates, dirty talks, naked content and 'fans', aren't there apps where you can find more people like that for you?!! Please leave us some pure land, ok?!! The environment for homosexuals is still not very good, and to those popular accounts, if you choose not to do anything for the group, could you please not make commodities of us? How inconsiderate!!!

It should be also noted that several members supported the viewpoint in this post. For instance, one comment says 'finally, someone's saying this!' It is not a surprise that some members felt in such ways, because if they wanted to initiate or engage in other social activities, they could not disregard the strong presence of gay men who attempted to engage in sexual activities with other gay men in the community.

Although the other main social activities carried out by members in the community did not have a strong sexual characteristic, they also seem to focus on gay men's needs, as they were largely underpinned by gay men's participation. When gay men posted in the community to make friends, they tended to make friends with gay men as well, rather than community members of other gender and sexual identities. Although most of them did not specify that they only wanted friends who were gay men, the ways in which they presented themselves suggested that their intention was

indeed so. On the one hand, many gay men's friend-making posts adopted a similar format as those dating posts by building personal profiles. This means that they often covered information that catered to an audience of gay men, especially information about their ages, heights, weights, and sexual positions. Here are two typical examples of the posts:

Xman1777: #IAmGay# located in Lishui Zhejiang. 172, 65, bottom. Hobbies: photography, music, and video games. Here for friends. Hit me up [with photos of himself and a photographic work]

Mango_PP: #IAmGay# Any top in Shanghai? Student in Shanghai, 22, 46, 170, normal looking. Anyone interested in chatting and making friends? (◡‿◡) I'm skinny and can't gain weight.

In fact, those pieces of personal information were probably not even important for making friends, unless those gay men were expecting to find dates through making friends first. However, regardless of the type of people they were looking for, by actively including such information in their posts, most of those gay men formed their own space for friend making, excluding members of other gender and sexual identities in an indirect way. On the other hand, most of those who did not adopt a dating profile format in their friend-making posts still tended to make friends of gay men. Such an intention was embedded in various ways. For instance, when one member who self-identified as 'half bent and half straight' posted to look for friends in the community, he treated the community as a space for gay men, using 'you' to refer to an audience of gay men:

Henrikkk: #IAmGay# wow, my first time posting in the super topic. I'm not fully gay (half bent and half straight), but I'm not afraid to become one of you, neither am I against making friends with you. Hope you can give me a like and I'm happy to interact with your posts too. Look forward to following you, and then we can become good friends 🤗 Hope we can be treated gently by the world and treat the world gently too ❤️ Love you all

In another post, a gay man used a gendered term 'bros' in his post:

Kiwijake: #IAmGay# hey bros, let's make friends [with several photos of himself]

Other than specific language that worked to exclude other community members, some photos posted by gay men conveyed the same intention. For instance, one gay member's post did not contain any exclusive language, but one of the photos that he posted was a bathroom selfie of himself posing to show arm muscles in only underwear, which is clearly aimed at an audience of gay men:

Rickmoon321: #IAmGay# do I really have to post my photos [to get attention] 🤔 looking for friends in Nanjing. Anyone!!!! [with a headshot photo and another one of himself posing in underwear in a bathroom]

Furthermore, when gay men initiated conversations in the community, the topics were often about their affection, relationships, or other common interests of the group. Their detailed experiences seem to resonate more with other gay men. This is because when gay men chatted about their affection and relationships in the community, their experiences based on their gender and sexual identities might be rather different from those of people of other gender and sexual identities. Consequently, it was not easy for people of other gender and sexual identities to engage in gay men's chats about their affection and relationships.

For instance, there were some gay men in the community who chatted about their experiences of being attracted by or falling in love with heterosexual men. One member posted to ask for advice:

Ang1007: well, everyone, please teach me how to give up on liking a straight guy. #IAmGay#

One posted to ask if anyone else had similar experiences:

Mac03768: #IAmGay# Wonder if any of you have ever had history with straight men? My two previous love experiences were both kind of about straight men. The most freaking unforgettable guy in my life is a straight man too. I'm really running in strange circles with straight men.

Another one, then, strongly advised others not to have any affection for straight men based on his own experience:

751Ship: #IAmGay# going back to school soon, which means I will see the person I like soon too. However... this is actually frustrating, because he hates me. I'm forcing myself to smile 😞 I hope my dears here will never like straight guys, because it's too hurtful. It was so stupid of me to like him. Repeat this three times... liking straight guys hurts... liking straight guys hurts... liking straight guys hurts...

This type of experience is, obviously, most relatable to other gay members of the community and the people who engaged with the posts were almost all men who were very likely to be gay men.

Thus, after exploring those main social activities in the #IAmGay# super-topic community, I discovered an outstanding phenomenon in the community: gay men being the majority of active members and the content focusing on gay men's needs and experiences fed into each other. In other words, those active gay members were likely to produce more content about themselves, and then, the content that they produced attracted more gay men to engage in various activities in the community. It was through those two ways that gay men's dominant position in the community was established and reinforced. Members of other gender and sexual identities could still post and interact with each other – as a matter of fact, some lesbians indeed did so, but there was a perception, which was likely to be a widely held one, amongst members that the community was mostly, if not exclusively, for gay men. Therefore, gay men continually strengthened their bonds with each other through those everyday social activities after the protest. Meanwhile, the collective identity associated with the hashtag was reformed. The confinement of the community led to a narrower audience of the social activities, i.e. members of the community. Gay men's dominance in the community shaped the 'we' to be increasingly exclusive to gay men.

8.1.2 Everyday activism

Apart from the everyday social activities that users partook in by using the hashtag, the hashtag was, of course, continuously used by some users to perform everyday

activism during the post-protest period. Importantly, the fact that the hashtag was still used for activism – even though a bigger proportion of the use of the hashtag was for socialisation – shows that after it was used for the protest, the hashtag had gained a strong association with LGBTQ+ identity politics. Not only was it available to be used again for subsequent LGBTQ+ activism on Weibo, but it was also embedded with experience of the protest, including participants’ framing of the collective identity, which could be adopted for later activism.

Evidently, the ways in which the hashtag was used for everyday activism in the post-protest period differed from how it was used during the protest. The different ways of use seem to influence the collective identity, yet not drastically. In this section, therefore, I will demonstrate how the collective identity was shaped by users’ performances of everyday activism both in the super-topic community and in the general public. Overall, I found that the collective identity in the community was underpinned by gay men’s participation, whereas outside of the community, it remained similar to how it was in the protest and the participants were still diverse and inclusive. As for the content of the posts, most of it did not contribute to framing the collective identity, because what many users posted was mainly general advocacy about eradicating discrimination and stigma against LGBTQ+ people in China and information about global LGBTQ+ activism and health, which means that they did not address any specific antagonist. However, there were also a few exceptions, including the activities in which users exposed homophobia and lobbied for the legalisation of same-sex marriage in China. Therefore, users’ everyday activism via the hashtag primarily contributed to maintaining the momentum of the protest, ensuring that the political use of the hashtag was not simply shelved after the protest.

More specifically, unlike those social activities that happened mostly in the confined super-topic community, users’ everyday activism spanned both inside and outside of the community. Namely, there were users who used the hashtag for activism but did not publish their posts in the community, in the same way participants did in the #IAmGay# protest. Those who engaged in everyday activism in the community were also more willing to synchronise their activism related posts to their personal pages. This is likely because they wanted those posts to reach a wider audience, which was opposite many community members more socially purposed posts that mostly

remained inside of the community. The soft boundary between the use of the hashtag in the super-topic community and in the general public potentially led to some divergence of the collective identity in those two spaces. In the community, due to gay men's dominance, the participant demographic of everyday activism was also concentrated on gay men. Contrarily, in the general public space on Weibo, the users who engaged in everyday activism through the hashtag were more diverse, consisting of both LGBTQ+ and heterosexual people. The divergent collective identities were parallel until the #IAmLes# protest, which I will explore at length in the next chapter.

Then, how did users engage in everyday activism? What content did they post? In order to answer those questions, I further investigated those posts and found that there were two types of posts based on whether there was an active framing of antagonist. Thus, the two types are 1) posts that did not frame any antagonist, and 2) posts that framed at least one antagonist. The number of the first type of post greatly exceeds the number of the second type of post, corresponding to one of the findings of the keyword analysis in the last chapter that no word or phrase potentially referring to an antagonist was used very frequently during the period.

The first type of posts, as briefly mentioned earlier, was mostly concerned with general advocacy and the dissemination of information relevant to LGBTQ+ people. General advocacy, in particular, made up the largest part of users' everyday activism. There were many users who spontaneously posted to call for the equality of LGBTQ+ people in China. Here are some examples of this type of post:

GlassbookY: #IAmGay# equality, freedom, strength, art, love and bravery.

When can we have equality? When can we be legalised? I'll always support [the cause] and always be here. Hope for solidarity! [with a photo of the rainbow flag]

Eetictm: #IAmGay# I AM GAY SO WHAT? I'm homosexual, but I won't feel I'm inferior because of that. Neither do I think it's an illness. I might have struggled before, but that was before I fully understood homosexuality. We still have much to do to achieve equality, but please believe we'll see the rainbow after the storm. Let's do it, comrades! [with three photos of the rainbow flag]

JordanC: #WorldAIDSDay# homosexuality isn't the way AIDS transmits, it's sexual intercourse #IAmGay# #ISupportGayRights# #TreatGaysEqually#

As these examples show, many of this type of post focus on personalised statements revolving around the equality of LGBTQ+ people in China. They did not necessarily attempt to frame any component of the collective identity, i.e. the ‘we’, the antagonist, or the audience. Moreover, it is probably worth mentioning that as in the third example, many users posted this type of personalised statement on several international awareness days during the period, including the IDAHOTB (the 17th May 2018), the International Coming Out Day (the 11th October 2018), the World AIDS Day (the 1st December 2018), and the Zero Discrimination Day (the 1st March 2019). The use of the hashtag for advocacy on those awareness days across the whole period helped to maintain the momentum, reminding users of the political significance of the hashtag.

In addition to general advocacy, there were also many users who used the hashtag to disseminate information as part of their everyday activism. A large proportion of the information that they shared was about the progress of international LGBTQ+ activism, especially photos of pride parades across the world and the progresses of same-sex marriage legalisation in other regions and countries such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Japan, and Switzerland. Although it was much less observed, health information, e.g. information about safe sex and sexually transmitted diseases, was also disseminated by users via the hashtag. Yet, compared with advocacy, information dissemination is even less likely to influence the collective identity.

The second type of post mainly involved in exposing homophobia and lobbying for the legalisation of same-sex marriage in China. The Voice of Comrade had an agenda to expose homophobia long before the #IAmGay# protest, for which they had also created a hashtag #theVoiceofComradeExposingChannel# (#同志之声曝光台#). During the post-protest period of #IAmGay#, they exposed several homophobic institutions and individuals. For instance, on the 30th May 2018, they exposed a technical secondary school in Hunan province for its homophobic misconduct in one of the school slogans, which explicitly rejected homosexuals. Led by the Voice of Comrade, some users incorporated #IAmGay# in their posts to condemn and pressure those homophobic institutions and individuals. In doing so, users framed very specific antagonists. However, those expository activities were limited to a great extent. Firstly, there were not many participants, and therefore, they did not escalate into collective action. Secondly, they lasted very briefly. In fact, the

longest lasted only several days. Lastly and most fundamentally, focusing on separate incidents, they scratched only the surface of the issue. Most users did not follow up on the incidents and some of the homophobic institutions and individuals were not pressured into apologising or improving their problems. Therefore, even though users' actions encompassed strong confrontational activism, the expository activities did not significantly influence the collective identity associated with the hashtag.

Meanwhile, the lobbying for the legislation of same-sex marriage happened mostly from early September to early November 2018, the period during which the Chinese central government collected public opinions for the codification of Book 5 Marriage and Family in the Civil Code. The codification of the Civil Code was a milestone of the nation's legal system, as explained by Sheng et al. (2020):

[it] is the most extensive legislation in the history of the PRC and is the first and only legislation named 'code' in China. The new Civil Code is considered as an amalgamation of the existing civil and tort related laws and regulations as well as certain judicial interpretations issued by the Supreme People's Court of the PRC. The Code covers various dimensions of civil society, including without limitation, private property, contracts, personal privacy, marriage and family, inheritance, and torts, etc.

As part of the codification process, the government asked for public opinions and suggestions on each section of a draft version of the Civil Code across 2018 and 2019. It provided Chinese LGBTQ+ individuals, allies, and organisations with opportunities to directly get involved in the process of law-making. The legislation of same-sex marriage was undoubtedly their primary goal. While massive numbers of individuals and organisations were voicing their demand for same-sex marriage through this channel, many users also used #IAmGay# to mobilise more participants to join this action. Since the suggestion system was rather complicated to use and the legal wording was not easy to understand, some users also circulated detailed guidelines on how people could do it and what specific suggestions they could give. In doing this, users had a clear goal and some strategies to achieve the goal. However, they did not make any significant change to the collective identity. This is because, firstly, they attempted to mobilise as many participants as possible regardless of gender and sexual

identities and this was the same as the framing of the ‘we’ in the initial protest. Secondly, even though the government and lawmakers could perhaps be seen as the antagonist in this case, users’ actions were mostly not confrontational. i.e. rather than intensively challenging the government and lawmakers, they only provided suggestions. Thus, there was no solidified antagonist framed.

In conclusion, the hashtag was used for various forms of activism on a daily basis, which underlines its capacity for facilitating political activities beyond the protest and sustaining LGBTQ+ activism in the digital space. Although there was divergence between the inside and the outside of the super-topic community regarding the reformation of the ‘we’, overall, users’ everyday activism consistently reinforced the political use of the hashtag and opened up possibilities of new ways in which the hashtag could be used.

8.2 The IDAHOTB: 13th and 17th May 2018

After the initial protest, there were two periods during which the hashtag was used in a collective way. Users’ participation in both incidents of collective action differed greatly from that during the #IAmGay# protest. The first incident happened around the IDAHOTB and its main difference was that participants used the hashtag to fight against injustice that happened offline. Although the incident did not last long – most of the collective action happened on only one day, the 13th May 2018 – and the number of people who used the hashtag for the incident was hardly large compared with the #IAmGay# protest, it was the most prominent connection between the online and the offline that was directly made through #IAmGay#. Therefore, the collective action shows an important aspect of the hashtag: it can be used to assist offline LGBTQ+ activism and used as a channel for disseminating information about, and fighting against, offline injustice.

It is, of course, essential to have a grasp of what happened first. When I started the observation, most information was already deleted, but fortunately, with the help of several posts on Weibo and a few news reports on the incident, e.g. Kuo (2018a), X. Liu and Yin (2018), and Baynes (2018), I was able to pin down the key facts surrounding the incident. On the 13th May 2018, some Chinese LGBTQ+ activists planned to hand out rainbow badges in 798, an art district in Beijing, to raise awareness

for the upcoming IDAHOTB. However, upon their arrival at the location, they had found that the area was already occupied by several police vehicles, which forced them to move to a different area. Then, after some badges were handed out, some security guards interfered. The event was called off and people were asked to take off their badges or to leave the art district. Conflicts between the participants and the security guards quickly escalated into violence. A video from the scene was posted and circulated on Weibo (the video has now been deleted but see Figure 8.1 for a screenshot of the video that was posted by another user). It showed ‘a woman beaten and pushed to the ground by a man wearing a security uniform’ and that ‘another woman was pushed by several men wearing the same uniform’ (X. Liu and Yin, 2018). Police were later involved, yet the persecutors and the management of the art district were not held accountable. As reported, both women were injured and hospitalised afterwards.



Figure 8.1 A screenshot of the video uploaded on Weibo

The video immediately incited many users’ anger on Weibo and some of them incorporated the hashtag #IAmGay# to express their anger along with other hashtags such as #517NoLongerSilent# (#517 不再沉默#), #InternationalDayAgainstHomophobia# (#国际不再恐同日#), #798#, #Beijing798# (#北京 798#), etc. Participants disseminated information about the incident including

the video and some photos from the scene, and condemned the security guards, the art district, and the police for their discriminatory misconduct and inaction. The scale of the action was, in fact, not small and at least thousands of users participated. However, the total number of posts containing #IAmGay# on the day was less than 300 when I collected them, and the number of posts using the hashtag for this cause was even smaller. Moreover, I observed very few posts containing the hashtag that discussed the incident after the 13th May. Although the number of posts increased again to around 400 on the 17th May, the IDAHOBT, most of the posts on the day just used the awareness day as an opportunity for general advocacy. Thus, the posts using #IAmGay# made up only a relatively small part of the action.

Did those posts, then, contribute to shaping the collective identity associated with #IAmGay#? Their contribution is likely small, considering how similar this action was to the activity of exposing homophobia, which I have discussed in the last section. Although both of them had clear antagonists, they also shared the characteristics of being short-lived and small-scale. This means that it was unlikely that they widely influenced the user demographic of #IAmGay# as a whole. Hence, they mainly contributed to the movement by expanding possible ways to use the hashtag.

In this case, in particular, not only was the hashtag used directly for an offline incident, but also it was used in conjunction with several other hashtags. It should be noted that it was not the first time that the hashtag was used in such a way, as there were other hashtags used during the #IAmGay# protest as well. However, the presence of other hashtags during the initial protest was not as prominent as during this action. It is seemingly because #IAmGay# was not the primary hashtag being used in this case. Nevertheless, such a way of using the hashtag shows that the activist essence of it was widely recognised by users on Weibo and it could be used in other forms of collective action to at least disseminate information and mobilise participants.

8.3 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has explored the everyday use of #IAmGay# after the #IAmGay# protest, as well as a small collective action using #IAmGay# against offline injustice. Although compared with the mass participation in the #IAmGay# protest,

users' everyday activities and a small part of the collective action around the IDAHOTB may seem negligible, they are of high importance to both users and this research.

Despite the new uses of #IAmGay# in the collective action around the IDAHOTB that I have already highlighted, online everyday activities, which include both everyday activism and social activities between activists on SNSs, are often paid less attention to in studies. However, those everyday practices should not be overlooked, as J. Liu (2016) argues that by examining 'the political dynamics in the quotidian nature of digitally mediated, routine daily life', we can:

not only place the use of ICTs in contentious moments into 'a big picture' to understand the political potential of the mundane use of ICTs, but also [reveal] 'everyday resistance' as precursors of open, confrontational forms of contentious activities [... and] understand the sudden outburst of contention and digital media as part of the 'repertoire of contention.' (p. 11)

Many previous studies on slacktivism, as Dennis (2019) has pointed out, are based on anecdotal case studies, often being mass digital campaigns led by national or international organisations (e.g. Christensen, 2011; Christensen, 2012; Cook et al., 2014; Vie, 2014; Howard et al., 2016), and disregard daily practices of digital activism to which the slacktivist critique seems to apply. Therefore, my analysis of the everyday use of #IAmGay# has partially filled the gap regarding the impact of online minor political activities out of those organised mass campaigns. It has revealed that online minor political activities on a day-to-day basis can not only maintain momentum of collective action and create spaces where activists can socialise and build bonds with each other, but also shape their collective identity based on their interaction.

As a result of gay men's dominance in social activities, the collective identity in the super-topic community was reformed to concentrate on gay men. Gay men's dominance in LGBTQ+ social spaces and the separation of social spaces between LGBTQ+ people, especially between gay men and lesbians, have both been previously observed. For instance, Adler and Brenner (1992) argue that in the United States, gay men establish and dominate gay communities in aspects such as lifestyle, business, and leisure, whereas lesbians have much less spatial territory and their communities

are often constructed based on their gendered needs. Then, Pritchard et al. (2002) have conducted a study on the only lesbian bar in the Gay Village in Manchester, the United Kingdom, which shows that gay men's 'presence, power and control' not only 'dominate gay space' but also 'threaten lesbian space' (p. 274). Similarly, Podmore (2006) reviews the historical geographies of gay and lesbian bars in Montréal, Canada, and finds that while gay men have become the representative of growing urban queer spaces, lesbians are losing their own spaces and being subsumed into umbrella queer spaces. Interviewing LGBTQ+ people about their experiences of social interactions, Farmer and Byrd (2015) notice that there is a perceived social segregation between some gay men and lesbians who prefer to not socially engage with each other, whilst bisexual, transgender and gender non-conforming individuals often feel 'ignored, rejected, and excluded from the rest of the gay and lesbian community' (p. 299). Group dynamics within daily social spaces affect LGBTQ+ activism, contributing to the situation where gay men strategise and conduct activism in their dominated spaces whilst lesbians are more inclined to build social networks to enrich their own world (Castells, 1983); and other gender and sexual minorities, such as transgenders, are excluded from gay and lesbian politics to varying degrees, struggling to increase their visibility and voice their demands (Murib, 2015; Minter, 2000).

