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NEW MOTHERS' MANAGEMENT OF COMPLAINTS IN COMPUTER-MEDIATED
COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

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NEW MOTHERS' MANAGEMENT OF COMPLAINTS IN COMPUTER-MEDIATED
COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

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Abstract

This study examines new mothers' complaining behaviors in computer-mediated communication (CMC) channels and investigates mothers' privacy management when self-disclose family issues online. This study includes data collected through face-to-face in-depth interviews and interview surveys with new mothers (i.e., who had at least one child younger than 3 years old at the time), which were analyzed through constant comparative methods and descriptive statistics. In total, 35 participants were recruited for this study, including 16 American mothers and 19 Chinese mothers who live in the US. The study examines new mothers' complaining behaviors in CMC channels through two steps. First, I explore the facilitators and barriers that influence new mothers' choices when selecting the appropriate CMC channel(s) to complain about motherhood-related challenges and problems. Then I categorize these facilitators and barriers into four areas of consideration (i.e., emotion management, impression management, information control, and problem-solving) that mothers may think of when balancing the benefits and risks of using any CMC channel to express their negative feelings. Based on the Communication Privacy Management theory, I also investigate mothers' self-disclosure behaviors in different channels. From level 1 (vague) to level 5 (full of details), mothers disclosed sensitive and private family issues with varying levels when complaining in different channels. The four areas of consideration can be applied again to explain their choices. I further identify four underlying factors across these areas of consideration that affect new mothers' online complaining behavior: mothers' expected social support types, the nature of the complaining subject, online privacy literacy, and cultural differences. Finally, I propose an integrated model of negative self-disclosure via CMC which demonstrates all the factors that potentially impact people's channel selection and message-framing processes.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of Problem

Becoming a mother is a life-changing event that can be stressful and challenging, especially for women who are pregnant for the first time. The period of time from conception to one year after childbirth entails multiple physical and psychological changes, including but not limited to weight gain, body shape change, exhaustion, anxiety, and depression (Hung et al., 2011; Wu & Hung, 2016). Based on the Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS), the most recent research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows that about 1 in 8 women with a recent live birth experience symptoms of postpartum depression (CDC, 2022). In addition to the physical and psychological impacts on the life of first-time mothers, the transition to motherhood also involves a great deal of social adjustments and engagement in developmental tasks (e.g., learning new skills of infant care; Leahy-Warren et al., 2011; Stapleton et al., 2012). Some new mothers may even face issues of inadequate financial resources, unemployment, and social isolation (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2017).

Due to the considerable stress and difficulty of new motherhood, women have a high demand for social support from formal (e.g., hospitals and health professionals) and informal sources (e.g., partners and friends) (Dennis, 2010; Dennis & Ross, 2006; Sword & Watt, 2005). The support generally includes informational (e.g., advice and guidance), emotional (e.g., encouragement and comfort), and instrumental (e.g., childcaring and financial assistance) (Barnett et al., 2015; Cutrona & Russell, 1990; Taraban et al., 2017). Social support is highly valued by new mothers (Leahy-Warren, 2005). There is strong evidence showing that adequate social support provides a buffer between stress and parenting (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2017; Cohen

& Wills, 1985). Inadequate support is a significant factor in developing postpartum depression and anxiety (Glazier et al., 2004; Robertson et al., 2004).

Before delivering their babies, women usually hold expectations about the social support they will receive (Harwood et al., 2007). In addition, first-time mothers tend to have optimistic expectations. The discrepancy between their (unrealistic) expectations and reality can contribute to their disappointment and distress, which may lead to less satisfaction with their transitions to motherhood (Biehle & Mickelson, 2012; Roy et al., 2014). One way to vent their dissatisfaction is by expressing their distress (i.e., complaining or venting) to others in their support networks, including their partners, family members, friends, and even acquaintances (e.g., offline and online support group peers). Common subjects that new mothers complain about include unequal involvement in childcare and household responsibility (Cowan & Cowan, 2000).

Besides traditional ways of complaining in face-to-face settings, Internet technology today enables individuals to express emotions through various mediated channels such as social networking sites (SNSs), online forums, instant messaging, etc. Complaining through computer-mediated communication (CMC) channels could be a double-edged sword. On the positive side, women can freely express their thoughts and emotions without hurting anyone's feelings and even protect their own faces by anonymously sharing their stories (e.g., a new mother can complain about her husband's unsupportiveness in childcaring on an online parenting forum without hurting her husband's feeling and face). On the negative side, complaining about motherhood involves a tremendous amount of personal and sensitive information. Disclosing such information online, especially on channels like SNSs where an individual can be easily recognized, can result in a loss of personal privacy. As a unique kind of self-disclosure, whether the outcome of complaining is positive or negative may depend on the context (i.e., the channel

where people complain), recipients' closeness with the discloser (Rains & Brunner, 2015), the way of complaining (e.g., serious complaining or humorous complaining; McGraw et al., 2015), and the degree of disclosure (i.e., the depth and breadth of information; Taylor et al., 1973). Therefore, to maximize the benefits of complaining while minimizing the possibility of negative experiences, it may be necessary for new mothers who seek emotional support through CMC to establish different "rules" or follow specific norms while navigating different types of CMC channels.

Purpose of the Dissertation

Complaining as an important facet of interpersonal communication has been overlooked in the past decade (Hall et al., 2013). Most recent complaint studies are within the area of consumer dissatisfaction and descriptively discuss customers' complaining behaviors and corporations' coping strategies (e.g., Einwiller & Steilen, 2015; Garding & Bruns, 2015), with only some early work touching the core issues (e.g., conceptualization, functions, and consequences) about complaining in social relationships (e.g., Gottman, 1982; Hall et al., 2013; Kowalski, 1996). For example, John Gottman has extensive research on interpersonal complaints and their impact on married couples (Carrere & Gottman, 1999; Gottman, 1982). However, these early studies were conducted before the pervasive usage of CMC and mainly explored the process of how a complaint was issued to one another without consideration of the rippling effects in CMC contexts, thus they are insufficient to explain individuals' complaining behaviors in this digital age. One of the specific aims of this dissertation is to examine individuals' perceived appropriate complaining behaviors across different types of communication technology.

In addition, privacy management can be an ongoing and ever-changing process (Bute & Vik, 2010). This is especially the case when individuals frame their complaints to different target recipients if they want to get the most support with minimal risk of losing privacy. According to the Communication Privacy Management Theory (CPM), an individual sets privacy boundaries based on various criteria (e.g., context, risk-benefit ratio, and relationship) (Petronio, 2002). Individuals negotiate between revealing and concealing to balance their control over private information. This has implications for individuals who are coping with life stressors that develop over time (Bute & Vik, 2010). The transition to motherhood is an example of such stressors thus providing a proper context for the present study.

Therefore, another objective of this study is to examine CPM by investigating new mothers' self-disclosure behaviors on various CMC channels as well as advance the theory by proposing a model theorizing the decision-making process in individuals' negative self-disclosure and privacy management intentions and behaviors within the context of CMC. CPM was developed before the proliferation of Internet use among the general public. Although there is an increasing amount of research applying CPM to investigate how people manage their privacy online in recent years (see reviews in Baruh et al., 2017b), most of the studies focused on one or two particular platforms (e.g., Facebook and Twitter). One major contribution of the current study is to systemically demonstrate the factors and their influence on how individuals shift their negative self-disclosure strategies and manage privacy boundaries while navigating across a wide set of CMC channels.

CPM also proposed that culture is an important factor affecting the privacy rules that individuals adopt (Petronio, 2002). Within this area, researchers have studied the relationship between the culture and self-disclosure (e.g., Rui & Stefanone, 2013), culture and privacy

expectations (e.g., Petronio, 2002), as well as the privacy and face negotiation (e.g., Cho & Sillars, 2015). Another aim of the dissertation is to explore cultural influences on new mothers' complaining behaviors and their privacy management techniques across different types of communication technology. I compare the United States and China – two representative countries with different cultural norms based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions – on how mothers from these two cultures self-disclose negative parts of their new motherhood and manage the privacy boundary differently while disclosing on CMC channels (Hofstede, 2001).

In summary, this dissertation will answer three questions:

RQ1: What are new mothers' levels of self-disclosure in different types of CMC channels?

RQ2: What are the areas of consideration that are central to new mothers' decisions when contemplating whether to engage in negative self-disclosure in a CMC channel?

RQ3: What are the facilitators and barriers for such considerations?

There are five chapters in the dissertation. The second chapter reviews the extant literature on major challenges of transitioning to motherhood that potentially cause mothers' negative emotions, the ways of new communication technology facilitate or impede support-seeking behaviors, and individuals' privacy management intentions and behaviors in self-disclosure. The third chapter presents the research methods, including study design (i.e., face-to-face interview), participant recruitment (American and Chinese new mothers), and data analysis (i.e., constant comparative method). The fourth chapter reports the findings addressing the research questions on mothers' selection of CMC channels for complaining and their strategies for privacy protection in online negative self-disclosure. The last chapter provides an in-depth discussion of the findings in combination with literature and proposes an integrated model that

systematically showcases the factors and their impact on individuals' negative self-disclosure and privacy management on CMC channels.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter reviews the existing literature on four areas: individuals' complaining intentions and behaviors, CMC technology and support-seeking behaviors, online privacy management, and cultural influences on all of the mentioned issues.

Specifically, the review starts with a summary of the literature on the challenges of new motherhood and the formation of mothers' intentions to express negative emotions and seek support online. Then I review prior research on individuals' complaining behaviors, including the conceptualization of complaining as well as the potential rewards and costs of complaining. The review suggests that most existing literature focuses on offline interpersonal communication settings, with a limited number of exceptions examining one or two specific types of online platforms (e.g., Facebook).

Next, I expand the reviewing scope by exploring literature on individuals' self-disclosure (not limited to complaining) and support-seeking intentions and behaviors in CMC settings in particular. At the beginning is a summary of common types of CMC technology individuals use for disclosure and support seeking (i.e., online support groups and forums, SNSs, private CMC services such as Skype), followed by a review of how technology facilitates or impedes the whole communication process.

Considering that one focus of the dissertation is to investigate individuals' privacy management behaviors during online self-disclosure, the third section of the chapter reviews the Communication Privacy Management Theory (CPM) which serves as the theoretical foundation of the dissertation, and specific privacy management strategies individuals generally use in both offline and online contexts. The review helps me examine the CPM and further advance the

theory by proposing a systemic model that presents individuals' negative self-disclosure and privacy management intentions and behaviors when navigating CMC channels.

Cultural differences have been demonstrated to influence individuals' self-disclosure, support-seeking, and privacy management behaviors. The last section of this chapter reviews cultural differences between the United States and China – the two subjects studied in the dissertation, and how the differences may affect individuals from the two cultural backgrounds regarding their online complaining and privacy protection behaviors.

Complaining Intentions and Behaviors

Why do New Mothers Complain?

Challenges to New Motherhood. The transition to motherhood introduces considerable stress to new mothers as they need to face an array of challenges and adjustments, such as physical changes (e.g., loss of fitness) (Hung, 2007a), overwhelming infant care (e.g., feeding, pediatric appointment) and self-care tasks (e.g., postpartum recovery) (Barkin et al., 2014), and sleep deprivation (Feeney et al., 2001). Research shows that 30-40% of new mothers met the criteria for minor psychiatric disorders by the first month postpartum due to childbirth-related stress (Hung, 2007b), indicating that caring for new mothers' psychological health is an important issue which worth scholars' continuing attention.

Social support for new mothers is critical for optimal maternal well-being (Emmanuel et al., 2012). Parenting stress and support received can predict life satisfaction, a predictor of an individual's mental health (Howard, 2010; Pilar et al., 2014). While the fulfillment of support expectations can benefit satisfaction with childbirth (Christiaens & Bracke, 2007), lack of support may lead to vulnerable feelings during the transition period and a higher likelihood of experiencing maternal depressive symptoms (Bost et al., 2002). Specifically, a review of the

literature suggests three major challenges new mothers face that they have relatively high expectations for social support: excessive childcaring tasks, changing roles and responsibilities, and work-life unbalance.

First of all, new mothers are often physically and mentally exhausted from childcaring tasks. Although the birth of a child can affect the whole family, mothers are the primary caregivers in most cases even though fathers today have already been more involved in childcare tasks and housework than in the past (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). In some cultures (e.g., China), the grandparents are also important helpers in taking care of the child(ren) (Logsdon et al., 2006). However, studies have shown that even with other family members' help, mothers still spend twice as much time on childcare as other helpers (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). Mothers thus feel physically and mentally exhausted, especially in the early months of motherhood (Darvill et al., 2010).

Second, women struggle between the new role of being a mother and concurrent roles as a wife, daughter, friend, and employee, which potentially results in disruptions in their existing interpersonal networks and relationships (Knobloch & Satterlee, 2009). For example, they no longer have spare energy to work (Zhou, 2017), care for their husband or parents, or hang out with friends. Moreover, devoting most of their time to childcare and housework leaves new mothers isolated and lonely (Razurel et al., 2011), which can lead to depression.

The third primary challenge for new mothers is losing control and power in many aspects of their life. For instance, it is not uncommon that women are forced to become stay-at-home mothers due to childcare tasks and a financial burden (e.g., cannot afford the expenses of daycare or hiring a nanny; Roy et al., 2014). The loss of income, identity as an independent woman, and even power at home are negative consequences of leaving the job market (Kanji & Cahusac,

2015). Some working mothers are also frustrated because they have no choice but to support the family and leave the child(ren) to other helpers. In contrast, although men and women appear to be equal today in many areas, fatherhood still barely changes men's time allocation, ironically (Killewald & García-Manglano, 2016).

The overwhelming demands often exceed new mothers' expectations (Logsdon et al., 2006), especially for women who are not fully prepared (Barclay et al., 1997) or those who have overly optimistic expectations about their ability to navigate the transition and feelings of enjoyments and excitement after childbirth (Delmore-Ko et al., 2000; Lawrence et al., 2007). Expectation violation is more likely to occur for first-time mothers as their expectations are not based on their own prior experience (Biehle & Mickelson, 2012). Moreover, while holding unrealistic high expectations is not beneficial to new mothers' emotion management as they may be easily disappointed, one should not assume the simple solution is to go in the opposite direction – holding low or even no expectations. Low expectations have been proven to result in nonoptimal parental and marital relationships across the transition to parenthood (Harwood et al., 2007). It is important to hold realistic expectations, and everyone may have different standards due to various types of personalities and living situations.

All the aforementioned challenges can potentially lead to new mothers' emotional fluctuation, especially when their social support expectations are violated (Theiss et al., 2013). Research has shown that people (including new mothers) may employ two major types of coping: problem-focused (managing underlying problems) and emotion-focused (managing distress) (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The focus of this dissertation – new mothers' complaining behavior – is a unique coping strategy that could be either problem-focused or emotion-focused, or both, depending on the context and mothers' choice. An alternative classification of coping

proposed by Duhachek (2005) includes three strategies: action, expressive and avoidance/denial. The action *coping* consists of “direct, objective attempts to manage a source of stress” (Duhachek, 2005, p. 44). *Expressive* strategy is aimed at emotional venting and support-seeking to relieve stress. *Avoidance* and *denial* are passive ways of dealing with the problems, such as creating “psychic or physical distance between oneself and a stressor” (Duhachek, 2005, p. 46). The behavior of complaining leans towards active and expressive strategies. A couple of early studies on the association between emotional expression and health condition (e.g., Pennebaker, 1997b; Watson & Pennebaker, 1989) have already demonstrated that providing individuals opportunities to disclose deep feelings can significantly improve their physical and mental health, indicating that complaining is an effective means for new mothers to regain psychological health.

In summary, the factors influencing new mothers’ emotions include but are not limited to prenatal stress, physical discomfort, maternal inefficacy, significantly decreased amount of private and leisure time, and maladaptive coping strategies (Christiaens & Bracke, 2007; De Caroli & Sagone, 2014). The negative emotions will not only damage the mothers’ own health but also affect the child(ren)’s development since psychological stress interferes with the quality of the parenting (see Model of Parenting in Belsky, 1984; Ayala-Nunes et al, 2017). Therefore, new mothers are eager to express their distress and obtain support from as many sources as possible. Motherhood involves continuous negotiations, which may help adjust their emotions (Emmanuel et al., 2011). Regarding complaining, what to complain, to whom they complain, and how to complain are critical elements in the negotiations new mothers make.

Development of Complaining Intentions. All challenges mentioned above are potential contributors to new mothers’ complaining behaviors — a form of social confrontation.

Complaining is a coping strategy aiming to vent negative emotions to release stress (Tsarenko & Strizhakova, 2013). The discussion in the previous section infers three significant causes of new mothers' complaining behaviors.

First, complaining intentions and behaviors result from discrepancies between new mothers' (unrealistic) expectations and reality. For example, they may expect new fathers to take more responsibilities for housework while fathers simply assume the division of labor remains the same as before. The division of childcare and household labor – which reflects fairness and equality in marriage – is one of the greatest sources of conflict between new parents (Roy et al., 2014). The increased burden of childcare responsibilities (Doss et al., 2009) and decreased energy devoted to marital relationship (Cowan & Cowan, 2000) are beyond some new mothers' anticipation, which triggers their intentions to complain. In addition to partners, new mothers often expect help and support from other intimate relationships (e.g., parents). A deteriorated relationship with intimate connections – whether these be spouses or extended family – may result in mothers' complaining behaviors. A worse situation is that new mothers never communicate their expectations with their partner or other helpers, and they just assume the other one would know (Biehle & Mickelson, 2012). Such defective communication potentially increases the likelihood of disappointment, which then leads to their willingness to vent over other channels.

Second, complaining can be triggered by dissatisfaction with the status quo from comparison. Literature shows that many couples develop expectations based on their experience with their family of origin and other social connections (Belsky & Isabella, 1985; Perren et al., 2005). They will be disappointed and dissatisfied when they feel their life is worse than others after comparison. Some argue that such a comparison is meaningless since every woman has her

own evaluation criteria. For example, perceptions of fairness in the division of labor between new parents is not necessarily based on actual time spent on childcare or household tasks but could be on their views of gender roles (Feeney et al., 2001). Some mothers would rather take full responsibility for childcare and have their partners support the family financially. The reality is, even though a woman is aware that that comparison is unreasonable or not meaningful, she cannot help making the comparison, which oftentimes results in her worse mood and a higher desire to complain.

Above are macro-level causes of new mothers' complaining intentions and behaviors. Researchers have also investigated the micro-level (i.e., psychological predictors) influential factors. Studies have shown that personal characteristics – such as sensitivity to unsatisfying experiences (Kowalski, 1996), propensity to complain (Harris & Mowen, 2001), attitude toward complaining (Thøgersen et al., 2009), prior experience with complaining (Velázquez et al., 2010) – are essential predictors of complaining behavior. For instance, a new mother who is a habitual complainer and can always get compensation for her complaints is more likely to complain about motherhood than someone who seldom complains or is used to having negative experiences of complaining (e.g., little feedback received, intimate relationship damaged due to complaining).

It should be noted that because of these micro-level individual differences, the level of dissatisfaction, the willingness to complain, and the way of complaining may vary among mothers experiencing the same situation (Thøgersen et al., 2009). In other words, both expectations and experience are subjective perceptions that can be different from person to person.

Some scholars pointed out that gender is also a significant predictor of people's complaining behavior. For example, studies have revealed that women complain more than men,

which is because women tend to experience greater dissatisfaction compared with men (Twenge et al., 2003). This dissertation focuses on new mothers' complaining behaviors simply because in the majority of cases mothers are the primary caregivers who have a higher likelihood – compared with new fathers – experiencing emotional fluctuations due to more violated expectations (Acquisti, 2004; Belsky & Isabella, 1985) as well as facing a greater restriction of freedom because of childcare tasks (Twenge et al., 2003). It is still meaningful for future scholars to examine new fathers' complaining behaviors and compare the two groups to testify to the validity of gender as a predictor of individuals' complaining intentions and behaviors.