However, those studies all focus on western societies where LGBTQ+ spaces have been physically established since the mid-twentieth century and there is almost no literature discussing dynamics between LGBTQ+ groups in social spaces in China. Some studies have documented the situation that there are both physical and virtual spaces specifically catering to Chinese gay men or lesbians (e.g. L. W. W. Ho, 2010; Chiang, 2019). Although they do not distinctly identify the separation of social lives between Chinese gay men and lesbians, the implication is that there seems to be one.

Based on those previous discussions, my analysis of the super-topic community during the post-protest period of #IAmGay# suggests that such dynamics – gay men being the dominant group and social spaces being separated between LGBTQ+ groups – may also be constructed and perceived within the Chinese LGBTQ+ community. Thus, they foster collective identity that is also dominated by Chinese gay men in those social spaces, which potentially affects how LGBTQ+ collective action is conducted in China. It is likely that gay men dominate collective

action that is framed under umbrella terms, such as LGBTQ+, queer, and gender and sexual minorities, and to fulfil their distinct needs, other identity groups have to separate themselves out of those umbrella terms to conduct their own collective action.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

Overall, my analysis of the #IAMGay# movement on Weibo – from the launch of the #IAMGay# protest in April 2018 to the end of April 2019 – shows how the collective identity associated with the hashtag was formed and reformed. Participants of the #IAMGay# protest framed a collective identity centring around homosexuals, which was inclusive of people of all gender and sexual identities. After the #IAMGay# protest, an online community was created based on the hashtag. Gay men socially dominated the community, reforming the collective identity to be dominated by gay men as well. Meanwhile, the hashtag was still used outside of the community for various forms of everyday activism, maintaining the inclusivity of the collective identity and the political momentum of the #IAMGay# protest.

Building on the analysis, in this chapter, I will conclude on three aspects that this thesis has been addressing from the empirical to the theoretical: *framing collective identity in Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism*, *slacktivism as a necessity in Chinese LGBTQ+ activism*, and *collective identity (re)formation through slacktivism*. Firstly, drawing on the collective identity framing theory (Hunt et al., 1994), I will illustrate how each component of collective identity may be framed in contemporary Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism. Secondly, I argue that under the tightening control of the state, slacktivism is a necessary process for Chinese LGBTQ+ activism, as it sustains Chinese LGBTQ+ activism by negotiating meanings embedded in collective identity and providing organisational opportunities for future activism. Thirdly and more broadly, I argue that slacktivism indeed has the capacity to (re)form collective identity, yet researchers are required to examine specific cases to explore how this is achieved. Then, I will briefly discuss the #IAMLes# protest, which is not included in the analysis in this thesis, followed by other findings and suggestions for future research.

9.1 Framing collective identity in Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism

How is collective identity framed in contemporary Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism? This is one of the central questions of this research. My analysis of the #IAMGay# movement shows some of the likely frames of collective identity. The components of collective identity frame, as Hunt et al. (1994) demonstrate, are the ‘we’, the antagonist,

and the audience. I shall demonstrate each of them in contemporary Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism. Overall, how collective identity is framed in contemporary Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism is often complex, influenced by factors including but not limited to dynamics between activists, the state's control, and the ecology of SNSs.

9.1.1 The 'we'

Inclusion/exclusion is the core process of framing the 'we' in LGBTQ+ collective identities (Gamson, 1997, 1995; Bernstein, 1997; Ghaziani, 2011; Gal et al., 2016; Egner, 2019). The 'we' in Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism can be framed in at least two ways, as the #IAmGay# movement shows.

Firstly, the most likely way is to frame the 'we' to include all people who support LGBTQ+ equality in China. This has been observed in both the #IAmGay# and everyday activism that users performed by using the hashtag. Such an inclusive 'we' is a result of the loose organisation of activism on SNSs and a strategical choice. Due to tightening control over society, Chinese LGBTQ+ organisations mostly conduct activism using soft approaches (J. Cao and Guo, 2016). Therefore, those organisations are not actively engaging in or taking the leadership of confrontational activism on SNSs. Without a strong leading organisation, those activist activities on SNSs are loosely organised and decentralised, becoming what Bennett and Segerberg (2012) call connective action. Under such circumstances, users of various identities and backgrounds can easily join the 'we', provided that they support LGBTQ+ equality in China. Their participation, thus, shapes the framing of the 'we' to be inclusive. Meanwhile, to frame an inclusive 'we', Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism can also gain strategical advantage. One effective approach that digital activism in China often adopts is to form public opinion that puts pressure on authorities to react (Q. Xiao, 2011b; Hassid, 2012). With an inclusive 'we', Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism can mobilise maximum support from the public, especially from the majority, heterosexuals. Such a strategy, as Ghaziani (2011) demonstrates, is 'the shift from opposition ("us versus them") to inclusion ("us and them")' (p. 101). By doing this, therefore, LGBTQ+ digital activism can effectively pressure authorities.

However, does this also mean that the inclusive 'we' is a queer 'we', or in other words, identity category boundaries are deconstructed? My analysis of the #IAmGay#

movement does not suggest so. Although by emphasising similarities between all identity categories, participants blurred category boundaries in the inclusive framing of the ‘we’, they did not entirely deconstruct the boundaries. Rather, they still actively claimed the categories. Gamson (1995) argues that the queer liberation of deconstruction of category boundaries itself is the goal of some LGBTQ+ activism, yet this was not the case that I observed. It seems that in the Chinese context of LGBTQ+ activism, the inclusive ‘we’ is a *united* front between identity categories rather than an *integral* front of identity categories. It is still worth noting, of course, that the inclusive ‘we’ has the potential to become a queer ‘we’.

Secondly, in the way that the #IAmGay# super-topic community reformed the ‘we’, an inclusive ‘we’ can quickly become a ‘we’ dominated by gay men. This is primarily caused by the social hierarchy of LGBTQ+ people in China, in which Chinese gay men are at the top. This can be even more common in Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism, which is mostly connective action as I have discussed. Without a strong organisation to actively include other identity groups and ensure equal positions of every group, the inner dynamic of Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism can easily mirror the social hierarchy in the wider society. This can happen even if Chinese gay men do not explicitly reject other groups. As seen in the #IAmGay# super-topic community, they occupied social space that catered to their needs. A gay men dominated ‘we’ potentially fosters separation between gay men and other groups both in social lives and activism, as other groups may create their own spaces to increase their visibility and address their needs. This is similar to the separation between Chinese gay men and lesbians in the wave of HIV/AIDS activism from the 2000s to the early 2010s, although this separation was mostly caused by organisational political economy rather than social hierarchy (Hildebrandt and Chua, 2017; Hildebrandt, 2012).

9.1.2 The antagonist

Antagonist frames in contemporary Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism reflect frames of the ‘we’. Specific composition of antagonist frames varies from case to case, but because of the political context in China, it is likely that the antagonist is made up of

primary and secondary parts, in the way that the antagonist was framed in the inclusive framing in the #IAmGay# movement.

As the political control over LGBTQ+ discourse, content, and space is increasingly restrictive, to avoid censorship and survive, many Chinese LGBTQ+ individuals and organisations often engage in apolitical activities (Y. Wang et al., 2020), non-confrontational activism (J. Cao and Guo, 2016), and self-censorship (L. W. W. Ho, 2007; Y. Yang, 2019). A similar logic applies to confrontational activism as well. When participants frame the antagonist, they are more likely to frame a primary antagonist that is not the state so that their activism is more likely to survive. The primary antagonist can be a commercial corporation, like Weibo in the inclusive framing in the #IAmGay# movement, a public service institution or an individual that is not directly affiliated with the state (e.g. a school or a hospital), like in the Voice of Comrade's action of exposing homophobia. To frame a particular organisation or individual as the primary antagonist, participants make demands only on them. Meanwhile, framing a primary antagonist can sometimes also be a strategical choice for LGBTQ+ activism in China. Demands and shared goals that participants frame based on a primary antagonist that is not affiliated with the state are generally easier to attain, compared with policy change, legal reform, etc.

A primary antagonist, then, is followed by a secondary antagonist or multiple secondary antagonists. Unlike a primary antagonist, a secondary antagonist is recognised as causing the inequality of LGBTQ+ people in China, towards which participants express dissent, but do not make demands. The state is often a secondary antagonist, since its control over LGBTQ+ is indeed a manifestation of discrimination. Along with the state, the heterosexist society is also likely to be a secondary antagonist. In fact, as the fundamental sources of discrimination against LGBTQ+ people in China, the state and the society may always be framed as antagonists in Chinese LGBTQ+ confrontational digital activism, either explicitly or implicitly. This happens especially in connective action in which discourse is greatly diversified.

However, it is worth noting that framing primary and secondary antagonists is not always necessary. There have been rare cases of LGBTQ+ activism that only express dissent towards the state and the society or directly make demands upon the state. For instance, in the case of Qiu Bai's lawsuit with the Ministry of Education, the

activist voiced specific and strong demands on the government department (S. X. Chen, 2020; Y. Yang, 2019). Such an example shows possible radicalism in Chinese LGBTQ+ activism. However, this type of antagonist framing is less observed in my research and previous studies.

9.1.3 The audience

The audience framed in contemporary Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism is often unclear. It seems that participants spend most of the time and effort on mobilising potential participants and expressing dissent towards antagonists. This suggests that potential participants are the main constituent of the audience frame. Therefore, potential participants reflect how the ‘we’ is framed.

As Hunt et al. (1994) point out, the audience frame traditionally consists of not only potential participants but also other ‘neutral and uncommitted observers who may react to or report on movement activities’ (p. 199) such as media and bystanders. However, ‘due to the official policy of “no encouraging, no discouraging, and no promoting” on homosexuality, Chinese mainstream media rarely cover LGBTQ-related issues’ (W. Wei, 2020, p. 342). Therefore, in most cases, participants of LGBTQ+ digital activism do not expect mainstream media coverage. Sometimes, international media, mostly in English, and domestic ‘self-media’²⁴ may report on Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism, but they do not seem to be intentionally framed as part of the audience. Rather, they are more of a ‘nice surprise’ to Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism.

Meanwhile, bystanders are hardly seen in Chinese LGBTQ+ digital activism. This is possibly because of the increasing political polarisation on SNSs (see Bail et al., 2018; Tucker et al., 2018; J. K. Lee et al., 2014; F. L. F. Lee, 2016; Hong and Kim, 2016; J. Jiang et al., 2020; Y. Lu et al., 2020) in China (see A. X. Wu, 2014; C. Zhang, 2018; T. Liu and Guan, 2019; Xing et al., 2022). A. X. Wu (2014) argues that Chinese netizens are often divided into two polarised groups based around nationalism and culture liberalism, leaving no grey space in between. The circumstances for Chinese

²⁴ ‘Self-media’ (‘自媒体’) refers to the civic journalistic practice in which ‘individuals and organizations broadcast their views using platform service’ (Y. Wang et al., 2020, p. 4878). According to Y. Wang et al. (2020), Chinese self-media is one of the few places, if not the only place, where Chinese people can receive information about the domestic LGBTQ+ community.

LGBTQ+ digital activism, therefore, may be similar. People are divided into either pro- or anti- LGBTQ+ equality in China and being a neutral bystander is not seen as possible, which is likely the reason why bystanders are not prominently framed in the audience.

9.2 Slacktivism as a necessity in Chinese LGBTQ+ activism

All the activities that participants did in the #IAmGay# movement were minor political activities. Forms of their action included clicking ‘like’, commenting, reposting posts, publishing original posts. On the surface, they served to show support, disseminate information, and expand discussions on the issues. They did not require a huge amount of effort, time, and resources. Nor did they lead to offline activism. Thus, they seem to fit the broad definition of slacktivism that refers to all minor political activities online.

However, as shown in this research, those minor political activities functioned in a more profound way, that is, to (re)form the collective identity associated with the hashtag. By participating through those forms of so-called slacktivism, Chinese LGBTQ+ individuals engaged in negotiation of the meanings of the ‘we’, the antagonist, and the audience in their collective identity on Weibo. They gained experience in identifying, in particular, the ‘we’ and the antagonist. Such experience is also embedded in the collective identity associated with the hashtag, available for future adoption and modification. The process of (re)forming collective identity did not only happen in confrontational collective action, i.e. the #IAmGay# protest, but in forms of everyday social and political activities as well, though in those non-confrontational forms, the process was mostly about (re)forming the ‘we’.

Offline LGBTQ+ activism, especially in confrontational and radical forms such as protests, sit-ins, and rallies, is increasingly difficult to emerge in China because of the state’s tightening control (Chia, 2019; Y. Yang, 2019), and Chinese LGBTQ+ individuals and organisations have few offline opportunities to practice the process of collective identity (re)formation. To practice framing antagonists offline is nearly impossible, as it involves expressing dissent and acting on dissent in physical ways. Thus, even though a complete collective identity is not essential for the emergence of collective action (Schlesinger, 1987; Garrison, 1992; Gamson, 1995; Rupp and Taylor,

1999; Polletta and Jasper, 2001; Flesher Fominaya, 2010a), the process of (re)formation of collective identity on SNSs is extremely valuable to LGBTQ+ activism in China. It provides well-negotiated and crystallised frames for Chinese LGBTQ+ individuals and organisations to enact future activism, especially confrontational collective action.

By exploring the continuity between collective identities in different events of Chinese LGBTQ+ activism, researchers treat them as connected, rather than isolated. Previous experience of framing collective identity in digital activism also contributes to improving the political opportunity structure in which LGBTQ+ activism takes place both online and offline in China.

9.3 Collective identity (re)formation through slacktivism

Beyond LGBTQ+ digital activism in China, my research has also proven that slacktivism does indeed have the capacity to (re)form collective identity, contrary to the slacktivist critique that deems slacktivism to be zero impact and merely self-satisfying (Morozov, 2009). My approach that links slacktivism's impact with collective identity (re)formation also differs from previous studies that argue against the slacktivist critique by looking for visible and material outcomes of slacktivism (e.g. Howard et al., 2016; Jones, 2015; Vie, 2014), the positive correlation between slacktivism and subsequent political participation (e.g. Christensen, 2012; Y. Lee and Hsieh, 2013; Jones, 2015; Lane and Dal Cin, 2018; Kwak et al., 2018; Vie, 2014), and organisational uses of slacktivism in activist organisations (e.g. Dennis, 2019). Therefore, I am providing a new approach by which not only researchers, but also political and media commentators and activists can use to rethink the value of slacktivism.

While the use of the term slacktivism remains broad, by this thesis, I aim to remind scholars and the public who are interested in the relationship between online and offline activism to avoid the dichotomy of online and offline activism and treating offline activism as the only form that can make a difference. Online and offline forms of activism are often intertwined (Greijdanus et al., 2020). When activism is mostly conducted through ICTs, such as in the #IAmGay# movement, it still can make a difference in ways that differ from offline activism. The (re)formation of collective

identity through slacktivism is one of the significant outcomes of digital activism. Though it does not directly and immediately contribute to any social or political change, it serves to sustain activism by helping participants to negotiate and elucidate relational meanings in organising activism.

Meanwhile, it is important to emphasise the contextual problem of the slacktivist critique again. In the discussion about the cost of activism, risk needs to be considered as well (McAdam, 1986). The risk of low-threshold online political activities is not always low, especially in authoritarian political contexts where activism is controlled. The political context of LGBTQ+ digital activism in China exemplifies how the slacktivist critique fails to recognise such an important matter. Regardless of the form of participation, when participating in digital activism in contexts where activism is controlled, participants face varying degrees of risk. Generally, if many participants of a collective action are willing to take risks and even sacrifice themselves for the benefit of the collective, it is more likely for the collective action to succeed (Hirsch, 1990). Thus, participating in so-called slacktivism in those contexts is differentiated from doing so in more liberal and democratic contexts, and is not self-satisfying and without impact as the slacktivist critique suggests. To examine how slacktivism contributes to social and political changes, researchers must consider its specific context.

9.4 The #IAmLes# protest

Before moving on to discussing some other findings, I would also like to briefly discuss the #IAmLes# protest launched on the 13th April 2019, which I deliberately left out in the research. As previously stated, I do not include the analysis of this protest not because the protest is irrelevant or insignificant but due to practical reasons. The #IAmLes# protest happened whilst I was collecting the data of the post-protest period of #IAmGay#, so I did not have the capacity and was not prepared to analyse it in the same way as I did with the #IAmGay# protest. However, it should be emphasised that the #IAmLes# protest was indeed a part of the #IAmGay# movement, which is worth investigating. Not including it is one of the most important limitations of this research.

In the #IAmLes# protest, participants protested Weibo again for another phase of discriminatory censorship. However, instead of homosexuality, Weibo's censorship

targeted only lesbian content and spaces, one of which was the #Les# super-topic community, a popular lesbian social space on Weibo. Although the scale of the #IAmLes# protest was also huge (Ogles, 2019; Adesina, 2019) and possibly no smaller than the #IAmGay# protest, neither Weibo nor the Chinese government responded to the protest. Eventually, it did not succeed in lifting the censorship in the way the #IAmGay# protest did a year ago. It ended gradually with decreasing participation.

Nevertheless, the #IAmLes# protest may show some important changes to the collective identity associated with #IAmGay#. For example, rather than directly inheriting the legacy of the #IAmGay# protest by continuously using the same hashtag, a few lesbian users on Weibo created a new hashtag, #IAmLes#, to launch the protest. It seems that those lesbian users refused to be subsumed into a simplified category of homosexuals that included both lesbians and gay men and wanted to recognise the differences between lesbians and gay men. This, potentially, was caused by the increasingly common phenomenon that lesbians widely draw on feminism to conduct their activism.

During the second wave of feminism, especially the 1970s and the 1980s, lesbian feminism became an increasingly dominant ideology amongst lesbians in western societies (Ellis and Peel, 2011; Poirot, 2009; Stein, 1992). Drawing on radical feminism, it emphasises the need for separation to varying degrees between lesbian women and men (S. Jeffreys, 2002). Although lesbian feminism is less discussed in the Chinese context, some literature has shown that it is increasingly common that Chinese lesbian and queer women activists and organisations are incorporating feminism and separating themselves from LGBTQ+ activism that is often dominated by Chinese gay men. For instance, Cheng (2018) shows that many Chinese lesbians are experiencing ‘double marginalisation’, namely oppressions against their intersectional identity of gender as well as sexuality inside and outside of the LGBTQ+ community, which has led them to start their own organisations and campaigns to tackle intersectional inequality. W. Liu et al. (2015) demonstrate that while Chinese gay men and their activism often hold ‘conservative biological essentialist views on sexuality and the rampant sexism that exclude queer women activists from LGBT political spaces and silence feminist agendas’, many Chinese queer women activists are more invested in ‘build[ing] the movement beyond a biological essentialist agenda

on sexual identity’, ‘advocat[ing] for the fluidity of sexual and gender categories’ and ‘bridging alliances with the existing feminist activism on the ground’ (p. 15-16). From a political economy perspective, Hildebrandt and Chua (2017) discover that during the wave of HIV/AIDS activism from the 2000s to the early 2010s in China, most funding was provided to organisations and campaigns that primarily addressed health issues amongst gay men, which also contributed to the invisibility of Chinese lesbians and the separation between Chinese gay men’s and lesbians’ activism. Moreover, as I have discovered in the last chapter, gay men’s dominance of the #IAmGay# super-topic community suggests that gay men also dominate social spaces of LGBTQ+ people in China. This is also likely to contribute to the separation of activism between Chinese gay men and lesbians, as lesbians may feel forced to create their own social spaces.

Did lesbian users attempt to separate themselves from gay men and reform the collective identity to centre around lesbians in the #IAmLes# protest? This, however, cannot be answered just by the fact that they replaced the old hashtag with a more lesbian-focused one. More analysis of the protest is required. Even if this was indeed the case, we need to further understand how lesbian users attempted to separate themselves from gay men and why they did so in the wider context of Chinese LGBTQ+ community. Therefore, I plan to further explore the #IAmLes# protest and find out how the #IAmLes# protest was different from the #IAmGay# protest.

9.5 Other findings and suggestions for future research

Finally, there are also some other findings in my research. They are concerned with the Chinese LGBTQ+ community and activism. However, they are not the focus of this research and so I did not collect sufficient data to allow me to make clear explanations of them. By highlighting them, I suggest future research to explore them further.

Firstly, in my analysis of the inclusive framing in the #IAmGay# movement, I discovered that there were strategies deployed by participants that were similar to some strategies commonly used in international LGBTQ+ activism such as the symbolic use of the rainbow flag. Amongst all of them, the ‘love is love’ discourse was used the most prominently. It was one of the core strategies that participants used for inclusive mobilisation. Not only was the phrase directly used by many participants in their posts,

but also the meaning of it was even more widely articulated in the movement. It seems that these soft, symbolic, and discursive strategies of international LGBTQ+ activism are very likely to be deployed by Chinese LGBTQ+ activism.

Secondly, related to the first point, the use of identity terms seems to be shifting in China. While there are still many people who are using identity terms created particularly to refer to Chinese LGBTQ+ people (e.g. comrade and lala), an increasing number of people are now also using formal Chinese terms (e.g. 男同性恋, 女同性恋, 双性恋, and 跨性别者²⁵) and even English terms (e.g. gay man, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender). Of course, the wide use of ‘同性恋’ (‘homosexual’) during the #IAmGay# protest was partly because participants wanted to respond to Weibo’s initial censorship announcement in which the term was used. However, other formal Chinese terms and English terms were also widely used across the #IAmGay# movement. In particular, in #IAmLes#, ‘les’ was used as the short term for ‘lesbian’. Considering the fact that the use of the terms comrade and lala was a result of Chinese LGBTQ+ people’s refusal to use formal Chinese terms and English terms in the 1980s (Bao, 2019a), the current prevalent use of them is intriguing. This may suggest that those formal Chinese terms have been destigmatised from their close association with clinical use and that Chinese LGBTQ+ people are increasingly incorporating western LGBTQ+ cultures in their daily lives.

From a political economy perspective, Chinese LGBTQ+ activism is increasingly independent from international LGBTQ+ activism or more precisely western LGBTQ+ activism (Hildebrandt, 2012). However, culturally, it seems that they are still tightly connected. Nowadays, with global information exchange accelerated by ICTs, the cultural connection between international and Chinese LGBTQ+ activism may be increasingly tight. However, more exploration of this cultural connection is needed to better understand it. Therefore, I suggest that future research explores how and why Chinese LGBTQ+ activism deploys some strategies that are commonly used in international LGBTQ+ activism and how Chinese

²⁵ They mean, respectively, ‘homosexual man’, ‘homosexual woman’, ‘bisexual’, and ‘transgender’, and they are also used sometimes in shortened forms like ‘男同’, ‘女同’, ‘双’, and ‘跨儿’.

LGBTQ+ people negotiate their identities under the influence of both the Chinese context and western LGBTQ+ cultures.

Appendix

1. Tables

Participant	Gender identity	Sexual identity
Interviewee.0	Man	Homosexual
Interviewee.1	Woman	Heterosexual
Interviewee.2	Woman	Homosexual
Interviewee.3	Man	Homosexual
Interviewee.4	Woman	Pansexual
Interviewee.5	Woman	Bisexual
Interviewee.6	Man	Homosexual
Interviewee.7	Man	Homosexual
Interviewee.8	Woman	Homosexual
Interviewee.9	Woman	Homosexual
Interviewee.10	Man	Homosexual
Interviewee.11	Woman	Bisexual
Interviewee.12	Woman	Homosexual
Interviewee.13	Woman	Homosexual
Interviewee.14	Woman	Heterosexual
Interviewee.15	Man	Homosexual
Interviewee.16	Woman	Homosexual
Interviewee.17	Woman	Homosexual
Interviewee.20	Woman	Homosexual
Interviewee.21	Man	Homosexual
Interviewee.22	Man	Homosexual
Interviewee.23	Man	Homosexual
Interviewee.24	Woman	Homosexual
Interviewee.25	Woman	Homosexual
Interviewee.26	Man	Homosexual
Interviewee.27	Woman	Bisexual
Interviewee.28	Woman	Homosexual
Interviewee.29	Transgender man	Heterosexual
Interviewee.30	Man	Homosexual
Interviewee.31	Woman	Bisexual
Interviewee.32	Woman	Heterosexual
Interviewee.33	Woman	Homosexual
Interviewee.34	Man	Homosexual
Interviewee.35	Man	Homosexual
Interviewee.36	Man	Homosexual
Interviewee.37	Woman	Homosexual
Interviewee.38	Man	Homosexual
Interviewee.39	Woman	Homosexual
Interviewee.40	Man	Homosexual

Table 4.1 Interview participants

User	Verified or not	Number of engagements
Panito	Yes	531.4 thousand
The Voice of Comrade	Yes	106.1 thousand and 6 thousand
IMPAL	No	22.9 thousand
Yangweiyang	Yes	11.7 thousand
BryantGHD	Yes	7.8 thousand
MrYan	No	7.1 thousand
Limpw	No	4.8 thousand
Shilande	Yes	3.8 thousand
KenJU	No	2.6 thousand
Erving99	No	2.4 thousand
poky098	Yes	2.2 thousand
UVWCD	Yes	2.1 thousand
Li333	No	1.9 thousand
Shully06	Yes	1.7 thousand
YammyBPL	No	1.6 thousand
Yocky	No	1.6 thousand
Blueapple11	Yes	1.6 thousand
Socialclue9	No	1.5 thousand
tomack3	No	1.4 thousand
Liamkiki	No	1.4 thousand
Cloud_V	Yes	1.3 thousand
DOGGYB	No	1.3 thousand
POZHANG	No	1.3 thousand
Leeyehchi	Yes	1.2 thousand
Alex20	No	1.1 thousand
HaiguiSoup	No	1 thousand
Tonmei	No	1 thousand
MIMINGGUI	No	1 thousand

Table 5.1 Users whose posts or reposts were engaged the most during the #IAmGay# protest

Keyword	Part of speech	English translation	Frequency rank	Frequency
同性恋	Noun/adjective	Homosexual	1	27174
爱	Noun/verb	Love	2	4839
同性	Noun/adjective	Same sex/same-sex	3	2317
希望	Noun/verb	Hope	4	2022
喜欢	Noun/verb	Like	5	1977
渣浪	Noun	Crappy Sina	6	1807
朋友	Noun	Friend	7	1468
支持	Noun/verb	Support	8	1441
话题	Noun	Topic	9	1383
错	Noun/adjective	Fault/wrong	10	1337

微博	Noun	Weibo	11	1318
性别	Noun	Gender	12	1228
歧视	Noun/verb	Discrimination/ discriminate	13	1219
发声	Verb	Speak out	14	1156
社会	Noun	Society	15	1012
同性戀	Noun/adjective	Homosexual	16	940
世界	Noun	World	17	896
爱情	Noun	Love	18	891
love	Noun/verb		19	885
脸	Noun	Face	20	866
国家	Noun	State	21	830
家人	Noun	Family	22	828
权利	Noun	Rights	23	827
有一天	Adverb	One day	24	781
被爱	Verb	Be loved	25	773
自由	Noun/adjective	Freedom/free	26	760
异性恋	Noun/adjective	Heterosexual	27	760
孩子	Noun	Child	28	744
姐妹	Noun	Sister	29	737
is	Verb		30	690
同志	Noun	Comrade	31	682
尊重	Noun/verb	Respect	32	674
平等	Noun/adjective	Equality/equal	33	673
燕公子	Noun	Mr Yan	34	661
新浪	Noun	Sina	35	656
生活	Noun/verb	Life/live	36	639
群体	Noun	Group	37	572
幸福	Noun/adjective	Happiness/happy	38	540
恢复	Verb	Recover	39	500
封	Noun/verb	Ban	40	493
选择	Noun/verb	Choice/choose	41	479
tag	Noun		42	475
女	Noun/adjective	Woman	43	472
加油	Verb	Go for it	44	460
中国	Noun	China	45	447
接受	Noun/verb	Acceptance/ accept	46	420
努力	Noun/verb	Endeavour	47	399
性取向	Noun	Sexual orientation	48	396
撑	Verb	Support	49	388

双性恋	Noun/adjective	Bisexual	50	375
违法	Verb/adjective	Break the law/illegal	51	374
故事	Noun	Story	52	371
企业	Noun	Corporation	53	367
出版物	Noun	Publication	54	362
合规	Adjective	Compliant	55	360
听话	Verb/adjective	Obey/obedient	56	360
曲解	Verb	Misinterpret	57	358
共产主义	Noun/adjective	Communism/communist	58	356
好妹妹	Noun	GoodSister	59	355
管理员	Noun	Administrator	60	353
视频	Noun	Video	61	353
扮红	Verb	Play the good cop	62	351
扮白	Verb	Play the bad cop	63	351
无关	Adjective	Irrelevant	64	346
图片	Noun	Picture	65	346
永远	Adverb	Forever	66	340
第一	Adjective/adverb	First	67	329
彩虹	Noun	Rainbow	68	329
沉默	Noun/adjective	Silence/silent	69	324
事情	Noun	Incident	70	320
一棍子打死	Verb	Completely negate	71	318
转发	Noun/verb	Repost	72	318
暴力	Noun/adjective	Violence/violent	73	318
站	Verb	Stand	74	317
Love	Noun/verb		75	315
拥抱	Noun/verb	Hug	76	315
反对	Noun/verb	Opposition/oppose	77	311
理解	Noun/verb	Understanding/understand	78	309
反	Verb/preposition	Oppose/against	79	308
男	Noun/adjective	Man	80	303
生而	Verb	Be born as	81	301
家	Noun	Home	82	300
身边	Preposition	At one's side	83	290
灵魂	Noun	Soul	84	283
换成	Verb	Change to	85	281
值得	Verb	Deserve	86	277

出柜	Verb	Come out of the closet	87	275
未来	Noun/adjective	Future	88	270
骄傲	Noun/adjective	Pride	89	266
LGBT	Noun		90	260
发现	Verb	Find	91	256
人生	Noun	Life	92	253
心	Noun	Heart	93	253
包容	Noun/verb/ adjective	Tolerance/ tolerate/tolerant	94	251
抱	Verb	Hug	95	241
说话	Verb	Speak	96	236
开心	Noun/adjective	Happiness/happy	97	236
异性	Noun/adjective	Opposite sex/opposite-sex	98	233
拍	Verb	Take a photo of	99	232
美好	Noun/adjective	Happiness/happy	100	231

Table 5.2 Keywords used most frequently during the #IAmGay# protest

Grammatical relation	Collocate	English translation	Frequency
Subject	##		269
	同性戀	Homosexual	32
	同性恋	Homosexual	5
	管理员	Administrator	4
	问题	Problem	3
Object of	看看	See	20
	道歉	Apologise	6
	封	Ban	6
	歧视	Discriminate	6
	抵制	Boycott	4
	要求	Require	4
	想	Think	4
	送给	Give	3
	感谢	Thank	3
	停止	Stop	3
	知道	Know	3
	觉得	Think	3
	希望	Hope	3
	删	Delete	3

	继续	Continue	3
	做	Do	3
	给	Give	3
	轮到	One's turn to	2
	欢迎	Welcome	2
	合法化	Legalise	2
	反	Oppose	2
	反对	Oppose	2
	感觉	Feel	2
	说	Say	2
	请	Please	2
	提供	Provide	2
	过分	Be out of the line	2
	可能	Can	2
	恶心	Disgust	2
	敢	Dare	2
	禁	Ban	2
	死	Die	2
	去	Go	2
Object			
	CEO	CEO	19
	关系	Relationship	19
	跪舔	Worship	3
	乌龙	Own goal	2
	屁事	Shitty thing	2
	页面	Page	2
	内部	Inside	2
	爸爸	Father	2
	狗	Dog	2
	行为	Behaviour	2
	事情	Thing	2
	群体	Group	2
	时候	Time	2
	人	People	2
Modifies			
	问题	Problem	5
	封禁	Ban	2
	声明	Announcement	2
	行为	Behaviour	2
Direct object of			
	提供	Provide	2

	道歉	Apologise	2
	想	Think	2
	有	Have	2
Indirect object			
	内部	Inside	2
	狗	Dog	2
	时候	Time	2
	你	You	2
Modifier			
	结果	Consequence	2
	一下	One time	2

Table 5.3 Collocation test results for ‘crappy Sina’ (‘渣浪’)

Grammatical relation	Collocate	English translation	Frequency
Object of			
	转发	Repost	175
	刷爆	Flood	117
	发	Post	41
	刷	Browse	19
	看	Look at	19
	玩	Play	13
	开	Open	9
	上	Login	8
	用	Use	8
	发布	Publish	5
	删	Delete	5
	害怕	Scare	5
	封	Ban	5
	看到	Saw	5
	到	Come to	5
	下载	Download	4
	卸载	Uninstall	4
	敢	Dare	4
	发出	Posted	4
	觉得	Think	4
	希望	Hope	4
	请	Please	4
	打开	Open	3
Modifies			
	管理员	Administrator	261

	视频	Video	9
	社区	Community	7
	话题	Hashtag topic	5
	下面	Underneath	4
	账号	Account	4
	故事	Story	4
	管理	Management	3
	会员	Membership	3
	现在	Now	3
Subject of			
	要	Want	9
	宣布	Announce	6
	经历	Experience	6
	发布	Publish	6
	封杀	Ban	6
	出柜	Come out of closet	5
	可以	Can	5
	说	Say	5
	清理	Clean up	4
	敢	Dare	4
	支持	Support	4
	想	Think	4
	看	Look at	4
	卸载	Uninstall	3
	行使	Exercise	3
	炸	Explode	3
	道歉	Apologise	3
	回来	Come back	3
	哭	Cry	3
	发生	Happen	3
	加油	Go for it	3
	看到	Saw	3
	让	Let	3
Modifier			
	新浪	Sina	48
	腾讯	Tencent	5
	今天	Today	4
Indirect object of			
	转发	Repost	15
	发	Post	7
	可以	Can	4

	刷	Browse	3
	敢	Dare	3
Direct object of	封	Ban	3

Table 5.4 Collocation test results for ‘Weibo’ (‘微博’)

Grammatical relation	Collocate	English translation	Frequency
Modifies			
	微博	Weibo	48
	管理员	Administrator	4
	幕后	Backstage	2
	官微	Official Weibo account	2
	决策者	Decision maker	1
	众人	The crowd	1
	毛事	Annoying thing	1
	Nmsl (你妈死了)	Your mother died	1
	甘霖凉	Fuck your mother	1
	理解	Understanding	1
	道歉	Apology	1
	屁事	Shitty thing	1
	脑子	Brain	1
	妈	Mother	1
	解禁	Lifting the ban	1
	官方	The official	1
	新闻	News	1
	平台	Platform	1
Object of			
	请	Please	9
	希望	Hope	3
	送给	Give	2
	看看	See	2
	感谢	Thank	2
	用	Use	2
	看到	Saw	2
	挑衅	Provoke	1
	辱骂	Curse	1
	直言	Speak honestly	1
	心酸	Upset	1
	建议	Suggest	1

	翻看	Look through	1
	整顿	Rectify	1
	谴责	Condemn	1
	再见	Bye	1
	宣传	Advertise	1
	消失	Disappear	1
	卸载	Uninstall	1
	失望	Disappoint	1
	怪	Blame	1
	逼	Push	1
	对不起	Sorry	1
	表示	Show	1
	算是	Count as	1
	拒绝	Reject	1
	关	Close	1
	感觉	Feel	1
	见	See	1
	删	Delete	1
	想到	Think	1
	需要	Need	1
	值得	Deserve	1
	觉得	Think	1
	成为	Become as	1
	知道	Know	1
	说	Say	1
	支持	Support	1
	看	Look at	1
Modifier			
	解禁	Lifting the ban	27
	垃圾	Crappy	5
	现在	Now	3
	Ballball (求求)	Begging	1
	沙雕	Idiotic	1
	孤儿	Orphan	1
	Cnm (操你妈)	Fuck your mother	1
	男朋友	Boyfriend	1
	希望	Hope	1
	时候	Time	1
	今天	Today	1
	同性恋	Homosexual	1
Subject of			

	敢	Dare	2
	封	Ban	2
	请	Please	2
	无法无天	Be out of control	1
	激怒	Infuriate	1
	自觉	Be aware of	1
	好自为之	Look out for oneself	1
	查杀	Search and kill	1
	卧槽	Fuck	1
	服	Be convinced	1
	清查	Check	1
	厉害	Be severe	1
	再见	Bye	1
	差	Lack	1
	道歉	Apologise	1
	必须	Must	1
	封杀	Ban	1
	搞	Make	1
	死	Die	1
	管	Care	1
	决定	Decide	1
	可能	Can	1
	需要	Require	1
Indirect subject of			
	请	Please	3
	感谢	Thank	2
	要	Want	2
	翻看	Look through	1
	辱骂	Curse	1
	心酸	Upset	1
	卸载	Uninstall	1
	算是	Count as	1
	看看	See	1
	想到	Think	1
	感觉	Feel	1
	需要	Require	1
	支持	Support	1
	说	Say	1
	看	Look at	1

Modifier	希望	Hope	1
	恶心	Disgusting	1
	尊重	Respectful	1

Table 5.5 Collocation test results for ‘Sina’ (‘新浪’)

Grammatical relation	Collocate	English translation	Frequency
Modifier			
	共产主义	Communist	351
	中国	Chinese	7
	危害	Harmful	5
	人类	Human	4
	包容	Tolerant	4
Subject of			
	接受	Accept	62
	能	Can	16
	会	Will	14
	包容	Tolerate	9
	进步	Advance	7
	倒退	Regress	7
	需要	Need	7
	应该	Should	7
	要	Want	7
	对待	Treat	6
	做	Do	6
	尽	Try the best	5
	接纳	Accept	5
	发展	Develop	4
	开始	Start	4
	退步	Regress	3
	多元化	Diversify	3
	认可	Recognise	3
	变得	Become	3
	容	Tolerate	3
	尊重	Respect	3
	能够	Can	3
	存在	Exist	3
	给	Give	3
	到	Come to	3

	让	Let	3
	可以	Can	3
Object of			
	希望	Hope	25
	让	Let	11
	危害	Harm	10
	反	Oppose	5
	体现	Show	4
	以为	Thought	4
	改变	Change	4
	想	Think	4
	看到	Saw	4
	能	Can	4
	得到	Receive	3
	接受	Accept	3
	觉得	Think	3
	到	Come to	3
	知道	Know	3
	做	Do	3
	会	Will	3
	看	Look at	3
Modifies			
	舆论	Public opinion	5
	进步	Advance	5
	发展	Development	5
	压力	Pressure	5
	环境	Environment	5
	主流	Mainstream	4
	稳定	Stability	3
	地位	Position	3
	大众	The public	3
	制度	Regulation	3
	文明	Civilisation	3
Indirect object of			
	希望	Hope	16
	让	Let	4
	以为	Thought	3

Table 5.6 Collocation test results for 'society' ('社会')