Conceptualization of Complaining

An early study of complaint (DeCapua, 1989) identifies the components and subcomponents of complaints. The primary components are the presentation of the problem and the solicitation of remediation (Acquisti, 2004) (DeCapua, 1989). Problem presentation may include two parts, announcement of the problem and criticism. The former one is simply a value-neutral statement whereas the latter one contains valence comments. For example, when a mother says “My husband doesn’t know how to change a diaper”, this is only a statement of the problem. However, when she says “I can’t believe until now my husband still doesn’t even know how to change a diaper”, this is a criticism. Clearly, criticism is more face-threatening for both parties and less acceptable for the complaint receiver. In terms of soliciting remediation, there are also two ways: request for repair and demand for repair (DeCapua, 1989). It is a request when a mother says to her husband “Could you help me feed the baby tonight?”. If she says “I won’t get up tonight. It’s your shift feeding the baby.”, that is a demand. The former tends to be softer and more face-saving for the receiver. New mothers may frame their complaint messages

in different ways when navigating various types of CMC channels and facing different audience groups.

The subcomponents of complaints are optional. DeCapua (1989) identified three subcomponents based on the degree of face-threatening. The most face-threatening moves are threats and emotional expressions. For example, a mother expresses her disappointment with threats, “I swear I’ll divorce you if you keep ignoring all the housework. I’m disappointed in you!” Less face-threatening moves include justifications and clarifications. The former refers to the complainer legitimizing the complaint. For instance, when a mother is angry with her partner’s wrong way of holding the baby, she may complain in this way, “Our pediatrician stressed several times that we should hold the baby’s neck before he could support it by himself.” Clarifications refer to complainers’ offering the target an option of providing additional information. An example could be a mother who speaks to her husband, “Why don’t you hold him? He’s been crying for a while.” The mother offers her husband a chance to explain his behavior when she is complaining. Finally, the most face-maintaining move is to let the responsible party “off the hook”. For example, the mother says, “I guess you must be too tired to help me tonight.”

In this study, a complaint should show a new mother’s internal dissatisfaction toward any aspects of the social support she received or not received. With that being said, a complaint such as “I’m so tired” – a vague statement without additional explanation – is not considered as a valid complaint message. In comparison, a complaint such as “I’m so tired. My husband is not helping at all” contains information relevant to the social support one is not received, and it is a valid complaint message.

One thing to be noted is that it is not uncommon for new mothers to complain about their baby's behaviors, such as constant crying and high needs. However, these are irrelevant to social support since babies are not the ones whom mothers seek support from. Such complaints are beyond this study's scope unless mothers explicitly mention their dissatisfaction with receiving support from other parties when dealing with baby-related issues. For example, complaints such as "My daughter slept too much during the day and she won't sleep at night. I'm exhausted" will be excluded from discussion in this study as the complaint does not show relevancy to social support. Complaints like "My husband let our daughter sleep too much during the day, and she won't sleep now. My husband has to work at night, and now I'm all alone fighting with this energetic girl" are the kind of complaints to be discussed in the study as they show mother's dissatisfaction with her partner's behavior. The definition of complaining was explained and clarified by all participants in the interview.

Benefits and Costs of Complaining

Literature suggests that complaining is a rational activity and people tend to calculate the cost-benefit ratio before they decide to complain (Kowalski, 1996). Individuals try to maximize the rewards and minimize the costs associated with their complaining behaviors.

Complaining can benefit people in multiple ways. First, individuals are likely to achieve desired goals after complaining (Kowalski, 1996), such as influencing others' behaviors and perceptions (McGraw et al., 2015). For example, after a new mother complains about her husband's unsupportiveness, the husband realizes the issue and starts to take more responsibility for childcaring. Complaining reduces the discrepancy between new mothers' ideal and current states. Sometimes individuals may even complain because of the utility of complaining rather than dissatisfaction (Kowalski, 2002). In other words, once they notice that complaining is an

effective means of obtaining desired outcomes, they will complain even if there is an absence of dissatisfaction (Kowalski, 2002).

Second, complaining allows people to vent and get their frustration off their chest (Kowalski, 1996), which helps alleviate the detrimental effects of suppressing negative feelings (McGraw et al., 2015). Complainers can reveal their hostile feelings and feel better with or even without the complaint target's awareness. One great example of this is people often sitting in their cars while expressing dissatisfaction with others' driving (Kowalski, 2003). The complaining cannot change other drivers' behavior since they may not even realize that someone is angry with their driving. But the complainer usually feels better after venting. For new mothers who are experiencing excessive stress and are about to reach the point of burnout, complaining enables them to vent, which serves as an effective way of relieving negative emotions. Furthermore, complaining sometimes can be viewed as a passive control mechanism (or secondary control as suggested by Rothbaum et al., 1982) people use to reclaim some control by providing an alternative outlet for expressing dissatisfaction. Many mothers feel powerless to change their partners' unsupportive attitudes and behaviors, thus complaining to friends and peers from support groups is an alternative control mechanism that at least empowers them with the ability to manage their moods.

There are dark sides to complaining. First, when a wife is angry with her husband's performance in childcaring, direct complaining may not be the best strategy since it will likely damage their marital relationship. Complaining has been demonstrated to have adverse effects on the complainer and receiver, as well as their relationship (Kowalski, 2002). Especially when the audience (e.g., new fathers) is tired of hearing the constant whines and gripes, they may use ostracism as a response to such aversive behaviors since it is an effective way of distancing

themselves from excessive complaining (Williams, 1997). On the other hand, it is not a pleasant experience for the complainer (e.g., new mothers) either as they find themselves ostracized. Therefore, when new mothers are disappointed, many of them are not choosing to complain straight to their partners. Alternative choices include complaining to a third party, and a large number of women today employ CMC technology to express their negative feelings and seek support online.

Second, complaining may potentially impact individuals' physical and psychological well-being negatively (Smith & Brunner, 2016). For example, Weber and Solomon (2008) found that individuals' disclosing information about their illness can lead to more uncertainty, which generates additional stress. Likewise, complaining is likely to increase new mothers' anxiety and frustration rather than relief, especially when the outcome of complaining is against their expectations (e.g., receiving comfort and physical help).

Third, complaining about family-related issues involves sharing private information, which may cause privacy violations. Especially when women disclose their negative emotions to family outsiders who are not meant to receive the information, a phenomenon called *privacy turbulence* emerges (Petronio, 2002). In the specific context of the dissertation, a new mother's complaints usually include family information that is co-owned by herself and family members. Inappropriately revealing this type of information to a third party not only violates the mother's own privacy but also threatens other family members' privacy without their awareness. Therefore, individuals may make a decision by balancing the potential rewards and costs of self-disclosure. The Privacy Calculus Theory (Dinev & Hart, 2006) demonstrates that individuals often perform a calculus between the cost and the potential gain before they decide between disclosing and concealing the information.

Another negative consequence of complaining is image/face damage. For instance, new mothers are under a high level of stress from early pregnancy to the years after childbirth. During such a long period of time, they are afraid of being labeled or even stigmatized as chronic/habitual complainers or whiners due to excessive complaints (Kowalski, 2002). Especially that taking care of the newborn and self-care during the postpartum period involve tons of trivial matters (e.g., diaper changing, bottle washing), new mothers' frequent complaining about these "trivial matters" may result in others' negative attitude toward them (e.g., grumpy and argumentative) (Forest & Wood, 2012; McGraw et al., 2015). Listeners' moods may also be negatively impacted, even when they are not the targets being "attacked" (Joiner et al., 1999). For example, if mothers constantly complain to their close friends about their partners' irresponsibility, the friends may generate compassion fatigue after hearing too many complaints. It is possible that a phenomenon of the "domino effect of complaining" occurs, which refers to that one complaint leading to another which leads to more complaints, and the cycle continues (Kowalski, 2002).

Due to the aforementioned detrimental effects, people sometimes withhold their negative emotions to maintain relational harmony (Baxter & Dindia, 1990). As the Dyadic Power Theory (Dunbar, 2004) suggested, the relational power dynamics between individuals may affect their cognitions (e.g., outcome assessment, fear of conflict, appraisals of problem severity) of revealing or withholding negative feelings. Individuals who feel more powerful relative to others tend to disclose, and vice versa. However, it should be noted that suppressing negative feelings may introduce physical and mental discomfort that potentially affects individuals' health. In a marital relationship, people who often withhold complaints may distance themselves from their

partners, which is likely to result in less intimacy and relational dissatisfaction (Liu & Roloff, 2016).

Literature suggests one strategy to compromise the harmful effects of complaining is humorous complaining, which is “a behavioral expression of dissatisfaction that elicits a response characterized by the positive emotion of amusement, the appraisal that something is funny, and the tendency to laugh” (McGraw et al., 2015, p. 1155). To avoid being labeled negatively as a whiner, for instance, an individual may complain humorously to express negative emotions while also maintaining a favorable impression (McGraw et al., 2015; Wilbur & Campbell, 2011). Humorous complaints tend to be favored by the audience since they introduce a positive component for the entrainment (McGraw et al., 2015). Under certain circumstances, this type of complaint can be more successful in terms of helping individuals achieve their goals. For example, there are many viral memes and videos shared by users on Facebook and YouTube about fathers’ “funny” ways of taking care of their children. Considering that many behaviors shown are dangerous and harmful to children, people who post or share these contents are probably complaining. Maybe a mother perceives these behaviors as wrong yet still acceptable, and she shares the link with her husband to imply that she hopes him to improve and stop behaving the same even though these behaviors seem amusing. Humorous complaining is more likely to let the responsible party accept the accusation and change their behaviors. However, many times humorous complaints are not taken seriously or elicit a more sympathetic response than serious ones since they signal that the complainer may consider the negative situation acceptable (McGraw & Warren, 2010).