Grammatical relation	Collocate	English translation	Frequency
Object of			
	喜欢	Like	44
	希望	Hope	33
	让	Let	20
	愿	Wish	15
	爱	Love	13
	改变	Change	9
	觉得	Think	9
	看到	Saw	8
	支持	Support	8
	得到	Receive	7
	以为	Thought	6
	告诉	Tell	5
	对抗	Confront	4
	面对	Face	4
	照亮	Light up	3
	来到	Come to	3
	存在	Exist	3
	热爱	Passionately love	3
	反对	Oppose	3
	成为	Become	3
	知道	Know	3
	看	Look at	3
Subject of			
	应该	Should	15
	充满	Be filled with	9
	以待	Wait for	8
	变得	Become	8
	改变	Change	7
	包容	Tolerate	6
	需要	Need	5
	该	Should	5
	变好	Become better	3
	善待	Treat well	3
	进步	Advance	3
	变成	Become	3
	对待	Treat	3
	接受	Accept	3
	爱	Love	3

Modifies			
	人权	Human rights	55
	卫生	Health	7
	和平	Peace	5
	人	People	3
Indirect object of			
	希望	Hope	18
	愿	Wish	8
	觉得	Think	5
	告诉	Tell	4
	以为	Thought	4
	爱	Love	4
	网络	Network	4
Modifier			
	平等	Equality	3
	一样	Same	3

Table 5.7 Collocation test results for 'world' ('世界')

Grammatical relation	Collocate	English translation	Frequency
Object of			
	爱	Love	97
	得了	Received	31
	希望	Hope	22
	热爱	Passionately love	15
	说	Say	10
	要	Want	9
	知道	Know	7
	对不起	Sorry	6
	包容	Tolerate	4
	想	Think	4
	看到	Saw	4
	容纳	Tolerate	3
	理解	Understand	3
	需要	Need	3
	可以	Can	3
	觉得	Think	3
Subject of			
	会	Will	19
	能	Can	18
	爱	Love	16

	要	Want	13
	可以	Can	12
	接受	Accept	11
	让	Let	11
	容纳	Tolerate	9
	应该	Should	9
	允许	Allow	8
	做	Do	8
	容	Tolerate	7
	抛弃	Abandon	4
	倒退	Regress	4
	能够	Can	4
	合法化	Legalise	4
	给	Give	4
	支持	Support	4
	善待	Treat well	3
	给予	Give	3
	接纳	Accept	3
	失望	Disappoint	3
	规定	Regulate	3
	充满	Be filled up with	3
	变得	Become	3
	希望	Hope	3
	觉得	Think	3
	开始	Start	3
	说	Say	3
Indirect object of			
	得了	Received	29
	爱	Love	11
	希望	Hope	11
	说	Say	5
	可以	Can	3
	知道	Know	3
Modifies			
	法律	Law	7
	同性恋	Homosexual	7
	生活	Life	4
	机器	Machine	3
	政策	Policy	3
	发展	Development	3
	现在	Now	3

Modifier			
	爱	Love	6
	社会主义	Communism	4
	同性恋	Homosexual	3
	开放	Openness	3

Table 5.8 Collocation test results for 'state' ('国家')

Grammatical relation	Collocate	English translation	Frequency
Object of			
	多元化	Diversify	38
	希望	Hope	12
	爱	Love	6
	觉得	Think	6
	看到	Saw	5
	合法化	Legalise	4
	相信	Believe	4
	说	Say	3
	设立	Set up	2
	发展	Develop	2
	发生	Happen	2
	懂	Understand	2
	以为	Thought	2
	认为	Think	2
	知道	Know	2
Modifies			
	同性恋	Homosexual	16
	社会	Society	7
	特色	Special	6
	青年	Youngster	6
	公民	Citizen	6
	大陆	Mainland	4
	人口	Population	4
	法律	Law	4
	同志	Comrade	4
	精神	Spirit	3
	政府	Government	3
	人民	People	3
	卫生部	The Ministry of Health	2
	互联网	The Internet	2

	社交	Sociality	2
	LGBT	LGBT	2
	历史	History	2
	思想	Thoughts	2
	文化	Culture	2
	现在	Now	2
Indirect object of			
	希望	Hope	6
	设立	Set up	2
	懂	Understand	2
Modifier			
	国家	State	3
	周年	Anniversary	2
	2004 年	Year 2004	2
	2018 年	Year 2018	2
	现在	Now	2
	彩虹	Rainbow	2
Subject of			
	容纳	Tolerate	4
	可以	Can	2
	能	Can	2

Table 5.9 Collocation test results for 'China' ('中国')

Grammatical relation	Collocate	English translation	Frequency
Modifier			
	听话	Obedient	352
	良心	Conscientious	3
	作恶	Evil	1
	垃圾	Crappy	1
	管理员	Administrator	1
Object of			
	撑	Support	3
	支持	Support	3
	开发	Develop	1
	进行	Proceed	1
	感谢	Thank	1
Subject of			
	注意	Be careful with	1
	开始	Start	1
	应该	Should	1

Modifies			
	官微	Official weibo account	1
	微博	Weibo	1

Table 5.10 Collocation test results for ‘corporation’ (‘企业’)

Keyword	Part of speech	English translation	Frequency rank	Frequency
同性恋	Noun/adjective	Homosexual	1	49320
gay	Noun/adjective		2	15948
爱	Noun/verb	Love	3	1513
朋友	Noun	Friend	4	1512
做	Verb	Do	5	1289
男	Adjective	Man	6	1181
喜欢	Verb	Like	7	1081
发现	Noun/verb	Discovery/ discover	8	1077
les	Noun/adjective		9	1043
找	Verb	Look for	10	924
直	Adjective	Straight	11	861
男人	Noun	Man	12	852
对象	Noun	Partner	13	834
约	Verb	Make an appointment (to hook up)	14	710
心	Noun	Heart	15	676
好看	Adjective	Good-looking	16	673
走	Verb	Go	17	655
同志	Noun	Comrade	18	607
家人们	Noun	Families	19	592
淘宝	Noun	Taobao	20	578
弯	Adjective	Bent	21	534
超话	Noun	Super topic	22	504
微博	Noun	Weibo	23	501
帅	Adjective	Handsome	24	491
gay 们	Noun	Gays	25	488
群体	Noun	Group	26	487
社会	Noun	Society	27	428
彩虹	Noun	Rainbow	28	419
交友	Verb	Make friends	29	407
情感	Noun	Affection	30	400

分手	Noun/verb	Break-up/break up	31	389
明天	Noun	Tomorrow	32	387
分享	Verb	Share	33	384
封	Noun/verb	Ban	34	369
开	Verb/adjective	Open	35	365
男生	Noun	Boy	36	359
哥哥	Noun	Elder brother	37	354
脸	Noun	Face	38	352
同性	Noun/adjective	Same sex/same-sex	39	354
玩	Verb	Play	40	339
异性恋	Noun/adjective	Heterosexual	41	336
告诉	Verb	Tell	42	335
照片	Noun	Photo	43	332
搞	Verb	Make	44	329
受	Noun	Bottom	45	319
女	Adjective	Woman	46	317
换	Verb	Change	47	317
LGBTQ	Noun		48	316
岁	Noun	Year(s) old	49	307
生活	Noun/verb	Life/live	50	302
感受	Noun/verb	Feeling/feel	51	301
情侣	Noun	Lovers	52	300
时间	Noun	Time	53	300
男朋友	Noun	Boyfriend	54	299
恐	Noun/verb/ adjective	Phobia/fear/ phobic	55	299
搜索	Verb	Search	56	299
努力	Noun/verb	Effort/make an effort	57	298
希望	Noun/verb	Hope	58	296
咨询	Noun/verb	Consultation/ consult	59	295
Gay	Noun/adjective		60	292
攻	Noun	Top	61	290
年龄	Noun	Age	62	290
Les	Noun/adjective		63	288
拒绝	Noun/verb	Refusal/refuse	64	288
利益	Noun	Benefit	65	284
思绪	Noun	Thoughts	66	282
想法	Noun	Thought	67	280

ta	Noun	He or she/him or her/they/them	68	277
放水	Verb	Try to lose	69	276
姐	Noun	Elder sister	70	275
纪念	Noun/verb	Memorial/ memorise	71	275
寂寞	Adjective	Lonely	72	274
国际	Adjective	International	73	274
渣	Adjective	Crappy	74	269
拍照	Verb	Take a photo	75	264
讲	Verb	Speak	76	263
女性	Noun/adjective	Woman	77	263
man	Noun/adjective		78	263
面对	Verb	Face	79	262
人渣	Noun	Crum	80	256
舆论	Noun	Public opinion	81	254
美	Adjective	Beautiful	82	251
拉拉们	Noun	Lalas	83	246
国家	Noun	State	84	246
骗婚	Noun/verb	Marriage fraud/ Deceive to get married	85	246
妹妹	Noun	Younger sister	86	245
反腐	Noun/verb	Anti-corruption/ fight against corruption	87	240
彩虹旗	Noun	Rainbow flag	88	234
请	Verb	Please	89	232
媒体	Noun	Media	90	229
森林	Noun	Forest	91	224
双	Noun/adjective	Bisexual	92	223
画册	Noun	Pic	93	210
评论	Noun/verb	Comment	94	208
愿	Verb	Wish	95	205
视频	Noun	Video	96	200
歧视	Noun/verb	Discrimination/ discriminate	97	195
发	Verb	Post	98	195
地方	Noun	Place	99	194
结婚	Verb	Get married	100	185

Table 7.2 Keywords used most frequently during the post-protest period of #IAmGay#

2. Semi-structured interview questions

1. What are your gender and sexual self-identification?
2. When and how did you use #IAmGay# on Weibo?
3. Had you participated in any LGBTQ+ activity before using #IAmGay#, especially online?
4. What do you think about #IAmGay#?
5. Has using #IAmGay# influenced you in any way? If so, how has it influenced you?
6. Have you participated in any other LGBTQ+ activity since your use of #IAmGay#? If so, did your experience of #IAmGay# influence your later participation?
7. What do you think about the status quo of the Chinese LGBTQ+ community and activism?

3. Coding sheets

Type	Sub-type 1	Sub-type 2	Sub-type 3	
Protest	We	Solidarity between social groups on Weibo	Homosexuals	
			Heterosexuals	
	Others	Solidarity between social groups offline	Audience	Other groups of gender and sexual identities
				Antagonists
		Audience	The state	
			The society	
Post-protest	Influence of participation			
	Subsequent uses of the hashtag	Everyday activism		
		Subsequent collective action		
	Subsequent action taken for relevant issues	Online action		
		Offline action		

Coding sheet: interview

Type	Sub-type 1	Sub-type 2	Sub-type 3	
We	Social groups	Gay men		
		Lesbians		
		Bisexuals and other sexual minorities		
		Transgenders and other gender nonconforming groups		
		Heterosexuals		
	Framing strategies	Inclusive discourse	Personal narratives	Directly calling for intergroup solidarity
				Emphasising similarities
		Personal narratives	Coming out stories	
			Love stories	

		Audio-visual approach	
Others	Antagonists	Weibo	Weibo censorship
		The state	Media censorship
			Law and regulation
		The society	Homophobia
			Sexual oppression
			Binary system
		Goals and strategies	Apology
			Lifting censorship
			Legal protection
			Gender and sexual equality in the society
	Audience		

Coding sheet: observation of the #IAMGay# protest

Type	Sub-type 1	Sub-type 2
Everyday activism	Virtual community building	Romantic partner seeking
		Information sharing
		Help seeking
	Personal stories and expressions	
	Discussion of rights and equality	
Collective action	Cooperating with offline action	
	Online action	

Coding sheet: observation of the post-protest period of #IAMGay#

4. Participant information sheet

研究参与者信息表



研究课题

线上活动主义、懒人行动主义与集体身份——LGBTQ 运动在中国，以#我是同性恋#为例（临时题目）

研究机构

英国东安格利亚大学，政治哲学语言与传播研究学院

研究目的

该博士研究课题主要致力于探讨以下三个范畴：1. 线上活动主义、懒人行动主义与集体身份三者的理论关系；2. 在中国的社交媒体上线上活动主义是如何开展的；3. 中国 LGBTQ 性少数群体在当下网络时代的生活现状。为完成研究需求，该课题将采访自 2018 年 4 月起，曾参与过新浪微博#我是同性恋#话题讨论的网友。

研究相关人员

黄兴, MA	博士研究生/主要研究人	Xing.Huang@uea.ac.uk
Benjamin Little, PhD	研究第一导师	B.Little@uea.ac.uk
Marina Prentoulis, PhD	研究第二导师	M.Prentoulis@uea.ac.uk
Eitan Tzelgov, PhD	研究方法导师	E.Tzelgov@uea.ac.uk

研究参与形式

自愿参与该研究课题者将接受 10-15 分钟的电话采访。采访问题将主要围绕受访者在新浪微博参与#我是同性恋#话题讨论的个人经验与观点。

数据收集

采访过程将在受访者同意的情况下进行录音，但受访者有权在采访任何阶段要求中止采访。

采访结束后，采访录音将被转换成文本形式，加密并妥善保存以供数据分析。

采访内容将以完全匿名的形式在研究报告、演讲、发表物以及博士论文中呈现，仅供学术目的。同时，在以上学术写作中，必须直接引用的受访者原话将被翻译成英文并冠以假名。

采访文本将严格仅限于该研究相关人员查看与使用，但受访者有权要求查看研究分析结果和报告。

该研究一旦结束，所有采访录音及文本将会被永久删除。

潜在风险

采访问题有可能会涉及受访者对相关社会、政治或性别话题的个人经验、看法或倾向，但受访者有权选择拒绝回答。

撤回权

受访者有权在采访结束后，该研究课题结束前，要求撤回自己的数据。撤回后未被使用的数据将不会被继续使用。

其他问题

如还有其他问题，请联系主要研究人黄兴，邮箱 Xing.Huang@uea.ac.uk

Participant Information Sheet

Title of project

Exploring the link between digital activism, slacktivism and collective identity: China's LGBTQ activism and #IAmGay# on Weibo (probationary title)

Institution

School of Politics, Philosophy, Language and Communication Studies, University of East Anglia

The purpose of the research

This research is designed for a PhD project that seeks for: 1) a systematic relationship between digital activism, slacktivism and collective identity in theory, 2) how digital activism is carried out on Chinese social media and 3) Chinese LGBTQ people's living situation in a digital era. In order to fulfil the needs, this research will interview people who have participated in the online hashtag movement #IAmGay# on Sina Weibo since April 2018.

People associated with the research

Xing Huang, MA	PhD candidate/researcher	Xing.Huang@uea.ac.uk
Benjamin Little, PhD	Primary supervisor	B.Little@uea.ac.uk
Marina Prentoulis, PhD	Secondary supervisor	M.Prentoulis@uea.ac.uk
Eitan Tzelgov, PhD	Research method supervisor	E.Tzelgov@uea.ac.uk

Participant involvement

Participating in this research will include a voluntary interview through phone calls. Questions will be semi-structured and based on your experience of being part of the online movement #IAmGay#.

Collected material

Once interviews have been completed, they will be transcribed and securely preserved for analysis.

Interviews will be anonymously represented in research reports, presentations, publications and theses for only academic uses. No legal name will be used. If interviewees make a statement that is directly quoted in any research report, presentation, publication and thesis, pseudo names will be used.

The interview transcripts will be seen by only the researcher and the research supervisors. The full reports and any subsequent research analysis and result will be accessible by request.

All the transcripts will be completely erased once the process of the research is finished.

Potential risk

Sensitive questions related to political experience/participation/opinion/tendency and sexuality may be involved in the interviews.

Right to withdraw

As a participant, you have the right to withdraw at any time before the process of the research is finished.

For more information

Please contact the researcher Xing Huang at Xing.Huang@uea.ac.uk

5. Consent form



研究同意书

研究课题：线上活动主义、懒人行动主义与集体身份——中国的 LGBTQ 运动，以#我是同性恋#为例（临时题目）

研究者姓名：黄兴

请在阅读并同意后在方框内打勾

1. 我确认已阅读并理解为上述研究课题所提供的研究参与者信息表，并有机会提出疑问。
2. 我理解我的参与是自愿的，我可以在任何时候自由退出上述研究，并且不用给出理由。
3. 我理解当我确定要退出上述研究时，已被使用的关于我的任何数据将继续被用于该研究。
4. 我理解上述研究数据，将被在英国东安格利亚大学，政治哲学语言与传播研究学院的科研工作者或与其合作的科研工作者查看并使用，并有可能被用于与上述研究相关的其他已通过伦理审查的研究。但研究者将严格遵守数据保护条例，将我的个人数据作为机密文件保护。
5. 我同意参与上述研究。

研究参与人姓名

日期

签名

研究者姓名

日期

签名



Participant anonymised initials:

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: *Exploring the link between digital activism, slacktivism and collective identity: China's LGBTQ activism and #IAmGay# on Weibo (probationary title)*

Name of Researcher: Xing Huang

Please initial box

6. I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet provided to me for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
7. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.
8. I understand that if I do withdraw any data already collected about me will continue to be used in the study.
9. I understand that the research data may be accessed by researchers working at or in collaboration with the School of Politics, Philosophy, Language and Communication Studies at UEA in related ethically approved studies but that at all times my personal data will be kept confidential in accordance with data protection guidelines.
10. I agree to take part in this study.

Name of Participant Date Signature

Name of Researcher Date Signature

Bibliography

- Ackland, R., & O'Neil, M. (2011). Online collective identity: The case of the environmental movement. *Social Networks*, 33(3), 177-190.
- Adesina, P. (2019). *Weibo is removing content with the #les hashtag*. <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2019/04/15/weibo-bans-lesbian-hashtag/>
- Adler, S., & Brenner, J. (1992). Gender and space: lesbians and gay men in the city. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 16(1), 24-34.
- Agger, B. (1991). Critical theory, poststructuralism, postmodernism: Their sociological relevance. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 17(1), 105-131.
- Ahern, S., Eckles, D., Good, N. S., King, S., Naaman, M., & Nair, R. (2007). Over-exposed? Privacy patterns and considerations in online and mobile photo sharing. In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI conference on human factors in computing systems* (pp. 357-366).
- Ahrens, K., & Jiang, M. (2020). Source domain verification using corpus-based tools. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 35(1), 43-55.
- Anduiza, E., Cristancho, C., & Sabucedo, J. M. (2014). Mobilization through online social networks: the political protest of the indignados in Spain. *Information, Communication & Society*, 17(6), 750-764.
- Aviles, G. (2020). *Celebrities warn that using #BLM with Blackout Tuesday posts could hide important information*. <https://www.nbcnews.com/pop-culture/pop-culture-news/celebrities-warn-using-blm-blackout-tuesday-posts-could-hide-important-n1222106>
- Baer, H. (2016). Redoing feminism: Digital activism, body politics, and neoliberalism. *Feminist Media Studies*, 16(1), 17-34.
- Bail, C. A., Argyle, L. P., Brown, T. W., Bumpus, J. P., Chen, H., Hunzaker, M. F., Lee, J., Mann, M., Merhout, F., & Volfovsky, A. (2018). Exposure to opposing views on social media can increase political polarization. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 115(37), 9216-9221.