Literature (Alberts, 1988) also indicates that whether a complaint has a positive or negative effect depends on how the message is shared. If the complaining behavior occurs

between two people (usually a couple), the responsible party is more likely to accept the accusation, especially if the complaint only presents the problem rather than a personal attack. When an individual complains to a third party, the potential effect can be influenced by factors such as the ways of their complaining (e.g., serious vs. humorous complaints), the technology they apply (e.g., video chatting vs. Facebook posts), and the parameters of complaints (e.g., breadth – number of details revealed, depth – level of privacy and duration of self-revelation; Cozby, 1973). Examining the influencing factors and exploring their effects on individuals' complaining behaviors in the CMC context are the research objectives of this dissertation.

In summary, the benefits of complaining online are mostly intangible ones, such as obtaining compensation, receiving moral support and sympathy, and even creating a positive image (Kokolakis, 2017; Kowalski, 1996). However, sometimes people choose not to complain due to the potential risks of self-disclosure (Zhang et al., 2013) as well as time and effort being devoted. For instance, an individual may feel vulnerable after disclosing personal information in the complaints (Steuber & Solomon, 2011). There are risks (a) to self (e.g., being judged, harmed, stigmatized, or embarrassed; Afifi & Guerrero, 2000; Steuber & Solomon, 2012), (b) to the relationship (e.g., marital relationship damaged after posting complaints to the public; Afifi et al., 2005), and (c) to other people (e.g., husband's feelings being hurt when being criticized due to wife's complaints; Steuber & Solomon, 2011). In terms of the costs of time and energy, technology today significantly reduce such costs as it saves people great energy to meet others in person and talk. But people may still feel it time-consuming to create a complaining post online.

Technology and Support Seeking

Why Seeking Support through CMC?

The availability and accessibility of social support are crucial to women's positive experiences of pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum (Evans et al., 2012). Literature shows that women who are well-supported tend to report higher personal competence and a sense of stability, increased self-esteem, and decreased feelings of anxiety and depression (Emmanuel et al., 2011; Leahy-Warren, 2005). For new mothers, common sources of support are partners, family members (e.g., parents), close friends, health professionals, and peers from support groups (Thoits, 2011; Wu & Hung, 2016). Partners' support is usually perceived as the most important one. External support from friends and family members also contributes to childcare expectation fulfillment as such type of support can lessen mothers' need for partners' support (Nazarinia & Walker, 2009; Roy et al., 2014). Emotional support from partners and peers appears to be more helpful and beneficial compared to informational support (Leahy-Warren et al., 2011), and formal types of support (e.g., health professionals) are found to be less helpful and available than semi-formal and informal sources (e.g., peers) (Ghate & Hazel, 2002).

There are barriers for new mothers to obtain social support, including but not limited to (a) a reluctance to seek support, (b) fear of adding a burden on others, (c) afraid of being rejected, (d) geographic mobility, (e) broken of intimate relationships (e.g., divorce), and (f) a lack of reciprocity (Barkin et al., 2014; Brady & Guerin, 2010; Harrison et al., 1995). Among these obstacles, some are subjective reasons whereas others are simply technical problems. CMC provides significant help in terms of facilitating new mothers to seek and achieve social support online – especially in the informational and emotional support (Craig & Johnson, 2011; Rains & Keating, 2011). The following provides a review of common types of CMC technology that

individuals apply to solicit support, and the ways of technology facilitate or impede support-seeking behaviors.

Common CMC Technology for Social Support

New communication technology today offers a unique means for new mothers to obtain support and connect with others on an ongoing and active base. There are three common types of CMC technology used by new mothers for seeking and receiving social support: (a) online support groups and discussion forums, (b) SNSs like Facebook and WeChat, and (c) private interpersonal communication facilitated by Internet technology (e.g., instant messaging, email, video chatting).

Online Support Groups (OSGs) and Forums. In this digital age, individuals have the luxury of choosing from the increasing number of specialized and niche websites to seek rewards from self-disclosure (Bazarova & Choi, 2014). People's varying goals and motivations could influence their choices of which service to use.

Online support groups and forums have specialized themes of expertise, which enable users who are experiencing a particular type of life stressors to communicate and share their struggles and coping strategies with peers (Attard & Coulson, 2012), and develop weak ties who can offer unique resources, empathy, and advice (Rains et al., 2015). Studies have particularly identified the benefits of support groups for people with health problems, most of which can be extended to the situation of new mothers. For instance, OSGs appear to be especially welcomed by mothers not only because OSGs have most positive features of traditional face-to-face support groups that empower women through sharing emotions and experiences, developing social relationships, and acquiring information and skills related to pregnancy and postpartum care and childcaring (e.g., Barak et al., 2008; Lowe et al., 2009; Tanis, 2008), but also enable new

mothers to communicate with others either synchronously through instant messaging or asynchronously discussions. Evans et al. (2012) used content analysis to investigate the postings on an OSG of women who were suffering from postpartum depression. The findings show that women were able to receive emotional, informational and instrumental support from OSGs, and OSGs are considered a safe space to express feelings of distress, anxiety, and even dislike for their child(ren). Meanwhile, OSG members believe that their peers would understand and appreciate their circumstances (Evans et al., 2012). A sense of belonging can be created through OSGs, which may facilitate the relief of negative emotions. Another study also demonstrates that breastfeeding mothers benefit from OSGs as they can get support at any hour of the day (Gray, 2013).

Online discussion forums (especially parenting forums) provide new mothers with another venue to express emotions, discuss issues and solicit help. Researchers have identified three significant functions of online forums (Drentea & Moren-Cross, 2005): (a) emotional support, which allows users to express their feelings such as frustration and tiredness; (b) instrumental support, which enables individuals to share and receive both formal and informal information about parenting-related issues; and (c) community building/protection, which provides opportunities for relationship development and bonding.

In many situations, there is considerable overlap between OSGs and online forums in terms of the benefits to users. One significant difference between them is the degree of intimacy and the stableness of relationships among members. Most OSGs still have the same features as traditional offline support groups (Chung, 2013). For example, the constitution of an OSG and its membership can remain stable for a reasonable amount of time. In some cases, OSGs are merely an extension of face-to-face support groups. The members not only physically attend group

gatherings but also communicate virtually with each other online. Thus the relational ties between OSG members could be comparatively stronger than the ones between random users on online forums, but may still be weaker than those between members in traditional support groups. The strength of relational ties has a potential influence on individuals' self-disclosure strategies and privacy management behaviors.

In comparison, the constitution of forum users is much more discursive. Everyone can register an account and engage in one or more discussions. Some will become active users while others may never return to the website again. Each thread on a forum may attract different types of readers, and a temporary "support group" is formed during the conversation. Most participants in the discussion are strangers, and a temporary and super weak tie is built between them. For a poster, he/she is facing an ill-defined audience group, and it will be more difficult for him/her to anticipate the feedback to be received. Compared to OSGs, online forums have a more open information boundary (Petronio, 2002), meaning that anyone has access to the messages posted on the forums at any time, even years after the original posting. In contrast, many OSGs set limited access, meaning that only admitted members can participate in the discussions during a specific period.

Social Networking Sites (SNSs). SNSs such as Facebook are major platforms for new mothers to seek social support. SNSs allow users to broadcast their issues and problems to diverse audiences that comprise their online network and receive support from a variety of relational ties, both strong and weak (Blight et al., 2015; Carr et al., 2016). The term masspersonal communication describes individuals' posting behaviors on an SNS personal page (Carr & Hayes, 2015). According to its definition, sometimes a posting is interpersonal in nature

but accessible to a broad audience, whereas other times it is mass in nature but intended for a single receiver. Both scenarios can happen to new mothers while disclosing on SNSs.

A key feature of SNSs is that there is usually an extensive overlap between individuals' online and offline networks (e.g., Subrahmanyam et al., 2008). For example, Subrahmanyam et al. (2008) found that 49% of people's top offline friends were also their SNS friends, with 22% of respondents' networks possessing a 100% overlap. Therefore, new mothers may disclose in a different manner when communicating on SNSs than their complaining behaviors on anonymous forums or OSGs that only include weak-tie peers. For instance, they probably need to consider more before they decide to share the negative sides of new motherhood on their personal page, aiming to protect their personal image and family privacy as well as to avoid being judged or stigmatized by people from their real-life network. However, there is also a possibility that mothers are willing to take the aforementioned risks of sharing private issues on their personal SNS pages for appealing rewards such as obtaining physical help from real-life relationships. The essential argument here is that no matter which CMC technology an individual prefers to use, he/she may disclose differently due to various relational structures on different channels.

SNSs are unique in two other ways in regard to individuals' support-seeking behaviors. First, on SNSs, it is not uncommon to see people share links to articles, photos, and videos to represent their attitudes and opinions toward specific issues. Sometimes they would add additional comments with the link to clarify their opinions. In the specific context of the dissertation, for example, a mother may share on her Facebook page an article about a husband's irresponsible behaviors during his wife's postpartum recovery period, and she comments, "You need to read this!" and tags her husband. This behavior can be interpreted as a subtle expression

of her dissatisfaction with her husband's performance, and the viewers may offer emotional support (e.g., empathy, comfort) to her.

Another uniqueness of SNS interactions is the use of paralinguistic digital affordances (PDAs), which are small cues (e.g., *Likes* on Facebook, *Favorites* on Twitter, *Upvotes* on Reddit) within SNSs that “facilitate communication and interaction without specific language associated with their messages” (Hayes et al., 2016). Although some research suggests that PDAs are also a valid form of social support that people can offer online (Robinson et al., 2011), they may be much less powerful than other types of support which need more effort from the providers, such as long paragraphs of advice or discourse of similar experience, or even tangible support like financial help.