- Bailey, J. M., Kim, P. Y., Hills, A., & Linsenmeier, J. A. (1997). Butch, femme, or straight acting? Partner preferences of gay men and lesbians. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73(5), 960-973.
- Bamman, D., O'Connor, B., & Smith, N. (2012). Censorship and deletion practices in Chinese social media. *First Monday*, 17(3).
- Bao, H. (2013). A queer 'comrade' in Sydney: Chineseness, queer desire and homonationalism. *Interventions*, 15(1), 127-140.
- Bao, H. (2018a). From "Celluloid Comrades" to "Digital Video Activism": Queer Filmmaking in Postsocialist China. *JOMEC Journal*, 12, 82-100.
- Bao, H. (2018b). *Queer comrades: Gay identity and Tongzhi activism in postsocialist China*. NIAS Press.
- Bao, H. (2019a). Queer comrades: towards a postsocialist queer politics. *Soundings*, (73), 24-37.
- Bao, H. (2019b). Queer history, culture, and activism in China: A conversation with He Xiaopei. *Made in China journal*, 4(1), 97-105.
- Bao, H. (2020). *Queer China: Lesbian and gay literature and visual culture under postsocialism*. Routledge.
- Bao, H. (2021a). "A cool kid": Queer theory travels to China. *Translation and Interpreting Studies*, 16(2), 219-239.
- Bao, H. (2021b). "Change the World Gently with Singing": Queer Audibility and Soft Activism in China. In L. Ó. Briain & M. Y. Ong (Eds.), *Sound communities in the Asia Pacific: Music, media, and technology* (pp. 193-210). Bloomsbury.
- Bao, H. (2021c). *Queer media in China*. Routledge.
- Barber, H. (2020). *Covid-19 has ushered in a new era of digital activism – and global leaders are listening*. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/climate-and-people/covid-19-has-ushered-new-era-digital-activism-global-leaders/>
- Bayer, R. (1987). *Homosexuality and American psychiatry: The politics of diagnosis*. Princeton University Press.
- Baynes, C. (2018). *Security guards attack Chinese women for 'wearing rainbow badges' at LGBT event in Beijing*. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/china-security-guards-attack-gay-women-lgbt-event-beijing-video-a8352766.html>

- BBC. (2018). *China's Sina Weibo backtracks from gay content ban after outrage*.
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-43779650>
- Bell, C., & Allen, K. (2019). *Bohemian Rhapsody opens in China, minus all the gay bits*. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-trending-47693115>
- Benford, R. D., & Snow, D. A. (2000). Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26(1), 611-639.
- Bennett, W. L. (2003a). Communicating Global Activism. *Information, Communication & Society*, 6(2), 143-168.
- Bennett, W. L. (2003b). New media power: The Internet and global activism. In N. Couldry & J. Curran (Eds.), *Contesting media power: Alternative media in a networked world* (pp. 17-38). Rowman and Littlefield.
- Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2012). The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics. *Information, Communication & Society*, 15(5), 739-768.
- Bennett, W. L., Segerberg, A., & Walker, S. (2014). Organization in the crowd: peer production in large-scale networked protests. *Information, Communication & Society*, 17(2), 232-260.
- Berlant, L., & Warner, M. (1995). What Does Queer Theory Teach Us About X? *PMLA*, 110(3), 343-349.
- Bernstein, M. (1997). Celebration and suppression: The strategic uses of identity by the lesbian and gay movement. *American Journal of Sociology*, 103(3), 531-565.
- Berridge, V. (1996). *AIDS in the UK: The making of a policy, 1981-1994*. Oxford University Press.
- Bie, B., & Tang, L. (2016). Chinese gay men's coming out narratives: Connecting social relationship to co-cultural theory. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 9(4), 351-367.
- Birbili, M. (2000). Translating from one language to another. *Social Research Update*, 31(1), 1-7.
- Blee, K. M., & Taylor, V. (2002). Semi-structured interviewing in social movement research. In B. Klandermans & S. Staggenborg (Eds.), *Methods of social movement research* (pp. 92-117). University of Minnesota Press.

- boyd, d. (2008). Why youth (heart) social network sites: The role of networked publics in teenage social life. In D. Buckingham (Ed.), *Youth, identity, and digital media* (pp. 119-142). The MIT Press.
- boyd, d. (2010). Social network sites as networked publics: Affordances, dynamics, and implications. In Z. Papacharissi (Ed.), *A networked self* (pp. 39-58). Routledge.
- boyd, d., & Crawford, K. (2012). Critical questions for big data: Provocations for a cultural, technological, and scholarly phenomenon. *Information, Communication & Society*, 15(5), 662-679.
- Breindl, Y. (2010). Internet-based protest in European policymaking: The case of digital activism. *International Journal of E-Politics (IJEP)*, 1(1), 57-72.
- Breuer, A., & Farooq, B. (2012). Online political participation: Slacktivism or efficiency increased activism? Evidence from the Brazilian Ficha Limpa campaign. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2179035> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2179035>
- Breuer, A., Landman, T., & Farquhar, D. (2015). Social media and protest mobilization: Evidence from the Tunisian revolution. *Democratization*, 22(4), 764-792.
- Brimacombe, T., Kant, R., Finau, G., Tarai, J., & Titifanue, J. (2018). A new frontier in digital activism: An exploration of digital feminism in Fiji. *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies*, 5(3), 508-521.
- Brinkmann, S. (2013). *Qualitative interviewing*. Oxford University Press.
- Browne, K. (2007). A party with politics? (Re)making LGBTQ Pride spaces in Dublin and Brighton. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 8(1), 63-87.
- Bruce, K. M. (2013). LGBT pride as a cultural protest tactic in a southern city. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 42(5), 608-635.
- Brünker, F., Deitelhoff, F., & Mirbabaie, M. (2019). *Collective Identity Formation on Instagram--Investigating the Social Movement Fridays for Future* [conference paper]. Australasian Conference on Information Systems, Perth, Australia.
- Brunner, E. (2017). Wild public networks and affective movements in China: Environmental activism, social media, and protest in Maoming. *Journal of Communication*, 67(5), 665-677.

- Buechler, S. M. (1995). New social movement theories. *Sociological Quarterly*, 36(3), 441-464.
- Butler, J. (1988). Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory. *Theatre Journal*, 40(4), 519-531.
- Butler, J. (2011). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- Calhoun, C. (1993). "New social movements" of the early nineteenth century. *Social Science History*, 17(3), 385-427.
- Cambridge University Press. (n.d.). Activism. In *Cambridge Dictionary*. Retrieved February 10, 2022, from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/activism>
- Cammaerts, B. (2015). Social Media and Activism. In R. Mansell & P. H. Ang (Eds.), *The international encyclopedia of digital communication and society* (pp. 1-8). John Wiley & Sons.
- Camus, C. (2019). Dissecting the #MeToo Movement: A Powerful Call to Action or a Futile Fuss? *Women Leading Change: Case Studies on Women, Gender, and Feminism*, 4(1), 93-107.
- Cao, J., & Cao, M. (2009). Case study of lesbian's health hotline in peripheral Chinese city. *Observatorio (OBS*)*, 3(3), 273-287.
- Cao, J., & Guo, L. (2016). Chinese "Tongzhi" community, civil society, and online activism. *Communication and the Public*, 1(4), 504-508.
- Cao, J., & Lu, X. (2014). A preliminary exploration of the gay movement in mainland China: Legacy, transition, opportunity, and the new media. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 39(4), 840-848.
- Cao, X., Zeng, R., & Evans, R. (2021). Digital activism and collective mourning by Chinese netizens during COVID-19. *China Information*, 1-12.
- Capozzola, C. (2002). A very American epidemic: memory politics and identity politics in the AIDS Memorial Quilt, 1985-1993. *Radical History Review*, 82(1), 91-109.
- Carter, D. (2004). *Stonewall: The riots that sparked the gay revolution*. Macmillan.
- Castells, M. (1983). *The city and the grassroots: A cross-cultural theory of urban social movements*. University of California Press.
- Castells, M. (2011). *The rise of the network society*. John Wiley & Sons.

- Cauterucci, C. (2016). *The Lessons of Kony 2012*. <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2016/09/kony-2012-quickly-became-a-punch-line-but-what-if-it-did-more-good-than-harm.html>
- Chai, J. (2013). *看见 [Kanjian]*. Guangxi Normal University Press.
- Chan, C. K., & Ngai, P. (2009). The making of a new working class? A study of collective actions of migrant workers in South China. *The China Quarterly*, 198, 287-303.
- Chang, C., & Lin, T. (2020). Autocracy login: internet censorship and civil society in the digital age. *Democratization*, 27(5), 874-895.
- Chase, T. (2012). Problems of publicity: Online activism and discussion of same-sex sexuality in South Korea and China. *Asian Studies Review*, 36(2), 151-170.
- Chávez, K. R. (2011). Counter-public enclaves and understanding the function of rhetoric in social movement coalition-building. *Communication Quarterly*, 59(1), 1-18.
- Chen, F., & Xu, X. (2012). “Active judiciary”: Judicial dismantling of workers’ collective action in China. *The China Journal*, (67), 87-108.
- Chen, L. (2012). Reporting news in China: Evaluation as an indicator of change in the China Daily. *China Information*, 26(3), 303-329.
- Chen, S. (2017). Environmental disputes in China: A case study of media coverage of the 2012 Ningbo anti-PX protest. *Global Media and China*, 2(3-4), 303-316.
- Chen, S. X. (2020). Relational interaction and embodiment: Conceptualizing meanings of LGBTQ+ activism in digital China. *Communication and the Public*, 5(3-4), 134-148.
- Chen, W. (2014). Taking stock, moving forward: the Internet, social networks and civic engagement in Chinese societies. *Information, Communication & Society*, 17(1), 1-6.
- Chen, X. (2012). *Social protest and contentious authoritarianism in China*. Cambridge University Press.
- Chen, Y., & Cheung, A. S. (2017). The transparent self under big data profiling: privacy and Chinese legislation on the social credit system. *Journal of Comparative Law*, 12, 356-378.

- Chen, Y., Wang, K., Xu, W., & Huang, Y. (2021). Exploring commenting behavior in the COVID-19 super-topic on Weibo. In *Extended Abstracts of the 2021 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 1-7).
- Cheng, F. K. (2018). Dilemmas of Chinese lesbian youths in contemporary mainland China. *Sexuality & Culture*, 22(1), 190-208.
- Chia, J. L. (2019). LGBTQ rights in China: Movement-building in uncertain times. In S. Biddulph & J. Rosenzweig (Eds.), *Handbook on human rights in China* (pp. 657-680). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Chiang, H. (2019). Gay and lesbian communities in urban China. In R. Yep, J. Wang, & T. Johnson (Eds.), *Handbook on urban development in China* (pp. 187-201). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Choi, S. Y., & Luo, M. (2016). Performative family: Homosexuality, marriage and intergenerational dynamics in China. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 67(2), 260-280.
- Chou, W. (2000). *Tongzhi: Politics of same-sex eroticism in Chinese societies*. Routledge.
- Christensen, H. S. (2011). Political activities on the Internet: Slacktivism or political participation by other means? *First Monday*, 16(2).
- Christensen, H. S. (2012). Simply slacktivism? Internet participation in Finland. *JeDEM-eJournal of eDemocracy and Open Government*, 4(1), 1-23.
- Chua, L. J., & Hildebrandt, T. (2014). From health crisis to rights advocacy? HIV/AIDS and gay activism in China and Singapore. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 25(6), 1583-1605.
- Ciszek, E. (2018). Constructive advocacy: Positivity and solutions-based information in activist communication. *The Journal of Public Interest Communications*, 2(2), 202-202.
- Ciszek, E. L. (2017). Activist strategic communication for social change: A transnational case study of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender activism. *Journal of Communication*, 67(5), 702-718.
- CNSA. (2017). 中国网络视听节目服务协会发布 《网络视听节目内容审核通则》 [Chinese Netcasting Services Association publishes the General Rules for

<http://www.cnsa.cn/2017/06/30/ARTI0Qg4cp7jtd1Z5o0RnfzM170630.shtml>

CNSA. (n.d.). 协会介绍 [Association introduction].

<http://www.cnsa.cn/home/about/describe.html>

Cook, D. M., Waugh, B., Abdipanah, M., Hashemi, O., & Rahman, S. A. (2014). Twitter deception and influence: Issues of identity, slacktivism, and puppetry. *Journal of Information Warfare*, 13(1), 58-71.

Coretti, L., & Pica, D. (2015). The rise and fall of collective identity in networked movements: communication protocols, Facebook, and the anti-Berlusconi protest. *Information, Communication & Society*, 18(8), 951-967.

Corlett, S., & Mavin, S. (2018). Reflexivity and researcher positionality. In C. Cassell, A. L. Cunliffe, & G. Grandy (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative business and management research methods* (pp. 377-399). Sage.

Crane, G. T. (1994). Collective Identity, Symbolic Mobilization, and Student Protest in Nanjing, China, 1988-1989. *Comparative Politics*, 26(4), 395-413.

Creemers, R. (2018). China's Social Credit System: an evolving practice of control. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3175792> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3175792>

Creswell, J. W., Plano Clark, V. L., Gutmann, M. L., & Hanson, W. E. (2003). Advanced mixed methods research designs. In A. Tashakkori & C. Teddlie (Eds.), *Handbook of mixed methods in social & behavioral research* (pp. 209-240). Sage.

China Daily. (2009). *Pride of tolerance*. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2009-06/10/content_8266057.htm

Dalton, J. (2018). *Protests in China as social media site Weibo bans homosexual content*. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/weibo-gay-protests-china-homosexual-iamgay-hashtag-website-social-media-a8305596.html>

David, O., & Bar-Tal, D. (2009). A sociopsychological conception of collective identity: The case of national identity as an example. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 13(4), 354-379.

de Lauretis, T. (1991). Introduction: Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities. *Differences*, 3(2), iii-xviii.

- DeCook, J. R. (2018). Memes and symbolic violence: #proudboys and the use of memes for propaganda and the construction of collective identity. *Learning, Media and Technology, 43*(4), 485-504.
- Deklerck, S. (2017). Bolstering queer desires, reaching activist goals: Practicing queer activist documentary filmmaking in Mainland China. *Studies in Documentary Film, 11*(3), 232-247.
- Deklerck, S. (2019). Chinese LGBT+ activism—playing, organizing, and playful resistance. In V. Frangville & G. Gaffric (Eds.), *China's youth cultures and collective spaces* (pp. 150-169). Routledge.
- Deklerck, S., & Wei, X. (2015). Queer Online Media and the Building of China's LGBT Community. In E. L. Engebretsen, W. F. Schroeder, & H. Bao (Eds.), *Queer/Tongzhi China: New perspectives on research, activism and media cultures* (pp. 18–34). NIAS Press.
- Deleuze, G. (1992). Postscript on the Societies of Control. *October, 59*, 3-7.
- della Porta, D., & Kriesi, H. (1999). Social movements in a globalizing world: An introduction. In D. della Porta, H. Kriesi, & D. Rucht (Eds.), *Social movements in a globalizing world* (pp. 3-22). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dencik, L., & Cable, J. (2017). The advent of surveillance realism: Public opinion and activist responses to the Snowden leaks. *International Journal of Communication, 11*, 763-781.
- Dennis, J. (2019). *Beyond slacktivism: Political participation on social media*. Springer.
- Denzin, N. K. (2015). Triangulation. In G. Ritzer (Ed.), *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Diani, M. (1992). The concept of social movement. *The Sociological Review, 40*(1), 1-25.
- Dickel, S., & Schrape, J. (2017). The logic of digital utopianism. *NanoEthics, 11*(1), 47-58.
- Diglin, G. (2014). Living the Orwellian Nightmare: new media and digital dystopia. *E-Learning and Digital Media, 11*(6), 608-618.
- Drescher, J. (2015). Out of DSM: Depathologizing homosexuality. *Behavioral Sciences, 5*(4), 565-575.

- Duguay, S. (2016). Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer Visibility Through Selfies: Comparing Platform Mediators Across Ruby Rose's Instagram and Vine Presence. *Social Media + Society*, 2(2), 1-12.
- Duhigg, J. M., Rostosky, S. S., Gray, B. E., & Wimsatt, M. K. (2010). Development of heterosexuals into sexual-minority allies: A qualitative exploration. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 7(1), 2-14.
- Egner, J. E. (2019). Hegemonic or queer? A comparative analysis of five LGBTQIA/disability intersectional social movement organizations. *Humanity & Society*, 43(2), 140-178.
- Eisinger, P. K. (1973). The conditions of protest behavior in American cities. *American Political Science Review*, 67(1), 11-28.
- Ekman, J., & Amnå, E. (2012). Political participation and civic engagement: Towards a new typology. *Human Affairs*, 22(3), 283-300.
- Ellis, S. J., & Peel, E. (2011). Lesbian feminisms: Historical and present possibilities. *Feminism & Psychology*, 21(2), 198-204.
- Eltantawy, N., & Wiest, J. B. (2011). The Arab Spring| Social Media in the Egyptian Revolution: Reconsidering Resource Mobilization Theory. *International Journal of Communication*, 5, 1207-1224.
- Engelbrechtsen, E. L. (2009). Intimate practices, conjugal ideals: Affective ties and relationship strategies among lala (lesbian) women in contemporary Beijing. *Sexuality Research & Social Policy*, 6(3), 3-14.
- Enjolras, B., Steen-Johnsen, K., & Wollebaek, D. (2013). Social media and mobilization to offline demonstrations: Transcending participatory divides?. *New Media & Society*, 15(6), 890-908.
- Sketch Engine. (n.d.). *What is Sketch Engine?* <https://www.sketchengine.eu/>
- Ergas, C. (2010). A model of sustainable living: Collective identity in an urban ecovillage. *Organization & Environment*, 23(1), 32-54.
- Esarey, A., & Xiao, Q. (2011). Digital Communication and Political Change in China. *International Journal of Communication*, 5, 298-319.
- Essam, B. A., & Abdo, M. S. (2021). How do Arab tweeters perceive the COVID-19 pandemic? *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 50(3), 507-521.

- Fang, C., Yu, X., Zhang, X., Fang, J., & Liu, H. (2020). Big data analysis on the spatial networks of urban agglomeration. *Cities*, *102*, 102735.
- Fang, K., & Repnikova, M. (2018). Demystifying “Little Pink”: The creation and evolution of a gendered label for nationalistic activists in China. *New Media & Society*, *20*(6), 2162-2185.
- Faris, D. M., & Meier, P. (2012). Digital activism in authoritarian countries. In A. Delwiche & J. J. Henderson (Eds.), *The participatory cultures handbook* (pp. 215-223). Routledge.
- Farmer, L. B., & Byrd, R. (2015). Genderism in the LGBTQQIA community: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, *9*(4), 288-310.
- Feng, C. (2013). Preserving stability and rights protection: conflict or coherence? *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, *42*(2), 21-50.
- Feng, Y., Lou, C., Gao, E., Tu, X., Cheng, Y., Emerson, M. R., & Zabin, L. S. (2012). Adolescents’ and young adults’ perception of homosexuality and related factors in three Asian cities. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *50*(3), S52-S60.
- Finnegan, W. (2020). *Environmental activism goes digital in lockdown – but could it change the movement for good?* <https://theconversation.com/environmental-activism-goes-digital-in-lockdown-but-could-it-change-the-movement-for-good-137203>
- Fisher, D. R., & Wright, L. M. (2001). On Utopias and Dystopias: toward an Understanding of the Discourse Surrounding the Internet. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *6*(2), JCMC624.
- Flesher Fominaya, C. (2010a). Collective identity in social movements: Central concepts and debates. *Sociology Compass*, *4*(6), 393-404.
- Flesher Fominaya, C. (2010b). Creating cohesion from diversity: The challenge of collective identity formation in the global justice movement. *Sociological Inquiry*, *80*(3), 377-404.
- Flesher Fominaya, C. (2017). European anti-austerity and pro-democracy protests in the wake of the global financial crisis. *Social Movement Studies*, *16*(1), 1-20.