Private CMC Services. Internet technology provides more options for people to communicate with their offline network privately. Private CMC tools mainly include two categories: instant messaging (e.g., Facebook Messengers) and video chatting (e.g., Skype). The communication mode is almost identical to traditional face-to-face or phone call interactions. The technology brings convenience to individuals who prefer a more private channel to disclose personal information. For example, via Skype, a new mother can complain about her husband to her sister who lives in another city.

Facebook and WeChat. The interviews show that Facebook and WeChat are the two major SNSs that Americans and Chinese use for expressing emotions. Here I review the similarities and differences between the two, which helps my further exploration of American and Chinese mothers' varied behaviors of disclosing and privacy management on these two platforms.

In China, WeChat is an equivalent social networking tool to Facebook since the latter is blocked from access in mainland China. As of the 3rd quarter of 2019, WeChat had over 1.15 billion monthly active users (Statista Research Department, 2020b). In comparison, Facebook had 180 million monthly active users in the US and 2.4 billion worldwide (Statista Research Department, 2020a).

Facebook and WeChat are similar in terms of both offering the three common communication channels mentioned above. First of all, users of both platforms can create a personal page to post their updates – which on WeChat is called *Moments* - and users have control of who has access to the posts. Second, users can easily create groups for various purposes. For example, a leading channel for American mothers to complain and seek help is Facebook mother groups. On WeChat, there are also many mom groups that are either national or local, large or small. Another similarity between Facebook and WeChat is that both provide users with channels for private one-on-one conversation, which was mentioned by many participants as their top if not the most important channel to express their negative emotions after the baby arrived.

Facebook and WeChat differ from each other in the following aspects. On Facebook, people can view their friends' updates on the home page, which is similar to an individual's *Moments* section on WeChat. One of the biggest differences between the two is the privacy setting, which is critical for this research. On WeChat, users are able to set their posts' visibility in different ways depending on their needs¹. By default, WeChat enables public moments that allow anyone - including strangers - to view a user's 10 latest posts. Users can turn this feature

¹ More details can be found in WeChat help center, <https://help.wechat.com/cgi-bin/micromsg-bin/oshelpcenter?opcode=2&plat=android&lang=en&id=120813euEJVf141023RBfMjm>

off so that strangers will not be able to view any of their posts until the strangers are added as the poster's friends. Facebook recently developed a similar feature that users can lock their profiles that helps protect their posts and photos from people they do not know (Facebook, 2019). A locked profile includes features like profile picture protection and visibility control. The former means strangers can only see a small preview of one's current profile picture on their Facebook profile, and cannot like, share or comment on them. The latter refers to that posts and photos being only shared with Facebook friends. Posts that are always set as "public" are still visible to everyone. However, this new feature of a locked profile is not available to every Facebook user yet, meaning that most users have no control over strangers' viewing of their previous posts. Due to this significant difference between Facebook and WeChat, American interviewees are likely to be more hesitant to post negative things on Facebook than their Chinese counterparts because anything posted on Facebook could be "set in stone", which may cause trouble in the future.

WeChat users can also decide the time limit for their friends (here the *friends* mean anyone who is connected on WeChat) to see past posts. The three options are *last six months*, *last three days*, and *all*. Moments published before the selected time limit will be hidden from friends. This feature is very different from Facebook in which friends are able to view users' all previous posts. Facebook and WeChat both offer users the function to *like* or *comment* on other's posting. However, on WeChat, only common friends will be able to view each other's likes or comments. For example, Sophia has two friends, Mia and Emily, who do not know each other and are not connected on WeChat. When Sophia publishes a Moment and Mia comments, Emily can see Sophia's post but will not be able to view Mia's comment. On the contrary, if Mia and Emily are also WeChat friends, then Emily will be able to view Mia's comment. Facebook, in contrast, allows people to view strangers' feedback under any post. In this sense, WeChat

Moments provides a more private and free space for users to express themselves while decreasing the chance of users being “attacked” by strangers. Both WeChat and Facebook allow blocking so that users can select an audience by creating a list of individuals who can see or not see their posts.

The groups on Facebook and WeChat are different in many ways as well. In general, Facebook groups have three privacy settings: public, closed, and secret. For public groups, people on Facebook can search and find the group and request to join. One does not need to become a member to see stories about the group (e.g., news feed). Closed groups are much more private. Similar to public groups, the name of a closed group is searchable on Facebook and anyone on Facebook can request to join. However, before one becomes a member, he/she may not have access to view any group post. Secret groups are the most private ones. The group name cannot be searched or found on Facebook. One needs to be invited to join the group by a current member of the group.

Compared with Facebook groups, WeChat groups are between closed and secret regarding privacy settings. One can be invited by an in-group member to join the group or scan the group QR code shared by current members. Usually, the QR code is temporary and is only valid for a few minutes to seven days after it is generated. One must request a new QR code to join the group if he/she finds the code expired.

Facebook does not set a numerical limit on the number of people who can join a group. WeChat only allows a maximum of 500 people in a group. Also, once the group reaches 100 people, the group owner must link his/her bank card to the WeChat account to upgrade the group capacity to 500 people. There is no cost for the upgrade.

These similarities and differences between Facebook and WeChat are closely related to users' privacy. Facebook users' concerns may not be valid for WeChat users, and vice versa.

Technology as a Facilitator

New communication technology facilitates individuals' support-seeking behaviors by providing a couple of advantages in comparison with traditional face-to-face communication.

First of all, CMC allows people to transcend temporal and geographic boundaries to seek support (Carr et al., 2016). For instance, it is a time-consuming and challenging endeavor to mount an offline support group that new mothers feel valuable and comfortable (Brady & Guerin, 2010; Wright, 2012). Another issue of traditional face-to-face support groups is poor attendance due to a lack of transportation, conflict with childcaring schedule, geographical difficulties, and dislike of groups (Brady & Guerin, 2010; Smith et al., 1994). In comparison, OSGs and online forums provide new mothers with a high level of flexibility and enable them to communicate with others whenever they are convenient and anywhere they feel comfortable. They can also take their time to carefully frame a message before posting it, which could be a critical step to avoid negative consequences (e.g., being misunderstood because of the vague message).

Second, CMC affords people to interact with diverse relational networks (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). In other words, individuals are able to solicit support from their entire network (including established and new ones), and they will be offered diverse perspectives and experiences, both of which make those online platforms powerful sources of social support (Brady & Guerin, 2010; Wright, 2012). According to Granovetter (1973), there are strong and weak relational ties within one's social network, and people tend to seek support from strong connections (i.e., close relationships such as significant others and close friends). Recent studies

investigating social media overall support Granovetter's (1973) assertion (e.g., Rains & Keating, 2011; Wright & Miller, 2010). Scholars further found that supportive comments on SNSs were mostly from close relationships (Blight et al., 2015). All of these suggest that new mothers may still be willing to seek support and more likely to receive support from close relationships in the context of CMC. However, there are a few exceptions within the specific context of health communication. People with health problems prefer to solicit online support from weak ties to keep away from potential stigmatization from their close network and to obtain increased objectivity of feedback (Wright & Miller, 2010). Based on this, it is reasonable to presume that new mothers who are experiencing psychological stress would rather express their negative emotions to strangers from OSGs and anonymous forums.

Third, people seek support online to compensate for the deficiency in their offline social network (Leung, 2007). For example, introverted mothers who are too shy to complain about their life to someone they are familiar with in real life are more willing to disclose their inner thoughts to strangers online. For migrant mothers who have weak social connections where they currently live, and for those who do not have the time or energy to develop new relationships offline due to the birth of a newborn, soliciting online support will be a compromise. Chung (2013) further pointed out that individuals who are dissatisfied with the support received from offline contacts are willing to seek support online. Besides, research suggested a potential cumulative effect on online and offline support (Blight et al., 2015). Another recent study (Chan & Cheng, 2016) stated that for individuals who have high self-esteem, "online supportive interactions are psychologically more beneficial than their offline counterparts" (p. 751).

Fourth, many CMC channels (e.g., instant messaging) enable people to receive prompt feedback (Blight et al., 2015). For new mothers who have access to online social tools all day

long (as long as they have Internet access), they are easier to obtain immediate help and reduce stress in a time of need, as opposed to waiting until a particular person in their offline network is available (Blight et al., 2015).

Last but not least, research suggested that OSGs for mothers and parenting forums are almost exclusively female domains, which enhances the environment of self-disclosure as women tend to express their emotions in same-sex relationships (Brady & Guerin, 2010). Moreover, these online platforms allow users to provide narratives of their experiences as detailed as possible. Forgas (2011) found that negative mood increased the concreteness of the disclosed information, which could be the reason for many long narratives of complaints posted online.

Technology as a Barrier

There are limitations to communicating and seeking support through CMC technology. First, one major issue of OSGs and forums is that the relationships women develop there tend to be weak ties rather than strong ones, which may lead to frequent turnover in the membership (Chung, 2013). In other words, the relationship established on these online platforms are usually short-lived and is likely to limit the depth of the disclosure and support provided.

Second, the virtuous nature of technology-based interaction has decided the types of support individuals can get are mainly limited to intangible ones (e.g., comfort and encouragement; Hwang et al., 2011). For instance, if a new mother complains about her financial burden and seeks financial help, online platforms such as SNSs or forums are not good choices since most of her audience does not have the responsibility to support the mother financially. Of course, if one speaks to her parents about the issue via Skype, the parents may lend some money to the mother to help her go through a difficult time. Moreover, the virtuous nature of CMC is

featured with a reduction of contextual, visual, and auditory cues (Hyperpersonal Communication Theory by Walther, 1996), which may make the support-seeking action less effective compared to face-to-face communication (Frison & Eggermont, 2015).

Third, information from online platforms can be inaccurate and outdated since most users are not professionals. Almost anyone with an account can edit the information on there without a professional “gatekeeper” to check the accuracy and authenticity of the postings. However, interestingly, Esquivel et al. (2006) noticed a self-correction feature of this type of information-exchanging mode. They analyzed 4600 postings in an online cancer support group and found that the majority of false and misleading information could be identified and corrected by other members in a reasonably short time after it was posted (within an average of four hours and 33 minutes). But should one count on the existence of self-correction in an online channel where she seeks help and support? It is at least a risk that people have to take if they choose to use CMC technology for acquiring information and advice that may help them solve the issue that caused their negative emotions.