- Florio, K., Basile, V., Polignano, M., Basile, P., & Patti, V. (2020). Time of Your Hate: The Challenge of Time in Hate Speech Detection on Social Media. *Applied Sciences*, *10*(12), 4180.
- Foster, M. D., Hennessey, E., Blankenship, B. T., & Stewart, A. (2019). Can “slacktivism” work? Perceived power differences moderate the relationship between social media activism and collective action intentions through positive affect. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, *13*(4).
- Foucault, M. (2012). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Vintage.
- Fuchs, C. (2017). From digital positivism and administrative big data analytics towards critical digital and social media research!. *European Journal of Communication*, *32*(1), 37-49.
- Fuchs, C. (2018). ‘Dear Mr. Neo-Nazi, can you please give me your informed consent so that I can quote your fascist tweet?’: Questions of social media research ethics in online ideology critique. In G. Meikle (Ed.), *The Routledge companion to media and activism* (pp. 385-394). Routledge.
- Gal, N., Shifman, L., & Kampf, Z. (2016). “It gets better”: Internet memes and the construction of collective identity. *New Media & Society*, *18*(8), 1698-1714.
- Gamson, J. (1995). Must identity movements self-destruct? A queer dilemma. *Social Problems*, *42*(3), 390-407.
- Gamson, J. (1996). The organizational shaping of collective identity: The case of lesbian and gay film festivals in New York. *Sociological Forum*, *11*(2), 231-261.
- Gamson, J. (1997). Messages of exclusion: Gender, movements, and symbolic boundaries. *Gender & Society*, *11*(2), 178-199.
- Gamson, J. (2000). Sexualities, queer theory, and qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (Vol. 2, pp. 347-365). Sage.
- Garrett, K. R. (2006). Protest in an information society: A review of literature on social movements and new ICTs. *Information, Communication & Society*, *9*(2), 202-224.

- Garrison, W. A. (1992). The social psychology of collective action. *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory, 1*, 53-76.
- Gåsemyr, H. J. (2016). Networks and campaigns but not movements: collective action in the disciplining Chinese State. *Journal of Civil Society, 12*(4), 394-410.
- Gaudette, T., Scrivens, R., Davies, G., & Frank, R. (2021). Upvoting extremism: Collective identity formation and the extreme right on Reddit. *New Media & Society, 23*(12), 3491-3508.
- Geisinger, G. (2019). *Bohemian Rhapsody censorship: Chinese fans SHOCKED at censored Freddie Mercury biopic*. <https://pulse.express.co.uk/entertainment/films/1105531/Bohemian-Rhapsody-censorship-China-gay-bisexual-lgbtw-Freddie-Mercury-china>
- Georgakopoulou, A. (2021). Designing stories on social media: A corpus-assisted critical perspective on the mismatches of story-curation. *Linguistics and Education, 62*, 100737.
- George, J. J., & Leidner, D. E. (2018a). Digital activism: A hierarchy of political commitment. In *Proceedings of the 51st Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*.
- George, J. J., & Leidner, D. E. (2018b). Why marginalized groups struggle to leverage digital activism. In *the 24th Americas Conference on Information Systems 2018: Digital Disruption, AMCIS 2018*.
- George, J. J., & Leidner, D. E. (2019). From clicktivism to hacktivism: Understanding digital activism. *Information and Organization, 29*(3), 100249.
- Gerbaudo, P. (2012). *Tweets and the streets: Social media and contemporary activism*. Pluto Press.
- Gerbaudo, P. (2015). Protest avatars as memetic signifiers: political profile pictures and the construction of collective identity on social media in the 2011 protest wave. *Information, Communication & Society, 18*(8), 916-929.
- Gerbaudo, P. (2017). The indignant citizen: anti-austerity movements in southern Europe and the anti-oligarchic reclaiming of citizenship. *Social Movement Studies, 16*(1), 36-50.

- Gerbaudo, P., & Treré, E. (2015). In search of the ‘we’ of social media activism: introduction to the special issue on social media and protest identities. *Information, Communication & Society*, 18(8), 865-871.
- Ghaziani, A. (2008). *The dividends of dissent: How conflict and culture work in lesbian and gay marches on Washington*. University of Chicago Press.
- Ghaziani, A. (2011). Post-gay collective identity construction. *Social Problems*, 58(1), 99-125.
- Ghosh, P. (2014). Performing Pride/Performing Protest: LGBT Activism Post Recriminalizing of Section 377. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 6(1), 163-176.
- Gillmor, D. (2006). *We the media: Grassroots journalism by the people, for the people*. O’Reilly Media, Inc.
- Gladwell, M. (2010). Small change: Why the revolution will not be tweeted. *The New Yorker*, 4(2010), 42-49.
- Gleiss, M. S. (2015). Speaking up for the suffering (br)other: Weibo activism, discursive struggles, and minimal politics in China. *Media, Culture & Society*, 37(4), 513-529.
- Goltz, D. B. (2013). It gets better: Queer futures, critical frustrations, and radical potentials. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 30(2), 135-151.
- Gong, J., & Liu, T. (2021). Decadence and relational freedom among China’s gay migrants: Subverting heteronormativity by ‘lying flat’. *China Information*.
- Gow, M. (2017). The core socialist values of the Chinese dream: Towards a Chinese integral state. *Critical Asian Studies*, 49(1), 92-116.
- Grant, P. R., & Smith, H. J. (2021). Activism in the time of COVID-19. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 24(2), 297-305.
- Greijdanus, H., de Matos Fernandes, C. A., Turner-Zwinkels, F., Honari, A., Roos, C. A., Rosenbusch, H., & Postmes, T. (2020). The psychology of online activism and social movements: Relations between online and offline collective action. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 35, 49-54.
- Grömping, M., & Sinpeng, A. (2018). The “crowd-factor” in connective action: comparing protest communication styles of Thai Facebook pages. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 15(3), 197-214.

- Grzanka, P. R., Adler, J., & Blazer, J. (2015). Making up allies: The identity choreography of straight LGBT activism. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy, 12*(3), 165-181.
- Grzanka, P. R., & Mann, E. S. (2014). Queer youth suicide and the psychopolitics of “It Gets Better”. *Sexualities, 17*(4), 369-393.
- Gu, Y. (1990). Politeness phenomena in modern Chinese. *Journal of Pragmatics, 14*(2), 237-257.
- Guenther, K. M., Mulligan, K., & Papp, C. (2013). From the outside in: Crossing boundaries to build collective identity in the new atheist movement. *Social Problems, 60*(4), 457-475.
- Habermas, J. (1981). New Social Movements. *Telos, 1981*(49), 33-37.
- Hafeez, E. (2021). Impact of Online Activism on Public Involvement in Criminal Justice System. *Journal of Media Studies, 36*(1), 255-289.
- Han, L. (2021). Alternative Media and the Queer Feminist Community: The Lesbian Print Magazine in China. *Journal of Homosexuality, 1*-24.
- Han, X., Han, W., Qu, J., Li, B., & Zhu, Q. (2019). What happens online stays online?—Social media dependency, online support behavior and offline effects for LGBT. *Computers in Human Behavior, 93*, 91-98.
- Hands, J. (2010). *@ is for activism: Dissent, resistance and rebellion in a digital culture*. Pluto Press.
- Harlow, S., & Harp, D. (2012). Collective action on the Web: A cross-cultural study of social networking sites and online and offline activism in the United States and Latin America. *Information, Communication & Society, 15*(2), 196-216.
- Hassid, J. (2012). Safety valve or pressure cooker? Blogs in Chinese political life. *Journal of Communication, 62*(2), 212-230.
- He, X., & Jolly, S. (2002). Chinese women tongzhi organizing in the 1990s. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies, 3*(3), 479-491.
- Heale, R., & Forbes, D. (2013). Understanding triangulation in research. *Evidence-based Nursing, 16*(4), 98-98.
- Hilal, A. H., & Alabri, S. S. (2013). Using NVivo for data analysis in qualitative research. *International Interdisciplinary Journal of Education, 2*(2), 181-186.

- Hildebrandt, T. (2011a). The political economy of social organization registration in China. *The China Quarterly*, 208, 970-989.
- Hildebrandt, T. (2011b). Same-sex marriage in China? The strategic promulgation of a progressive policy and its impact on LGBT activism. *Review of International Studies*, 37(3), 1313-1333.
- Hildebrandt, T. (2012). Development and division: The effect of transnational linkages and local politics on LGBT activism in China. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 21(77), 845-862.
- Hildebrandt, T. (2018). *NGOs and the success paradox: Gay activism 'after' HIV/AIDS in China*. Social Policy Working Paper 01-18, London: LSE Department of Social Policy.
- Hildebrandt, T., & Chua, L. J. (2017). Negotiating in/visibility: The political economy of lesbian activism and rights advocacy. *Development and Change*, 48(4), 639-662.
- Hirsch, E. L. (1990). Sacrifice for the Cause: Group Processes, Recruitment, and Commitment in a Student Social Movement. *American Sociological Review*, 55(2), 243-254.
- Hirzalla, F., Van Zoonen, L., & de Ridder, J. (2011). Internet use and political participation: Reflections on the mobilization/normalization controversy. *The Information Society*, 27(1), 1-15.
- Ho, L. W. W. (2007). The gay space in Chinese cyberspace: Self-censorship, commercialisation and misrepresentation. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs-China aktuell*, 36(4), 45-73.
- Ho, L. W. W. (2010). *Gay and lesbian subculture in urban China*. Routledge.
- Ho, P. (2007). Embedded activism and political change in a semiauthoritarian context. *China Information*, 21(2), 187-209.
- Ho, S. (2020). A social media 'blackout' enthralled Instagram. But did it do anything? <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/social-media/social-media-blackout-enthralled-instagram-did-it-do-anything-n1230181>
- Ho, V. (2016). *Taipei raises rainbow flag at City Hall as thousands march in pride parade*. <https://mashable.com/article/taipei-pride-parade-dpp>

- Hoffman, S. (2017). Programming China: The communist party's autonomic approach to managing state security. *Merics China Monitor*, 44, 1-12.
- Holmes, A. G. D. (2020). Researcher Positionality – A Consideration of Its Influence and Place in Qualitative Research – A New Researcher Guide. *Shanlax International Journal of Education*, 8(4), 1-10.
- Hong, S., & Kim, S. H. (2016). Political polarization on twitter: Implications for the use of social media in digital governments. *Government Information Quarterly*, 33(4), 777-782.
- Horbelt, S. (2020). *Mr. Gay Japan Encourages Everyone to Sign This Petition for Marriage Equality in Japan*. <https://hornet.com/stories/japanese-marriage-equality-petition/>
- Horwitz, J., & Huang, Z. (2016). *China's new television rules ban homosexuality, drinking, and vengeance*. <https://qz.com/630159/chinas-new-television-rules-ban-homosexuality-drinking-and-vengeance/>
- Hou, L. (2020). Rewriting “the personal is political”: young women's digital activism and new feminist politics in China. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 21(3), 337-355.
- Howard, P. N., Duffy, A., Freelon, D., Hussain, M., Mari, W., & Mazaid, M. (2011). Opening closed regimes: What was the role of social media during the Arab Spring? Project on Information Technology and Political Islam. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2595096> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2595096>
- Howard, P. N., & Hussain, M. M. (2013). *Democracy's fourth wave?: Digital media and the Arab Spring*. Oxford University Press.
- Howard, P. N., Savage, S., Saviaga, C. F., Toxtli, C., & Monroy-Hernández, A. (2016). Social media, civic engagement, and the slacktivism hypothesis: Lessons from Mexico's “El Bronco”. *Journal of International Affairs*, 70(1), 55-73.
- Howcroft, D., & Fitzgerald, B. (1998). From Utopia to Dystopia: the twin faces of the Internet. *Information Systems: Current Issues and Future Changes, Proceedings of IFIP WG8*, 2, 49-70.
- Hu, J. (2020). The Second Act of Social-Media Activism. *The New Yorker*, 3(2020).

- Hu, K., & Li, X. (2019). The effects of media use and traditional gender role beliefs on tolerance of homosexuality in China. *Chinese Sociological Review*, 51(2), 147-172.
- Hu, Y., Mu, Y., & Huang, Y. (2020). The #MeToo narrative: Reconstructing the cultural intelligibility of female subjects. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 80, 102365.
- Hu, Y., & Scott, J. (2016). Family and gender values in China: Generational, geographic, and gender differences. *Journal of Family Issues*, 37(9), 1267-1293.
- Huang, C., Hong, J., Ma, W., & Šimon, P. (2015). From corpus to grammar: automatic extraction of grammatical relations from annotated corpus. *Journal of Chinese Linguistics Monograph Series*, 25, 192-221.
- Huang, R., & Sun, X. (2014). Weibo network, information diffusion and implications for collective action in China. *Information, Communication & Society*, 17(1), 86-104.
- Hung, C. (2011). The Politics of Electronic Social Capital and Public Sphere in Chinese Lala Community: Implications for Civil Society+. *International Journal of China Studies*, 2(2), 369-388.
- Hunt, S. A., & Benford, R. A. (2004). Collective Identity, Solidarity, and Commitment. In D. A. Snow, S. A. Soule, & H. Kriesi (Eds.), *The blackwell companion to social movements* (pp. 433-457). Blackwell.
- Hunt, S. A., Benford, R. D., & Snow, D. A. (1994). Identity fields: Framing processes and the social construction of movement identities. In E. Laraña, H. Johnston, & J. R. Gusfield (Eds.), *New social movements: From ideology to identity* (pp. 185-208). Temple University Press.
- Io, H. N., & Lee, C. B. (2020). Social media comments about hotel robots. *Journal of China Tourism Research*, 16(4), 606-625.
- Ito, M. (2008). Introduction: Networked Publics. In K. Varnelis (Ed.), *Networked publics* (pp. 1-14). The MIT Press.
- Jackson, K., & Bazeley, P. (2019). *Qualitative data analysis with NVivo*. Sage.
- Jagose, A. (1996). *Queer theory: An introduction*. NYU Press.

- Jeffreys, E., & Wang, P. (2018). Pathways to legalizing same-sex marriage in China and Taiwan: Globalization and “Chinese values”. In B. Winter, M. Forest, & R. Sénac (Eds.), *Global perspectives on same-sex marriage* (pp. 197-219). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jeffreys, S. (2002). *Unpacking queer politics*. Polity Press.
- Jennings, R. (2020). *Who are the black squares and cutesy illustrations really for?* <https://www.vox.com/the-goods/2020/6/3/21279336/blackout-tuesday-black-lives-matter-instagram-performative-allyship>
- Ji, P. (2007). Being a heterosexual ally to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered community: Reflections and development. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy*, 11(3-4), 173-185.
- Jia, X. (2011). *CCTV host slams Lv Liping's gay slur.* https://europe.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-07/06/content_12849632.htm
- Jiang, J., Chen, E., Yan, S., Lerman, K., & Ferrara, E. (2020). Political polarization drives online conversations about COVID-19 in the United States. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*, 2(3), 200-211.
- Jiang, Y. (2012). *Cyber-nationalism in China: Challenging Western media portrayals of internet censorship in China*. University of Adelaide Press.
- Jiao, L. (2021). 內外有別: 《中國日報》(China Daily) 對性少數群體的另類呈現 (1991-2019) [Distinguishing Insiders and Outsiders: Alternative Representations of LGBT in the China Daily (1991–2019)]. *傳播與社會學刊 [Communication and Society]*, (57), 53-93.
- Jones, C. (2015). Slacktivism and the social benefits of social video: Sharing a video to ‘help’ a cause. *First Monday*, 20(5).
- Kallio, J. (2015). Dreaming of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 8(4), 521-532.
- Kavada, A. (2015). Creating the collective: social media, the Occupy Movement and its constitution as a collective actor. *Information, Communication and Society*, 18(8), 872-886.
- Khazraee, E., & Novak, A. N. (2018). Digitally mediated protest: Social media affordances for collective identity construction. *Social Media + Society*, 4(1), 1-14.

- Kilgarriff, A., Baisa, V., Bušta, J., Jakubíček, M., Kovář, V., Michelfeit, J., Rychlý, P., & Suchomel, V. (2014). The Sketch Engine: ten years on. *Lexicography*, 1(1), 7-36.
- King, G., Pan, J., & Roberts, M. E. (2013). How censorship in China allows government criticism but silences collective expression. *American Political Science Review*, 107(2), 326-343.
- King, G., Pan, J., & Roberts, M. E. (2014). Reverse-engineering censorship in China: Randomized experimentation and participant observation. *Science*, 345(6199), 1251722.
- King, G., Pan, J., & Roberts, M. E. (2017). How the Chinese government fabricates social media posts for strategic distraction, not engaged argument. *American Political Science Review*, 111(3), 484-501.
- Kligler-Vilenchik, N., & Thorson, K. (2016). Good citizenship as a frame contest: Kony2012, memes, and critiques of the networked citizen. *New Media & Society*, 18(9), 1993-2011.
- Koller, V. (2012). How to analyse collective identity in discourse: Textual and contextual parameters. *Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis Across Disciplines*, 5(2), 19-38.
- Kong, T. S. (2020). The pursuit of masculinity by young gay men in neoliberal Hong Kong and Shanghai. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 23(8), 1004-1021.
- Koopmans, R. (1999). Political. Opportunity. Structure. Some Splitting to Balance the Lumping. *Sociological Forum*, 1(14), 93-105.
- Kopacheva, E. (2021). How the Internet has changed participation: Exploring distinctive preconditions of online activism. *Communication & Society*, 34(2), 67-85.
- Kostka, G. (2019). China's social credit systems and public opinion: Explaining high levels of approval. *New Media & Society*, 21(7), 1565-1593.
- Kriesi, H. (1995). The political opportunity structure of new social movements: Its impact on their mobilization. In J. C. Jenkins & B. Klandermans (Eds.), *The politics of social protest*. University of Minnesota Press.

- Kriesi, H., Koopmans, R., Duyvendak, J. W., & Giugni, M. G. (1992). New social movements and political opportunities in Western Europe. *European Journal of Political Research*, 22(2), 219-244.
- Kristofferson, K., White, K., & Peloza, J. (2014). The nature of slacktivism: How the social observability of an initial act of token support affects subsequent prosocial action. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40(6), 1149-1166.
- Kuo, L. (2018a). *China: security guards assault women attending LGBT event*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/14/china-security-guards-assault-women-attending-lgbt-event>
- Kuo, L. (2018b). *China's Weibo reverses ban on 'homosexual' content after outcry*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/16/china-weibo-bans-homosexual-content-protest>
- Kwak, N., Lane, D. S., Weeks, B. E., Kim, D. H., Lee, S. S., & Bachleda, S. (2018). Perceptions of social media for politics: Testing the slacktivism hypothesis. *Human Communication Research*, 44(2), 197-221.
- Love Has No Labels. (n.d.). *Love Has No Labels*. <https://lovehasnolabels.com/>
- Lane, D. S., & Dal Cin, S. (2018). Sharing beyond Slacktivism: the effect of socially observable prosocial media sharing on subsequent offline helping behavior. *Information, Communication & Society*, 21(11), 1523-1540.
- Lee, C. K., & Hsing, Y. (2009). *Social activism in China: Agency and possibility*. Routledge.
- Lee, C. S. (2019). Datafication, dataveillance, and the social credit system as China's new normal. *Online Information Review*, 43(6), 952-970.
- Lee, F. L. F. (2016). Impact of social media on opinion polarization in varying times. *Communication and the Public*, 1(1), 56-71.
- Lee, J. K., Choi, J., Kim, C., & Kim, Y. (2014). Social media, network heterogeneity, and opinion polarization. *Journal of Communication*, 64(4), 702-722.
- Lee, K., & Ho, M. (2014). The Maoming Anti-PX Protest of 2014. An environmental movement in contemporary China. *China Perspectives*, 2014(2014/3), 33-39.
- Lee, Y., & Hsieh, G. (2013). Does slacktivism hurt activism? The effects of moral balancing and consistency in online activism. In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI conference on human factors in computing systems* (pp. 811-820).

- Leung, A. (2013). Anonymity as Identity: Exploring Collective Identity in Anonymous Cyberactivism. *International Journal of Technology, Knowledge & Society: Annual Review*, 9(2), 173-184.
- Lewis, K., Gray, K., & Meierhenrich, J. (2014). The structure of online activism. *Sociological Science*, 1, 1-9.
- Leyva, R. (2017). Exploring UK millennials' social media consumption patterns and participation in elections, activism, and "slacktivism". *Social Science Computer Review*, 35(4), 462-479.
- Li, C., & Zhang, X. (2017). *Online regulations and LGBT rights: A test for China's legal system*. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/online-regulations-and-lgbt-rights-a-test-for-chinas-legal-system/>
- Liang, F., Das, V., Kostyuk, N., & Hussain, M. M. (2018). Constructing a data-driven society: China's social credit system as a state surveillance infrastructure. *Policy & Internet*, 10(4), 415-453.
- Liao, S. (2019). "#IAmGay# what about you?": Storytelling, discursive politics, and the affective dimension of social media activism against censorship in China. *International Journal of Communication*, 13, 2314-2333.
- Lin, K., & Wang, W. (2021). Changing Public Tolerance for Same-Sex Sexual Behaviors in China, 2010-2017: A Decomposition Analysis. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 50(8), 3433-3445.
- Lin, Z., Zhang, Z., & Yang, L. (2019). Self as enterprise: Digital disability practices of entrepreneurship and employment in the wave of 'internet+ disability' in China. *Information, Communication & Society*, 22(4), 554-569.
- Liu, J. (2011). Picturing a green virtual public space for social change: A study of Internet activism and Web-based environmental collective actions in China. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 4(2), 137-166.
- Liu, J. (2016). Digital media, cycle of contention, and sustainability of environmental activism: the case of anti-PX protests in China. *Mass Communication and Society*, 19(5), 604-625.
- Liu, J. (2017). From 'moments of madness' to 'the politics of mundanity' - researching digital media and contentious collective actions in China. *Social Movement Studies*, 16(4), 418-432.

- Liu, J., & Gao, L. (2021). Analysis of topics and characteristics of user reviews on different online psychological counseling methods. *International Journal of Medical Informatics*, 147, 104367.
- Liu, T. (2016). Neoliberal ethos, state censorship and sexual culture: A Chinese dating/hook-up app. *Continuum*, 30(5), 557-566.
- Liu, T., & Guan, T. (2019). Globalized fears, localized securities: 'Terrorism' in political polarization in a one-party state. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 52(4), 343-353.
- Liu, W. (2012). *Zooming in on LGBT issues*. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2012-03/20/content_14867222.htm
- Liu, W., Huang, A., & Ma, J. (2015). II. Young activists, new movements: Contemporary Chinese queer feminism and transnational genealogies. *Feminism & Psychology*, 25(1), 11-17.
- Liu, X., & Yin, H. (2018). *Women beaten by security at 798 Art Zone for wearing rainbow badge*. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1102065.shtml>
- Liu, Y. (2015). Tweeting, re-tweeting, and commenting: Microblogging and social movements in China. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 25(6), 567-583.
- LoveisLoiveisLove. (n.d.). *OUR STORY*. <https://www.loveisloveislove.org/>
- Lu, J. & Chan, C. K. (2016). Collective Identity, Framing and Mobilisation of Environmental Protests in Urban China: A Case Study of Qidong's Protest. *China: An International Journal*, 14(2), 102-122.
- Lu, J., & Zhao, Y. (2018). Implicit and explicit control: Modeling the effect of internet censorship on political protest in China. *International Journal of Communication*, 12, 3294-3316.
- Lu, W. (2016). *8 LGBTQ Advocates Share What 'Love Is Love' Means*. <https://www.bustle.com/p/8-lgbtq-activists-share-what-love-is-love-means-to-them-in-donald-trumps-america-7278041>
- Lu, Y., Ray, R., Ha, L., & Chen, P. (2020). Social media news consumption and opinion polarization on China's trade practices: Evidence from a US national survey. *International Journal of Communication*, 14, 3478-3495.
- Lyons, L. (2016). *#LoveIsLove*. <http://affinitymagazine.us/2016/06/06/loveislove/>

- MacKinnon, R. (2011). Liberation Technology: China's "Networked Authoritarianism". *Journal of Democracy*, 22(2), 32-46.
- Majchrzak, A., Faraj, S., Kane, G. C., & Azad, B. (2013). The contradictory influence of social media affordances on online communal knowledge sharing. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 19(1), 38-55.
- Mano, P. (2021). Disarming as a tactic of resistance in Pink Dot. *Journal of Language and Sexuality*, 10(2), 129-156.
- Mao, C. (2020). Feminist activism via social media in China. *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 26(2), 245-258.
- Marsh, A. (1977). *Protest and political consciousness*. Sage Publications.
- Marwick, A. (2013). Ethnographic and qualitative research on Twitter. In K. Weller, A. Bruns, J. Burgess, M. Mahrt, & C. Puschmann (Eds.), *Twitter and society* (pp. 109-122). Peter Lang.
- McAdam, D. (1986). Recruitment to high-risk activism: The case of freedom summer. *American Journal of Sociology*, 92(1), 64-90.
- McAdam, D. (1996). Political Opportunities: Conceptual Origins, Current Problems, Future Directions. In D. McAdam, J. D. McCarthy, & M. Zald (Eds.), *Comparative perspectives on social movements* (pp. 23-40). Cambridge University Press.
- McClelland-Cohen, A., & Endacott, C. G. (2020). The Signs of Our Discontent: Framing Collective Identity at the Women's March on Washington. *Communication Studies*, 71(5), 842-856.
- McEnery, T., McGlashan, M., & Love, R. (2015). Press and social media reaction to ideologically inspired murder: The case of Lee Rigby. *Discourse & Communication*, 9(2), 237-259.
- Melucci, A. (1980). The new social movements: A theoretical approach. *Social Science Information*, 19(2), 199-226.
- Melucci, A. (1989). *Nomads of the present: Social movements and individual needs in contemporary society*. Hutchinson Radius.
- Melucci, A. (1995). The process of collective identity. In H. Johnston & B. Klandermans (Eds.), *Social movements and culture* (Vol. 4, pp. 41-63). Routledge.

- Melucci, A. (1996). *Challenging codes: Collective action in the information age*. Cambridge University Press.
- Meyer, D. S. (1993). Protest cycles and political process: American peace movements in the nuclear age. *Political Research Quarterly*, 46(3), 451-479.
- Meyer, D. S. (2004). Protest and political opportunities. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 30, 125-145.
- Meyer, D. S., & Minkoff, D. C. (2004). Conceptualizing political opportunity. *Social Forces*, 82(4), 1457-1492.
- Meyer, D. S., & Staggenborg, S. (1996). Movements, countermovements, and the structure of political opportunity. *American Journal of Sociology*, 101(6), 1628-1660.
- Meyjes, T. (2016). *The world unites in reaction to Orlando massacre with #loveislove hashtag*. <https://metro.co.uk/2016/06/12/the-world-unites-in-reaction-to-orlando-massacre-with-loveislove-hashtag-5940192/>
- Michell, B. (2018). *#IAmGay is trending in China as Weibo removes gay and violent content*. <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/04/14/iamgay-is-trending-in-china-as-weibo-removes-gay-and-violent-content/>
- Milan, S. (2013). *Social movements and their technologies: Wiring social change*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Milan, S. (2015). From social movements to cloud protesting: the evolution of collective identity. *Information, Communication & Society*, 18(8), 887-900.
- Milan, S., & Barbosa, S. (2020). Enter the WhasApper: Reinventing digital activism at the time of chat apps. *First Monday*, 25(1).
- Milbrath, L. W., & Goel, M. L. (1977). *Political participation: How and why do people get involved in politics?* Rand McNally College Publishing Company.
- Milošević-Đorđević, J. S., & Žeželj, I. L. (2017). Civic activism online: Making young people dormant or more active in real life? *Computers in Human Behavior*, 70, 113-118.
- Minter, S. (2000). Do Transsexuals Dream of Gay Rights? Getting Real About Transgender Inclusion in the Gay Rights Movement. *New York Law School Journal of Human Rights*, 17(2), 589-622.

- Moreno-Tabarez, U., Chávez, K. R., Leonelli, S. J., Huang, A., Deklerck, S., & Rother, C. (2014). Queer politics in China: A conversation with “Western” activists working in Beijing. *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*, 1(3), 109-132.
- Morozov, E. (2009). The brave new world of slacktivism. *Foreign Policy*, 19(05).
- Morozov, E. (2011). *The net delusion: How not to liberate the world*. Penguin UK.
- Murib, Z. (2015). Transgender: Examining an emerging political identity using three political processes. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 3(3), 381-397.
- Murthy, D. (2008). Digital ethnography: An examination of the use of new technologies for social research. *Sociology*, 42(5), 837-855.
- Myers, J. (2017). *Is the saccharine message of #Loveislove really what Pride is about?* <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jun/28/loveislove-message-pride-lgbt-queen-nation-chant>
- Natale, S., & Ballatore, A. (2014). The web will kill them all: New media, digital utopia, and political struggle in the Italian 5-Star Movement. *Media, Culture & Society*, 36(1), 105-121.
- Nurdin, N. (2017). Research in Online Space: The Use of Social Media for Research Setting. *Jurnal Sistem Informasi*, 13(1), 67-77.
- Offe, C. (1985). New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics. *Social Research*, 52(4), 817-868.
- Ogles, J. (2019). *Chinese Social Media Giant Weibo Cracks Down on Lesbian Content*. <https://www.advocate.com/media/2019/4/15/chinese-social-media-giant-weibo-cracks-down-lesbian-content>
- Olukotun, O., Mkandawire, E., Antilla, J., Alfaifa, F., Weitzel, J., Scheer, V., Olukotun, M., & Mkandawire-Valhmu, L. (2021). An Analysis of Reflections on Researcher Positionality. *Qualitative Report*, 26(5), 1411-1426.
- Orwell, G. (1949). *Nineteen eighty-four*. Secker and Warburg.
- People’s Daily Online. (2018). 王勇：组建国家广播电视总局 不再保留国家新闻出版广电总局 [Yong Wang: Form the National Radio and Television Administration and no longer retaining the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television]. <http://lianghui.people.com.cn/2018npc/n1/2018/0313/c418468-29865067.html>

- Opeibi, T. (2019). The Twittersphere as Political Engagement Space: A Study of Social Media Usage in Election Campaigns in Nigeria. *Digital Studies/Le Champ Numérique*, 9(1), 1–32.
- Ortiz, J., Young, A., Myers, M. D., Bedeley, R. T., Carbaugh, D., Chughtai, H., Davidson, E., George, J., Gogan, J., & Gordon, S. (2019). Giving voice to the voiceless: The use of digital technologies by marginalized groups. *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, 45(1), 20-38.
- Oser, J., Hooghe, M., & Marien, S. (2013). Is online participation distinct from offline participation? A latent class analysis of participation types and their stratification. *Political Research Quarterly*, 66(1), 91-101.
- Oxford, L. (2020). *Culture out of crisis: How armchair activism became a force for change*. <https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/culture-crisis-armchair-activism-became-force-change/1689269>
- Pacheco, G., & Owen, B. (2015). Moving through the political participation hierarchy: A focus on personal values. *Applied Economics*, 47(3), 222-238.
- Panjaitan, Y. A., & Janah, L. N. (2022). #PapuanLivesMatter in the Wake of #BlackLivesMatter: Relations of Collective Identity in Twitter Activism. *JOELS: Journal of Election and Leadership*, 3(1), 37-55.
- Papacharissi, Z. (2002). The virtual sphere: The internet as a public sphere. *New Media & Society*, 4(1), 9-27.
- Papacharissi, Z. (2010). *A private sphere: Democracy in a digital age*. Polity.
- Parkin, S. (2018). LGBT Rights-Focused Legal Advocacy in China: The Promise, and Limits, of Litigation. *Fordham International Law Journal*, 41(5), 1243-1262.
- Peng, A. Y. (2021). Neoliberal feminism, gender relations, and a feminized male ideal in China: A critical discourse analysis of Mimeng's WeChat posts. *Feminist Media Studies*, 21(1), 115-131.
- Penney, J. (2015). Social media and symbolic action: Exploring participation in the Facebook red equal sign profile picture campaign. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 20(1), 52-66.
- Peterson, A., Wahlström, M., & Wennerhag, M. (2018). *Pride parades and LGBT movements*. Routledge.

- Pilny, A., & Shumate, M. (2012). Hyperlinks as extensions of offline instrumental collective action. *Information, Communication & Society*, 15(2), 260-286.
- Pinckney, J., & Rivers, M. (2020). Sicknes or Silence: Social Movement Adaptation to COVID-19. *Journal of International Affairs*, 73(2), 23-42.
- Podmore, J. A. (2006). Gone 'underground'? Lesbian visibility and the consolidation of queer space in Montréal. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 7(4), 595-625.
- Poell, T. (2020). Social media, temporality, and the legitimacy of protest. *Social Movement Studies*, 19(5-6), 609-624.
- Poirot, K. (2009). Domesticating the liberated woman: Containment rhetorics of second wave radical/lesbian feminism. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 32(3), 263-292.
- Polletta, F., & Jasper, J. M. (2001). Collective identity and social movements. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27(1), 283-305.
- Potts, A. (2015). 'LOVE YOU GUYS (NO HOMO)' How gamers and fans play with sexuality, gender, and Minecraft on YouTube. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 12(2), 163-186.
- Pressgrove, G., McKeever, B. W., & Jang, S. M. (2018). What is Contagious? Exploring why content goes viral on Twitter: A case study of the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 23(1), e1586.
- Pritchard, A., Morgan, N., & Sedgley, D. (2002). In search of lesbian space? The experience of Manchester's gay village. *Leisure Studies*, 21(2), 105-123.
- Puar, J. (2013). Rethinking homonationalism. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 45(2), 336-339.
- Puar, J. K. (2017). *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Duke University Press.
- Qin, B., Strömberg, D., & Wu, Y. (2017). Why does China allow freer social media? Protests versus surveillance and propaganda. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31(1), 117-140.
- Rao, H., Monin, P., & Durand, R. (2003). Institutional change in Toque Ville: Nouvelle cuisine as an identity movement in French gastronomy. *American Journal of Sociology*, 108(4), 795-843.

- Rasmussen, T. (2014). Internet and the political public sphere. *Sociology Compass*, 8(12), 1315-1329.
- Ray, R., Brown, M., Fraistat, N., & Summers, E. (2017). Ferguson and the death of Michael Brown on Twitter: #BlackLivesMatter, #TCOT, and the evolution of collective identities. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 40(11), 1797-1813.
- Reilly, J. (2014). A Wave to Worry About? Public opinion, foreign policy and China's anti-Japan protests. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 23(86), 197-215.
- Rød, E. G., & Weidmann, N. B. (2015). Empowering activists or autocrats? The Internet in authoritarian regimes. *Journal of Peace Research*, 52(3), 338-351.
- Rohlinger, D. A., & Bunnage, L. A. (2018). Collective identity in the digital age: Thin and thick identities in moveon.org and the tea party movement. *Mobilization*, 23(2), 135-157.
- Rose, F. (1997). Toward a class-cultural theory of social movements: Reinterpreting new social movements. *Sociological Forum*, 12(3), 461-494.
- Rosenblatt, K. (2020). *A summer of digital protest: How 2020 became the summer of activism both online and offline*. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/summer-digital-protest-how-2020-became-summer-activism-both-online-n1241001>
- Rotman, D., Vieweg, S., Yardi, S., Chi, E., Preece, J., Shneiderman, B., Pirolli, P., & Glaisyer, T. (2011). From slacktivism to activism: participatory culture in the age of social media. In *CHI'11 Extended Abstracts on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 819-822).
- Ruan, F. F. (2013). *Sex in China: Studies in sexology in Chinese culture*. Springer Science & Business Media.
- Rupp, L. J., & Taylor, V. (1999). Forging feminist identity in an international movement: a collective identity approach to twentieth-century feminism. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 24(2), 363-386.
- Samshasha. (1997). *中國同性愛史錄：（增訂本） [A History of Homosexuality in China, Expanded Edition]*. Rosa Winkel Press.
- Sanders, S. (2014). *The 'Kony 2012' Effect: Recovering From A Viral Sensation*. <https://www.npr.org/2014/06/14/321853244/the-kony-2012-effect-recovering-from-a-viral-sensation?t=1646244237486>

- Sanjay, S. (2020). *The Pandemic is Changing Online Activism's Reputation of Being Just 'Slacktivism'*. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/qj4akq/online-activism-in-coronavirus-drives-change>
- Savage, S., Monroy-Hernandez, A., & Höllerer, T. (2016). Botivist: Calling volunteers to action using online bots. In *Proceedings of the 19th ACM Conference on Computer-Supported Cooperative Work & Social Computing* (pp. 813-822).
- Sawyers, T. M., & Meyer, D. S. (1999). Missed opportunities: Social movement abeyance and public policy. *Social Problems*, 46(2), 187-206.
- Schlesinger, P. (1987). On national identity: some conceptions and misconceptions criticized. *Social Science Information*, 26(2), 219-264.
- Schmitz, R. M., Coley, J. S., Thomas, C., & Ramirez, A. (2020). The cyber power of marginalized identities: intersectional strategies of online LGBTQ+ Latinx activism. *Feminist Media Studies*, 1-20.
- Schradie, J. (2018). The digital activism gap: How class and costs shape online collective action. *Social Problems*, 65(1), 51-74.
- Schradie, J. (2020). "Give me Liberty or Give me Covid-19": Anti-lockdown protesters were never Trump puppets. *Communication and the Public*, 5(3-4), 126-128.
- Schurman, R. (2004). Fighting "Frankenfoods": Industry opportunity structures and the efficacy of the anti-biotech movement in Western Europe. *Social Problems*, 51(2), 243-268.
- Schuster, J. (2013). Invisible feminists? Social media and young women's political participation. *Political Science*, 65(1), 8-24.
- Seegerberg, A., & Bennett, W. L. (2011). Social media and the organization of collective action: Using Twitter to explore the ecologies of two climate change protests. *The Communication Review*, 14(3), 197-215.
- Shan, J. (2014). *Stigma still haunts LGBT community*. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2014-09/01/content_18520010.htm
- Shan, S., Ju, X., Wei, Y., & Wang, Z. (2021). Effects of PM2.5 on People's Emotion: A Case Study of Weibo (Chinese Twitter) in Beijing. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(10), 5422.

- Shaw, G., & Zhang, X. (2018). Cyberspace and gay rights in a digital China: Queer documentary filmmaking under state censorship. *China Information*, 32(2), 270-292.
- Sheng, J., Xu, C., & Cai, W. (2020). *China Promulgates Its Long-Awaited Civil Code*. <https://www.pillsburylaw.com/en/news-and-insights/china-promulgates-civil-code.html>
- Shepherd, C. (2018). *China's Sina Weibo reverses gay content clean-up after outcry*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-lgbt-censorship/chinas-sina-weibo-reverses-gay-content-clean-up-after-outcry-idUSKBN1HN0KI>
- Shi, Y. (2013). *My child is ... gay*. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/sunday/2013-01/06/content_16086606.htm
- Shih, M., & Hsieh, S. (2016). Word dependency sketch for Chinese language learning. *Concentric: Studies in Linguistics*, 42(1), 45-72.
- Simon, B., & Klandermans, B. (2001). Politicized collective identity: A social psychological analysis. *American Psychologist*, 56(4), 319.
- Sivitanides, M., & Shah, V. (2011). The era of digital activism. In *Conference for Information Systems Applied Research* (Vol. 4, No. 1842).
- Skoric, M. M., Zhu, Q., Goh, D., & Pang, N. (2016). Social media and citizen engagement: A meta-analytic review. *New Media & Society*, 18(9), 1817-1839.
- Smith, A. (2014). *Half of online Americans don't know what a privacy policy is*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/04/half-of-americans-dont-know-what-a-privacy-policy-is/>
- Smith, B. G., Krishna, A., & Al-Sinan, R. (2019). Beyond slacktivism: Examining the entanglement between social media engagement, empowerment, and participation in activism. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 13(3), 182-196.
- Smith, B. G., & Taylor, M. (2017). Empowering engagement: Understanding social media user sense of influence. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 11(2), 148-164.
- Smith, R. A., & Siplon, P. D. (2006). *Drugs into bodies: Global AIDS treatment activism*. Greenwood Publishing Group.