Another potential negative consequence of excessive reliance on CMC technology for sharing feelings and soliciting support is individuals’ decreasing engagement with offline interactions. Some researchers considered this a problematic Internet use (Caplan, 2002; Chung, 2013). In their opinion, individuals who prefer expressing online may decrease communication in offline settings. In the context of the dissertation, this is concerning because the issue between the mother and her complaining target would remain unsolved. For example, imagine a scenario that a new mother is dissatisfied with her husband’s performance in childcaring. Instead of communicating with her husband, she complains on a parenting forum. Granted that she may feel relieved after venting her distress and acquiring emotional support from her peers, the problem

between the couple remains unsolved, and the situation is likely to become worse since the husband has never realized his wife's dissatisfaction.

Lastly, some literature has revealed time lags in the online forum communication (Lamerichs, 2003). Users may experience a considerable delay in receiving responses, and it is not uncommon that their requests for help will be completely ignored and remain unanswered (Stefanone et al., 2012). A lack of feedback could significantly impact individuals' online self-disclosure experience.

To sum up, CMC technology has advantages and disadvantages for people to seek social support online.

Technology and Privacy Management

Usually, women's complaints about new motherhood involve a large amount of personal and family information. Many individuals have become aware that self-disclosure carries inherent risks of information loss which may cause potential negative consequences such as privacy violation (Altman, 1975; Kokolakis, 2017; Zhou & Li, 2014). Therefore, if a mother decides to disclose for the rewards (e.g., receiving necessary support), she may engage in various protection behaviors (e.g., anonymity) to manage her and her family's privacy when complaining and seeking help online. Following is a review of the literature on individuals' perceptions of privacy, and privacy management behaviors in both contexts of traditional interpersonal interactions and CMC.

Conceptualization of Privacy

There is a ton of research on privacy, and scholars studied the issue from different perspectives. Following reviews the concept of privacy from three angles: types, levels, and functions of privacy.

A recent review study on the privacy paradox phenomenon has distinguished three aspects of the privacy (Kokolakis, 2017). The first one is *territorial privacy*, which refers to the protection surrounding one's physical area. The second is *personal privacy*, which is a protection of an individual against undue interference (e.g., spam phone calls, having stalkers). The third one is *informational privacy*, which is concerned with "controlling whether and how personal data can be gathered, stored, processed, and disseminated" (Kokolakis, 2017, p. 123). For new mothers who often disclose online, most privacy threats belong to the last category as they may share personal information intentionally or unintentionally to the audience. The violation of the former two types of privacy tends to occur rarer than the third one. However, women who are active in local OSGs are still under the threat of territorial and personal privacy violations.

One of the best-known early works on privacy is Westin's (1967, 2015) book *Privacy and Freedom*, in which he identified four levels of privacy: solitude, intimacy, anonymity, and reserved. *Solitude* means an individual is physically separated from others, thus freed from observation. *Intimacy* refers to a small group being secluded from society to achieve a close, relaxed, and frank relationship. *Anonymity* is the obscuring of one's identity to be free from identification. *Reserve* is characterized by a "creation of a psychological barrier against unwanted intrusion" (Westin, 1967, p. 31). All four levels can be applied to explore individuals' privacy management intentions and behaviors while self-disclosing through CMC. For example, a mother may choose not to share her negative feelings on Facebook, which physically separates her from being observed by other Facebook users. She can create a small group on GroupMe, and invite a couple of close friends who are also new mothers to exchange stories and experiences of motherhood. This is a demonstration of intimacy. The mother can also post anonymously on the parenting forum BabyCenter where no viewer can identify who she is. In

terms of reserving, the mother may vaguely talk about her disagreement with the in-laws on parenting styles when being asked specifically about life living with the in-laws. She can dodge the question by answering ambiguously or switching to a different topic so that the other party knows that she is not willing to disclose more details about the issue.

Westin (1967, 2015) also discussed the four functions of privacy. The first one is *personal autonomy*, meaning an individual's desire to avoid manipulation, domination, or exposure by others. A mother may choose to complain to a stranger rather than to a real-life connection because she tries to lower the risk of being taken advantage of in the future due to the complaint. The second function is *emotional release*, which allows an individual to be able to deviate from social norms, roles, and rules. A mother refuses to disclose on SNSs because she does not want others (especially weak-tie relationships) to judge her beliefs and behaviors. The third function of privacy is *self-evaluation*, meaning that an individual integrates experience into meaningful patterns and engages in self-reflection for future success. For instance, a mother had an argument with her husband. She knows she is responsible as well. She complains to a close friend for support rather than sharing details about the argument with strangers online. During the conversation with the friend, the mother critically evaluates her behavior and figures out a way to avoid the same argument in the future. Her problem is solved through self-disclosure without threatening her privacy. The last function is *limited communication*, which creates interpersonal boundaries when sharing private information. A mother can decide to whom she wants to share the complaint message and how many details to include in the disclosure.

Communication Privacy Management Theory (CPM)

In general, privacy management refers to the actions of protecting and controlling personal information (Ellison, Steinfield, et al., 2011). Bute and Vik (2010) conceptualize

privacy management as “an ongoing, ever-changing process rather than any one singular event marked by precise endpoints” (p. 2). They provided an example of women with fertility problems and argued that these women’s disclosure or hiding about their infertility could fluctuate as they progress through the journey. According to this opinion, it is plausible that new mothers also apply different privacy management tactics when communicating in different contexts.

CPM developed by Petronio (2002) provides a theoretical framework regarding how people manage self-disclosure and privacy. According to CPM, individuals have the desire to control their privacy, and they develop their own rules of self-disclosure to decide to either reveal or conceal private information (Frampton & Child, 2013). This theory serves as the theoretical foundation of the dissertation as it provides guidelines for investigating new mothers’ privacy management behaviors when complaining and seeking support by using different types of technology.

CPM includes six principles (see Table 1). The first two principles are concerned with information ownership and control, claiming that people own their personal information and should have the power to decide what to disclose to others. The other four principles are closely related to the critical concept in CPM – boundary. People create boundaries that vary in the degree of information accessibility and permeability (Bute & Vik, 2010), ranging from completely open to fully closed ones (Petronio, 2002). Complete open boundaries are characterized by open access to all details and a free flow of private information. In contrast, fully closed boundaries refer to that the information is not accessible through means such as withholding and concealing. The formation of in-groups and out-groups is based on the information boundary an individual creates.

Table 1 inserts here

As privacy management is a highly contextual behavior as well as a dynamic process, people may utilize different strategies in different contexts (Baruh et al., 2017b; Kokolakis, 2017). This is the essential idea of principles #4 and #5 of CPM (see Table 1). Individuals can regulate personal boundaries to control the levels of privacy with others (Zlatolas et al., 2015). In other words, the boundaries can shift (i.e., becoming more or less permeable) as people go back and forth between open and closed boundaries, depending on various factors such as context and experience (Bute & Vik, 2010; Jeong & Kim, 2017; Petronio, 2002). The in-group and out-group notions possibly influence individuals' disclosure behavior as well (Bergström, 2015; Hebl et al., 2012). New mothers could be more likely to disclose their distress to in-group members (e.g., peers in the mother support groups), just as general SNSs users who have been proven to trust and be more willing to interact with in-group members (Hebl et al., 2012).

Every mediated communication technology carries a unique structure and setting that establish boundaries for out-group members (Choi & Bazarova, 2015). For example, Choi and Bazarova (2015) pointed out that public Twitter accounts allow unidirectional following, which indicates high permeable boundaries, and the followers can easily become co-owners of the account holder's private information. However, protected Twitter accounts and regular Facebook accounts show less permeable boundaries as users can control who has access to their private information (Choi & Bazarova, 2015). One of the most popular Chinese social media platforms, Sina Weibo (an equivalent to Twitter), has the same feature as the public Twitter accounts and the ownership of privacy is loosely defined. WeChat, the most popular social networking tool in China, is similar to Facebook in terms of granting the account owners the right to admit people as friends and the users can control who sees their posts. Ellison, Vitak, et al. (2011) coined the

term “digital crowding” and they suggested that an effective way to reduce crowding is to engage with the myriad of privacy settings to differentiate their social spheres and re-establish manageable boundaries.

The last principle of CPM is concerned with privacy boundary turbulence, which describes the disruptions in the privacy management process (Petronio, 2002). In the context of this dissertation, for example, complaints of new motherhood often involve family privacy which is owned by the entire family. Due to the co-ownership of privacy, family members are likely to have explicit or implicit rules regarding what can be shared with family outsiders (Petronio, 2010). However, mothers may not realize that family privacy has been violated through their disclosure on CMC channels (especially public ones such as SNSs).

Petronio (2002) has also suggested five types of disclosure risks related to privacy: (a) security risk, referring to the possibility of jeopardizing an individual’s security (e.g., physical safety), (b) stigma risk, the potential negative consequence of being discredited after revealing personal information, (c) face risk, the risk of losing face or being embarrassed, (d) relational risk, suggesting a disclosure may damage a relationship, and (e) role risk, which is relevant to personal standing.

New mothers may consider the five privacy risks when they are selecting an appropriate CMC channel for negative self-disclosure and deciding the ways of complaining to various types of audiences. To reduce security risks, for instance, new mothers may choose to complain to strangers online instead of to their partners to avoid domestic violence. The number of details (i.e., breadth and depth) in their complaints about motherhood could vary on different platforms, for the sake of protecting their face within their real-life networks and reducing the risk of being judged and stigmatized. New mothers may also take into account the potential relational damage

between them and the other parties. As mentioned previously, some women prefer to complain to outsiders about their family members (especially partners') unsupportiveness or unsatisfactory performance during the early years after the child's birth. Petronio (2002) pointed out the relational risks of telling the partner about one's dislikes of the partner's behaviors, which poses threats to intimate relationships. Role risks are essentially concerned with interacting with inappropriate audiences. For instance, under most circumstances, it is not appropriate for a supervisor to complain about family life to his/her subordinates because the role of a professional leader may be compromised.