- Snow, D. (2001). Collective identity and expressive forms. In N. J. Smelser & P. B. Baltes (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of the social & behavioral sciences* (pp. 2212-2219). Pergamon.
- British Psychological Society. (2013). Ethics guidelines for internet-mediated research. *Leicester, UK: British Psychological Society.*
- Soon, C., & Kluver, R. (2014). Uniting political bloggers in diversity: Collective identity and web activism. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 19*(3), 500-515.
- Staggenborg, S. (1991). *The pro-choice movement: Organization and activism in the abortion conflict*. Oxford University Press.
- Stein, A. (1992). Sisters and queers: The decentering of lesbian feminism. *Radical Society, 22*(1), 33-55.
- Stein, A., & Plummer, K. (1994). "I can't even think straight" "queer" theory and the missing sexual revolution in sociology. *Sociological Theory, 12*(2), 178-187.
- Steinmetz, G. (1994). Regulation theory, post-Marxism, and the new social movements. *Comparative Studies in Society and History, 36*(1), 176-212.
- Stephansen, H. C. (2017). Media activism as movement?: collective identity formation in the World Forum of Free Media. *Media and Communication, 5*(3), 59-66.
- Stern, R. E., & Hassid, J. (2012). Amplifying silence: uncertainty and control parables in contemporary China. *Comparative Political Studies, 45*(10), 1230-1254.
- Stern, R. E., & O'Brien, K. J. (2012). Politics at the boundary: mixed signals and the Chinese state. *Modern China, 38*(2), 174-198.
- Štětka, V., & Mazák, J. (2014). Whither slacktivism? Political engagement and social media use in the 2013 Czech Parliamentary elections. *Cyberpsychology, 8*(3).
- Stokes, A. Q., & Atkins-Sayre, W. (2018). PETA, rhetorical fracture, and the power of digital activism. *Public Relations Inquiry, 7*(2), 149-170.
- Sun, X., Huang, R., & Yip, N. (2017). Dynamic political opportunities and environmental forces linking up: A case study of anti-PX contention in Kunming. *Journal of Contemporary China, 26*(106), 536-548.
- Sun, X., Wang, H., Li, J., & Zhang, Y. (2011). Injecting purpose and trust into data anonymisation. *Computers & Security, 30*(5), 332-345.
- Svirsky, M. G. (2010). Defining activism. *Deleuze Studies, 4*, 163-182.

- Tai, Z. (2015). Networked resistance: Digital populism, online activism, and mass dissent in China. *Popular Communication*, 13(2), 120-131.
- Tan, J. (2016). Aesthetics of queer becoming: Comrade Yue and Chinese community-based documentaries online. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 33(1), 38-52.
- Taylor, P. A. (2005). From hackers to hacktivists: speed bumps on the global superhighway? *New Media & Society*, 7(5), 625-646.
- Taylor, V. (1989). Social movement continuity: The women's movement in abeyance. *American Sociological Review*, 54(5), 761-775.
- Taylor, V. (2000). Mobilizing for change in a social movement society. *Contemporary Sociology*, 29(1), 219-230.
- Taylor, V., Rupp, L. J., & Gamson, J. (2004). Performing protest: Drag shows as tactical repertoire of the gay and lesbian movement. In D. J. Myers & D. M. Cress (Eds.), *Authority in contention* (pp. 105-137). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Taylor, V., & Whittier, N. E. (1992). Collective identity in social movement communities: Lesbian feminist mobilization. In A. D. Morris & C. M. Mueller (Eds.), *Frontiers in social movement theory* (pp. 104-129). Yale University Press.
- Temple, B. (1997). Watch your tongue: Issues in translation and cross-cultural research. *Sociology*, 31(3), 607-618.
- Theocharis, Y., Lowe, W., Van Deth, J. W., & García-Albacete, G. (2015). Using Twitter to mobilize protest action: online mobilization patterns and action repertoires in the Occupy Wall Street, Indignados, and Aganaktismenoi movements. *Information, Communication & Society*, 18(2), 202-220.
- Thurmond, V. A. (2001). The point of triangulation. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 33(3), 253-258.
- Tong, J., & Zuo, L. (2014). Weibo communication and government legitimacy in China: a computer-assisted analysis of Weibo messages on two 'mass incidents'. *Information, Communication & Society*, 17(1), 66-85.

- Townsend, L., & Wallace, C. (2016). *Social media research: A guide to ethics*. University of Aberdeen. <https://www.bolton.ac.uk/assets/Uploads/Social-media-ethics-study-Aberdeen-2018.pdf>
- Townsend, L., & Wallace, C. (2017). The ethics of using social media data in research: A new framework. In K. Woodfield (Ed.), *The ethics of online research (Advances in research ethics and integrity, Vol. 2)* (pp. 189-207). Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Treré, E. (2015). Reclaiming, proclaiming, and maintaining collective identity in the #YoSoy132 movement in Mexico: An examination of digital frontstage and backstage activism through social media and instant messaging platforms. *Information, Communication & Society, 18*(8), 901-915.
- Treré, E. (2018). The sublime of digital activism: Hybrid media ecologies and the new grammar of protest. *Journalism & Communication Monographs, 20*(2), 137-148.
- Trott, V. (2018). Connected feminists: foregrounding the interpersonal in connective action. *Australian Journal of Political Science, 53*(1), 116-129.
- Tu, J., & Lee, T. (2014). The effects of media usage and interpersonal contacts on the stereotyping of lesbians and gay men in China. *Journal of Homosexuality, 61*(7), 980-1002.
- Tucker, J. A., Guess, A., Barberá, P., Vaccari, C., Siegel, A., Sanovich, S., Stukal, D., & Nyhan, B. (2018). Social media, political polarization, and political disinformation: A review of the scientific literature. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3144139> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3144139>
- Tucker, J. A., Theocharis, Y., Roberts, M. E., & Barberá, P. (2017). From liberation to turmoil: Social media and democracy. *Journal of Democracy, 28*(4), 46-59.
- Turner, F. (2010). *From counterculture to cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth network, and the rise of digital utopianism*. University of Chicago Press.
- UNDP. (2016). *Being LGBTI in China: A National Survey on Social Attitudes towards Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Gender Expression*. https://www.asia-pacific.undp.org/content/dam/rbap/docs/Research%20&%20Publications/hiv_aids/UNDP-CH-PEG-Being%20LGBT%20in%20China_EN.pdf

- Valocchi, S. (2005). Not yet queer enough: The lessons of queer theory for the sociology of gender and sexuality. *Gender & Society, 19*(6), 750-770.
- van de Werff, T. (2010). The Struggle of the Tongzhi Homosexuality in China and the Position of Chinese ‘Comrades’. In I. Dubel & A. Hielkema (Eds.), *Urgency required: Gay and lesbian rights are human rights* (pp. 172-180). HIVOS.
- Van Dijk, J. (2020). *The network society*. Sage.
- Van Laer, J., & Van Aelst, P. (2010). Internet and social movement action repertoires: Opportunities and limitations. *Information, Communication & Society, 13*(8), 1146-1171.
- van Zomeren, M., & Iyer, A. (2009). Introduction to the Social and Psychological Dynamics of Collective Action. *Journal of Social Issues, 65*(4), 645-660.
- Varis, P. (2014). Digital ethnography. In A. Georgakopoulou & T. Spilioti (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of language and digital communication* (pp. 55-68). Routledge.
- Vegh, S. (2013). Classifying forms of online activism: The case of cyberprotests against the World Bank. In M. McCaughey & M. D. Ayers (Eds.), *Cyberactivism* (pp. 81-106). Routledge.
- Vie, S. (2014). In defense of “slacktivism”: The Human Rights Campaign Facebook logo as digital activism. *First Monday, 19*(4).
- Vivienne, S. (2011). Trans digital storytelling: Everyday activism, mutable identity and the problem of visibility. *Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review, 7*(1), 43-54.
- von Engelhardt, J., & Jansz, J. (2014). Challenging humanitarian communication: An empirical exploration of Kony 2012. *International Communication Gazette, 76*(6), 464-484.
- Wall, M. A. (2007). Social movements and email: expressions of online identity in the globalization protests. *New Media & Society, 9*(2), 258-277.
- Wallis, C., & Shen, Y. (2018). The SK-II #changedestiny campaign and the limits of commodity activism for women’s equality in neo/non-liberal China. *Critical Studies in Media Communication, 35*(4), 376-389.

- Wang, D., & Mark, G. (2015). Internet censorship in China: Examining user awareness and attitudes. *ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction (TOCHI)*, 22(6), 1-22.
- Wang, D., Zhou, T., & Wang, M. (2021). Information and communication technology (ICT), digital divide and urbanization: Evidence from Chinese cities. *Technology in Society*, 64, 101516.
- Wang, J. (2019). *The other digital China: Nonconfrontational activism on the social web*. Harvard University Press.
- Wang, M., & Jiang, Z. (2017). The Defining Approaches and Practical Paradox of Sensitive Data: An Investigation of Data Protection Laws in 92 Countries and Regions and 200 Data Breaches in the World. *International Journal of Communication*, 11, 3286-3305.
- Wang, Q. (2020). *The Chinese Internet: The online public sphere, power relations and political communication*. Routledge.
- Wang, S., & Huang, C. (2017). Word sketch lexicography: new perspectives on lexicographic studies of Chinese near synonyms. *Lingua Sinica*, 3(1), 1-22.
- Wang, S. Y. (2021). Unfinished revolution: An overview of three decades of LGBT activism in China. *Made in China Journal*, 6(1), 90-95.
- Wang, Y., Belair-Gagnon, V., & Holton, A. E. (2020). The technologization of news acts in networked news participation: LGBT self-media in China. *International Journal of Communication*, 14, 4871-4889.
- Wang, Y., Hu, Z., Peng, K., Xin, Y., Yang, Y., Drescher, J., & Chen, R. (2019). Discrimination against LGBT populations in China. *The Lancet Public Health*, 4(9), e440-e441.
- Wang, Y., Li, H., Zuo, J., & Wang, Z. (2019). Evolution of online public opinions on social impact induced by NIMBY facility. *Environmental Impact Assessment Review*, 78, 106290.
- Wang, Z. (2016). *Progress noted for LGBT employees*. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2016-06/08/content_25646207.htm
- Waugh, B., Abdipanah, M., Hashemi, O., Rahman, S. A., & Cook, D. M. (2013). The influence and deception of Twitter: The authenticity of the narrative and

- slacktivism in the Australian electoral process. In *The Proceedings of 14th Australian Information Warfare Conference*.
- Webster, F. (2014). *Theories of the information society*. Routledge.
- Wei, T. (2015). A look at the Beijing Conference through lesbian eyes. *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 21(3), 316-325.
- Wei, W. (2020). The normalization project: The progress and limitations of promoting LGBTQ research and teaching in mainland China. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 67(3), 335-345.
- Wei, W., & Yan, Y. (2021). Rainbow parents and the familial model of tongzhi (LGBT) activism in contemporary China. *Chinese Sociological Review*, 53(5), 451-472.
- Weibo. (n.d.-a). *User Privacy Policy*. <https://weibo.com/signup/v5/privacy>
- Weibo. (n.d.-b). *User Protocol*. <https://weibo.com/signup/v5/protocol>
- Weibo. (n.d.-c). *微博超话公约* [Weibo Super Topic Convention]. <https://huati.weibo.cn/about/convention>
- Wellman, B., Haase, A. Q., Witte, J., & Hampton, K. (2001). Does the Internet increase, decrease, or supplement social capital? Social networks, participation, and community commitment. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 45(3), 436-455.
- Welsh, E. (2002). Dealing with data: Using NVivo in the qualitative data analysis process. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 3(2), Art. 26.
- White, M. (2010). *Clicktivism is ruining leftist activism*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/aug/12/clicktivism-ruining-leftist-activism>
- Whittier, N. (2004). The Consequences of Social Movements for Each Other. In D. A. Snow, S. A. Soule, & H. Kriesi (Eds.), *The Blackwell companion to social movements* (pp. 531-551). Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Wiederhold, A. (2015). Conducting fieldwork at and away from home: Shifting researcher positionality with mobile interviewing methods. *Qualitative Research*, 15(5), 600-615.
- Williams, S. (2016). #SayHerName: Using digital activism to document violence against black women. *Feminist Media Studies*, 16(5), 922-925.

- Wilson, V. (2014). Research methods: triangulation. *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, 9(1), 74-75.
- Woolley, S. C. (2016). Automating power: Social bot interference in global politics. *First Monday*, 21(4).
- Worth, H., Jing, J., McMillan, K., Su, C., Fu, X., Yuping, Z., Zhao, R., Cui, J., Kelly-Hanku, A., & Youchun, Z. (2017). "Under the Same Quilt": The Paradoxes of Sex Between Men in the Cultural Revolution. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 64(1), 61-74.
- Wu, A. X. (2014). Ideological Polarization Over a China-as-Superpower Mind-set: An Exploratory Charting of Belief Systems Among Chinese Internet Users, 2008–2011. *International Journal of Communication*, 8, 2650-2679.
- Wu, J. (2003). From "long yang" and "dui shi" to tongzhi: Homosexuality in China. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy*, 7(1-2), 117-143.
- Wu, X. (2021). Fan leaders' control on Xiao Zhan's Chinese fan community. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 36.
- Wu, Y., Mou, Y., Wang, Y., & Atkin, D. (2018). Exploring the de-stigmatizing effect of social media on homosexuality in China: An interpersonal-mediated contact versus parasocial-mediated contact perspective. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 28(1), 20-37.
- Wu, Z., & Lu, Y. (2017). A study on micro-blog sentiment analysis of public emergencies under the environment of big data. In *2017 29th Chinese Control and Decision Conference (CCDC)* (pp. 4435-4438).
- Xiao, M., & Yi, H. (2016). The Chinese Image on Twitter: An Empirical Study Based on Text Mining. *Journalism and Mass Communication*, 6(8), 469-479.
- Xiao, Q. (2011a). Liberation technology: the battle for the Chinese internet. *Journal of Democracy*, 22(2), 47-61.
- Xiao, Q. (2011b). The rise of online public opinion and its political impact. In S. L. Shirk (Ed.), *Changing media, changing China* (pp. 202-224). Oxford University Press.
- Xie, L., & Van Der Heijden, H. (2010). Environmental movements and political opportunities: The case of China. *Social Movement Studies*, 9(1), 51-68.

- Xie, Y., & Peng, M. (2018). Attitudes toward homosexuality in China: Exploring the effects of religion, modernizing factors, and traditional culture. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 65(13), 1758-1787.
- Xie, Y., Qiao, R., Shao, G., & Chen, H. (2017). Research on Chinese social media users' communication behaviors during public emergency events. *Telematics and Informatics*, 34(3), 740-754.
- Xing, Y., Wang, X., Qiu, C., Li, Y., & He, W. (2022). Research on opinion polarization by big data analytics capabilities in online social networks. *Technology in Society*, 68, 101902.
- Xu, L. (2013). *LGBT students deal with bullying*. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/sunday/2013-01/06/content_16086605.htm
- Xu, X. (2021). To Repress or to co-opt? Authoritarian control in the age of digital surveillance. *American Journal of Political Science*, 65(2), 309-325.
- Yamamoto, M., Kushin, M. J., & Dalisay, F. (2015). Social media and mobiles as political mobilization forces for young adults: Examining the moderating role of online political expression in political participation. *New Media & Society*, 17(6), 880-898.
- Yang, G. (2009). *The power of the Internet in China: Citizen activism online*. Columbia University Press.
- Yang, G. (2014). Internet activism & the party-state in China. *Daedalus*, 143(2), 110-123.
- Yang, G. (2016). Narrative Agency in Hashtag Activism: The Case of #BlackLivesMatter. *Media and Communication*, 4(4), 13-17.
- Yang, G. (2018). Demobilizing the Emotions of Online Activism in China: A Civilizing Process. *International Journal of Communication*, 12, 1945-1965.
- Yang, Y. (2016a). Film policy, the Chinese government and soft power. *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*, 14(1), 71-91.
- Yang, Y. (2016b). How large-scale protests succeed in China: The story of issue opportunity structure, social media, and violence. *International Journal of Communication*, 10, 2895-2914.

- Yang, Y. (2019). Bargaining with the state: The empowerment of Chinese sexual minorities/LGBT in the social media era. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 28(118), 662-677.
- Yu, M. (2018). Rethinking migrant children schools in China: activism, collective identity, and guanxi. *Comparative Education Review*, 62(3), 429-448.
- Yu, Z. (2021). An empirical study of consumer video activism in China: protesting against businesses with short videos. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 14(3), 297-312.
- Yuen, S. (2014). Under the shadow of China. Beijing's policy towards Hong Kong and Taiwan in comparative perspective. *China Perspectives*, 2014(2), 69-76.
- Zeng, J. (2020). #MeToo as connective action: A study of the anti-sexual violence and anti-sexual harassment campaign on Chinese social media in 2018. *Journalism Practice*, 14(2), 171-190.
- Zeng, M. J. (2018). *From #MeToo to #RiceBunny: how social media users are campaigning in China*. <https://theconversation.com/from-metoo-to-ricebunny-how-social-media-users-are-campaigning-in-china-90860>
- Zhan, X., & Tang, S. Y. (2013). Political opportunities, resource constraints and policy advocacy of environmental NGOs in China. *Public Administration*, 91(2), 381-399.
- Zhang, C. (2018). *WeChatting American politics: Misinformation, polarization, and immigrant Chinese media*. Tow Center for Digital Journalism Publications. <https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/D89K5TPG/download>
- Zhang, J., Yan, Q., Guo, W., Gong, X., Cheng, M., & Yu, N. (2020). Rainbow over the Internet: How Internet use curtails homophobia in China. *Technology in Society*, 62, 101300.
- Zhang, L., & Pentina, I. (2012). Motivations and usage patterns of Weibo. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 15(6), 312-317.
- Zhang, L., & Wu, D. (2017). Media representations of China: A comparison of China Daily and Financial Times in reporting on the belt and road initiative. *Critical Arts*, 31(6), 29-43.
- Zhang, Y. (1998). *China in International Society since 1949: Alienation and beyond*. Palgrave.

- Zhang, Y. (2015). Nationalism and Beyond: Writings on Nüjie and the Emergence of a New Gendered Collective Identity in Modern China. *Nan Nü*, 17(2), 245-275.
- Zhao, L. (2021). 他/TA/X 她: What Pronouns Do Chinese Queer People Use? <https://radiichina.com/pronouns-chinese-queers/>
- Zhao, M. (2020). Chinese diaspora activism and the future of international solidarity. *Made in China journal*, 5(2), 97-101.
- Zheng, L., Su, Y., & Zheng, Y. (2017). The intersection of gender and sexuality: Sexism shapes men's same-sex sexuality in terms of self-label identification and partner choice in China. *Sex Roles*, 77(1), 125-134.
- Zheng, Y. (2022). *Technological empowerment: The Internet, state, and society in China*. Stanford University Press.
- Zhou, M., & Wang, H. (2016). Participation in anti-Japanese demonstrations in China: Evidence from a survey on three elite universities in Beijing. *Journal of East Asian Studies*, 16(3), 391-413.
- Zhou, T. (2018). Jack'd, Douban Group, and Feizan. com: The impact of cyberqueer techno-practice on the Chinese gay male experience. In J. T. Grider & D. van Reenen (Eds.), *Exploring erotic encounters* (pp. 27-43). Brill.
- Zhou, Y. (2015). Pursuing soft power through cinema: censorship and double standards in mainland China. *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, 9(3), 239-252.
- Zhu, J. (2018). 'Unqueer' kinship? Critical reflections on 'marriage fraud' in mainland China. *Sexualities*, 21(7), 1075-1091.
- Zhu, T., Phipps, D., Pridgen, A., Crandall, J. R., & Wallach, D. S. (2013). The Velocity of Censorship: {High-Fidelity} Detection of Microblog Post Deletions. In *22nd USENIX Security Symposium (USENIX Security 13)* (pp. 227-240).
- Zuboff, S. (2019). *The age of surveillance capitalism: The fight for a human future at the new frontier of power*. Profile Books Ltd.