CPM has been widely applied to research in health contexts (e.g., Petronio et al., 2004; Weber & Solomon, 2008). For example, Weber and Solomon (2008) investigated breast cancer online discussion forums and explored privacy boundary issues within stressors that are associated with diagnosis, treatment, and survivorship. Based on prior research, CPM is appropriate to be applied here as the theoretical foundation to analyze new mothers' privacy management behaviors across different types of CMC technology.

Privacy Management Strategies

CPM provides a theoretical guideline for researchers to examine individuals' privacy management intentions and behaviors. The following reviews literature on the specific techniques people employs to protect and control online privacy.

Online platforms *per se* have limited restrictions on users' disclosure of personal information, such as names, addresses, photos and other sensitive details (Mubarak & Rahamathulla, 2015). Careless self-disclosure significantly threatens an individual's privacy since information posted online can be accessed instantly by people who are not supposed to receive it.

A recent Pew Research study shows that most people think it is crucial to have the ability to control who views their information (Rainie, 2016).

The first common strategy people use to protect their privacy online is anonymity. It enables users to perform their online activities in comfort and feel less vulnerable and accountable for their online self-disclosure behavior (Kambourakis, 2014; Suler, 2004). Keipi et al. (2015) identified three types of online anonymity: visual anonymity, pseudonymity, and full anonymity. Visual anonymity refers to that an individual's physical characteristics being hidden (Keipi et al., 2015). For example, a new mother seeks help from a lactation consultant through email conversations. The visual cues are removed from their interactions (e.g., the lactation consultant can only use words to demonstrate the correct position of breastfeeding, and the mother cannot see or hear the consultant), which is likely to affect their communication effectiveness. Pseudonymity refers to using avatars or usernames (a substitute for the real name) (Keipi et al., 2015). New mothers who are users of parenting forums usually have a personal profile which includes a username and a profile picture. Full anonymity exists in the interactions "when users remain unknowable after interaction has concluded" (p. 719). For example, after a mother vents to peers in a large OSG (e.g., an International OSG for new mothers), her real identity remains unknown to each other.

Liu et al. (2016) pointed out that anonymity is not dichotomous but varies in degree. The information provided (e.g., a pseudonym, a photo) could mean different levels of disclosure due to the varying closeness and familiarity between the discloser and the message receiver. For example, a blurred photo could be enough to identify a person if the receiver is very familiar with the sender.

The effects of anonymity on self-disclosure can be positive and negative (see review in Pan et al., 2018). On the positive side, for example, the new mothers may feel secure to express anonymously their negative emotions without feeling embarrassed, being stigmatized by real-life connections, or getting reprisals (Mann & Stewart, 2000). Besides, compared to face-to-face discussions on privacy issues that require trust and acceptance of such confidential information (Holmes & Rempel, 1989), the disinhibition effect of online communication (Suler, 2004) can facilitate self-disclosure in the sense of making it easier for both the complainer and support provider to open up in the virtual world (Barak et al., 2008; Broom, 2005).

While on the negative side, the Social Penetration Theory (SPT; Altman & Taylor, 1973) has suggested that individuals would refrain from disclosing private information to an anonymous audience as people tend to disclose an increasing amount of personal information gradually. Based on this, one can argue that women would hesitate to reveal sensitive information about new motherhood to strangers in online forums. They may be more willing to express their negative emotions to a local support group on Facebook as they are developing friendly relationships with their group peers through online discussions and offline gatherings.

The second tactic of privacy management is manipulating the information before sharing it (Lee et al., 2013). In CPM, the behavior is called *accessibility* and *permeability control*, meaning that an individual determines who has access to the information, as well as how much and what type of information to share with others. In SPT, it refers to a control of the *breadth* and *depth* of information during self-disclosure. Specifically, individuals can eliminate part of the details (Kobsa et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2013) or even provide false information (Miltgen & Peyrat-guillard, 2014). They can be ambiguous when disclosing to strangers and be detailed when speaking to close friends. Users can also restrict access to their profiles and adjust privacy

settings (Hargittai, 2010; Stutzman et al., 2012), limit friendship requests, and delete tags and photos (Young & Quan-Haase, 2013).

Another frequently used approach to protect online privacy is establishing multiple accounts for different purposes (Ellison, Vitak, et al., 2011). For example, people share their daily life only on Instagram and talk about work on LinkedIn. New mothers may discuss childcaring issues and express related emotions in specialized OSGs. Employing such a technique is easier for individuals to set information boundaries and control the amount and depth of detail for sharing. On some platforms (e.g., online forums), one can create multiple accounts for a single site. For instance, a mother can create a brand-new account for publishing vent content only and uses her regular account for discussing non-sensitive topics.

Humor and metaphors are two less-used tactics of privacy protection (Smith & Brunner, 2016). However, they could be effective, especially for individuals who disclose negative issues online. The less aggressive messages allow people to express their emotions while protecting their image (e.g., not to be viewed as a whiner, weak mother, or grumpy wife), as well as preserving the other party's face (i.e., the subject of the complaint).

Individuals differ in their abilities to manage privacy when disclosing personal issues online. A relatively new concept that emerged in recent relevant research is *online privacy literacy*, which is defined as “a combination of factual or declarative (‘knowing that’) and procedural (‘knowing how’) knowledge about online privacy” (Trepte et al., 2015, p. 339). Declarative knowledge refers to an individual's knowledge about “technical aspects of online data protection, and about laws and directives as well as institutional practices” (Trepte et al., 2015, p. 339). Procedural knowledge refers to an individual's ability to “apply strategies for individual privacy regulation and data protection” (p. 339). Literature has pointed out that

individuals vary in the level of online privacy literacy, suggesting that not every mother acquires a comprehensive knowledge of the above strategies, let alone is able to apply these techniques freely when navigating different CMC channels.

In empirical research, online privacy literacy was measured by the Internet privacy concerns (IPC) scale developed by Hong and Thong (2013). The scale includes three existing variables extracted from literature (i.e., perceptions of one's concerns for others' behavior, perceptions of others' behavior, and expectations of others' behavior) and six original variables (i.e., collection, secondary usage, errors, improper access, control, and awareness). Sample items in the scale are: "My organization always allows me to decide how my personal information can be released to others" (perceptions of others' behavior), "It usually bothers me when commercial/government websites ask me for personal information" (collection), and "I believe that online privacy is invaded when control is lost or unwillingly reduced as a result of a marketing transaction with commercial/government websites" (control). A couple of recent empirical studies (e.g., Bartsch & Dienlin, 2016) further investigated the association between individuals' privacy literacy and privacy management, and results imply that a higher level of online privacy literacy leads to more cautious SNS disclosure activities, which may reduce the potential privacy threats.

To a certain degree, individuals' ability to calculate the benefits and costs of self-disclosure online is relevant to their online privacy literacy. Several studies (Baruh et al., 2017b; Kokolakis, 2017) claimed that most users lack such ability as they do not have access to all the information to make the most informed and reasonable judgments. Users can only make decisions based on bounded rationality. Additionally, a lack of knowledge and experience in the

negative consequences of privacy infringements may result in individuals' underestimation of potential risks (Dienlin & Trepte, 2015).

Besides individuals' varied levels of online privacy literacy, different personality traits (e.g., openness, agreeableness, neuroticism) have been proven to influence users' disclosure decisions in SNSs (e.g., Trepte & Reinecke, 2013). In addition, people may apply different management strategies due to the specific norms and regulations on different platforms. On Facebook, for example, users are required to use real names instead of fake ones (Facebook, 2009). Although it seems inevitable that a group of people create fake usernames, Facebook has already developed algorithms in an attempt to distinguish "fake" users (Kline, 2012). Some online interactions require users to identify themselves in a certain way (e.g., Facebook), whereas others offer users the opportunity to fully hide their identity (e.g., online forums) (Christie & Dill, 2016). Currently, SNSs like Facebook provide various features (e.g., blocking) that grant users flexibility in choosing the target audience (Garside, 2014). Zeynep (2007) found that individuals can manage their privacy by adjusting the visibility of their posts instead of regulating the levels of disclosure. Research has also suggested that a majority of Facebook users are familiar with the privacy settings, and they tend to restrict access to part of their profile information (Bartsch & Dienlin, 2016).

Another phenomenon related to privacy management is worth noting as well: the *privacy paradox*, which was coined by (Brown, 2001). It describes the inconsistency of individuals' privacy attitudes and privacy management behaviors. People frequently disclose a significant amount of personal information (e.g., complaining about dissatisfied marriage) despite their privacy concerns, sometimes only for small rewards (Jiang et al., 2013; Kokolakis, 2017; Norberg et al., 2007). One of the possible reasons is that people may not be able to act as

economically rational agents when they disclose private and personal information (Acquisti, 2004). They tend to seek immediate gratification, indicating that they value the present benefits more than future disclosure risks (Acquisti, 2004; Lee et al., 2013).

In summary, the literature has suggested plenty of options and measures that individuals can use to protect their privacy during online self-disclosure. In the dissertation, I will explore the strategies new mothers applied to manage privacy when they complained through CMC. I will also compare their behaviors across different CMC channels.

Cross-Cultural Comparison

Culture can be an influential factor affecting individuals' complaining, support-seeking, and privacy management behaviors, as people from different cultures differ in social norms, values, beliefs, and traditions (Kim et al., 2008; Krasnova et al., 2012). In this dissertation, I will compare American and Chinese new mothers' complaining and privacy management behaviors when navigating CMC channels. The United States and China are representatives of Western and Eastern cultures. According to the Cultural Dimensions Theory developed by Hofstede (2001), the US and China differ in five of the six dimensions: individualism/collectivism, low/high context, power distance, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance, indulgence/restraint. The following provides a discussion on the relevant ones concerning new mothers' support seeking behaviors.

First of all, many studies have confirmed that the US is a typical individualistic culture whereas China is collectivistic. The cultural difference can lead to people's dissimilar perceptions toward the arrival of a newborn and subsequent changes in the family structure and responsibilities. The research focused on Western new mothers suggested a deterioration in their marital intimacy after childbirth (e.g., Doss et al., 2009; Lawrence et al., 2008). In contrast,

marital intimacy has been proved to be reinforced in Chinese couples who have just become new parents, as they perceive that childbirth is a meaningful event in the marriage because both parties will get a chance to make contributions and even sacrifices that are valued by each other (Chen & Li, 2007; Wu & Hung, 2016).

It is without any doubt that mothers from both cultures need support after childbirth. Research (e.g., Su & Hynie, 2010; Uchida et al., 2008) has revealed that emotional support is more beneficial to people from collectivistic cultures than their counterparts from individualistic cultures. Individuals from interdependent cultures have a higher fear of being a burden to others and being negatively evaluated when seeking help for personal issues (Kim et al., 2008). Moreover, people with independent self-construal tend to share a cultural belief that others should have a choice rather than a social obligation to offer help when requested (Guan et al., 2017). Culture has also been proven to moderate the influence of individuals' privacy concerns and beliefs toward their self-disclosure decisions. For example, Liu et al. (2016) suggested that users from collectivistic cultures are more open and more prone to self-disclosure reciprocity. Zhao and Jiang (2011) revealed that Chinese SNS users exhibit a higher willingness to customize their profile images than US users. According to these studies, it is reasonable to presume mothers from individualistic and collectivistic cultures will hold different attitudes towards negative self-disclosure on CMC channels, thus behave differently.

Second, as the US is a low-context culture (Hofstede, 2001, 2020), American mothers could be more likely to express their negative emotions straightforwardly. In comparison, China is a typical high-context culture, thus it is plausible that Chinese women are more willing to complain in a subtle way, such as making humorous complaints or sending cues to the responsible party.

Besides, Chinese value face and image, both self-face and other's face. Therefore, complaining indirectly and tenderly can save both parties' faces, which may be preferred by Chinese mothers. Based on the Face Negotiation Theory which suggests the interdependence of self and family identity (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998), Cho and Sillars (2015) confirmed the prediction that Koreans (Chinese and Koreans share similar cultural beliefs on face protection) perceive greater face threat than do Americans when their health information (especially the information with a potential stigma) is disclosed to family outsiders.

Third, the US culture tends to be low-power distance whereas Chinese culture leans towards a high-power distance (Hofstede, 2001, 2020). It is relevant to this dissertation because childcaring sometimes involves interactions with older family members, and different beliefs on power distance have an impact on American and Chinese mothers' communication ways with the elders in the family. In low-power distance cultures, people may feel more comfortable pointing out elders' inappropriate behaviors, discussing different opinions and styles of childcaring, and expressing negative feelings. In Chinese culture, it is not appropriate for young family members to behave the same since elders tend to perceive such communication behaviors as disrespectful and unacceptable and consider their authority in the family and face being heavily threatened. With that being said, it is reasonable to presume that Chinese new mothers are more willing to express negative feelings about the elder family members (e.g., in-laws) to a third party, especially to someone who has no real-life connection with the complaint target (e.g., in-laws).

The reason that older family members were particularly mentioned here is that one of the most common types of complaints among Chinese new mothers is regarding conflicts and disagreements with the grandparents. It is a tradition in China that the grandparents help with

new mothers' postpartum recovery and taking care of the newborn. The latest statistics from Pew Research Center show that 29% of all mothers in the US are stay-at-home mothers (Cohn et al., 2014), and the percentage tends to be lower in today's China as the overwhelming living pressure of this generation of Chinese young couples. A report released by All-China Women's Federation, an official and authoritative national organization that serves Chinese women, shows that grandparents are primary caregivers of young children (Yin, 2014). The report pointed out that most children in China are picked up and dropped off at school by their grandparents, and a survey conducted in Shanghai has revealed that more than half of Shanghai families rely on grandparents to take care of the children. This situation leads to Chinese new mothers' higher expectations of support from older family members and also an increased possibility of having disagreements and arguments with the grandparents on childcaring issues, compared to their American counterparts.

The fourth cultural dimension is uncertainty avoidance. The literature revealed that the US scores below average on the uncertainty avoidance dimension, meaning that there is a fair degree of acceptance to embrace an event of something unexpected and unknown (Hofstede, 2020). China scores lower on this dimension, suggesting that the Chinese would make great efforts to avert such events and try to maintain the status quo. The tendency of uncertainty avoidance is likely to influence mothers' decision on channel selection for complaining about their motherhood. If a mother lacks the knowledge and experience of interacting with an ill-defined audience group (e.g., online forums), she may avoid using such a channel and choose another one she is more familiar with to reduce the uncertainty of the disclosure consequences. Krasnova et al. (2012) found that individuals from countries with a high uncertainty avoidance

(UAI) tend to reduce their self-disclosure on SNSs and are more willing to use privacy protection tools due to their privacy concerns, while user with a low UAI do not.

The last dimension that is relevant to the current topic is indulgence/restrain orientation. The US is an indulgent culture, meaning that Americans have a tendency toward relatively weak control over their desires and needs (Hofstede, 2020). China, on contrary, is a restrained culture and Chinese tend to perceive that their actions are restrained by social norms and it is wrong to indulge themselves (Hofstede, 2020).

Summary

A review of literature shows that the extant research on self-disclosure (e.g., complaining) through CMC and corresponding privacy management strategies is mainly focusing on one single platform (e.g., Facebook) or comparing two platforms at most. However, a large number of individuals today is learning to express themselves across a wide set of CMC channels for different purposes. The latest report from the Pew Research Center shows that 73% of American public has multiple SNS accounts and the typical (median) American uses three of the eight platforms² measured in the survey (Smith & Anderson, 2018). The results indicate that individuals have the luxury of choices of online platforms for negative self-disclosure and support-seeking.

In this dissertation, I will expand the literature by examining how individuals navigate between different CMC channels when they need to express negative emotions, as well as investigating the different strategies individuals employ for privacy protection during the online self-disclosure process. Comparing individuals' different self-disclosure practices across a set of

² The eight platforms measured are Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, YouTube, WhatsApp, Pinterest, and LinkedIn.

CMC channels can help me reveal a dynamic interplay between features of technology and privacy management behaviors (Tufekci, 2014). As proposed in the CPM theory, there are various factors influencing individuals' shift in the information boundaries (Bute & Vik, 2010; Petronio, 2002).

Chapter 3: Methods

This chapter includes information about the methods I used to collect data and address the research questions proposed in Chapter Two. Briefly speaking, I conducted face-to-face interviews with American and Chinese new mothers regarding their usage of CMC technology to complain about motherhood-related challenges and difficulties and seek support. I also conducted an interview survey to investigate their self-disclosure level in various CMC channels. I applied the constant comparative method to identify mothers' areas of consideration in channel selection, and I performed descriptive analysis to reveal mothers' different self-disclosure behaviors.

Rationale

This section describes the researcher's background in approaching the study, including why the topic, research methods, and specific groups of participants were selected.

As a new mother myself and an active user of social media, I joined several online support groups for new mothers and became an active reader (occasional poster) of online parenting forums since the early stage of my pregnancy. While viewing the posts on these platforms, I realized a large number of threads were mothers' complaints about various aspects of their life as new mothers. Besides, many friends in my personal network are around the age to start a family and have children. I have also expanded my social circle by making new friends with other mothers from offline activities (e.g., library baby storytime) and online interactions in mother support groups. I noticed an increasing number of feeds on my SNS boards are my friends' self-disclosure about being a parent. By reading these narratives online and learning from my personal experience, I started to be aware of the power of using online communication

technology for emotional management, which is crucial for both the psychological and physical health of an individual.

As a scholar with expertise in CMC, I learned that the majority of the general public today acquires the knowledge and capability of using more than one type of online communication technology. Ergo individuals (especially the young generations) may employ different products to disclose their negative stories in daily life. A brief search and quick learning of the existing literature on this subject made me realize a gap in this line of research: an overlook of individuals' ever-changing intentions and behaviors when switching back and forth between different online platforms. I narrowed down my research focus to people's privacy management during the process of negative self-disclosure online, aiming to identify the influencing factors and explore how they affect individuals' intentions and actions while navigating across different channels.

Considering the complexity of the topic, qualitative methods are more appropriate at the exploratory stage of the research. To be more specific, investigating an individual's disclosure and privacy management behaviors on different platforms involves repetitive and iterative questions. If we conduct a survey, the participants will read similarly formatted questions such as "Have you ever posted anonymously on Facebook?", "Have you ever posted anonymously on any online forums?", "Have you ever posted anonymously on any online support groups?" etc. This can be overwhelming, and the participants may not recall carefully their previous behaviors in each specific context, which decreases the validity and reliability of their responses.

In comparison, if we discuss the issue with a participant face-to-face in an interview, the researchers will be able to ask these questions in a more natural way depending on how the conversation flows. The researcher can ask follow-up questions to lead the participant to recall

more details about their response, which ensures the validity and reliability of the answer. Especially when a participant provides an inaccurate answer at first due to careless thinking or blurred memory, he/she will be able to correct or improve the answer through the following conversation in which he/she shares more details about the experience. Sometimes the participant will even provide an answer spontaneously without the interviewer's prompt. Therefore, conducting in-depth interviews is more appropriate for addressing the research questions of the dissertation considering its strength in extracting the richness and details of experiences that people have.

The dissertation is a study of people's behaviors. Observation is another method often adopted by qualitative researchers who investigate human actions. Although observation is not explicitly listed as one research method in this dissertation, I had been observing individuals' complaining behaviors in online support groups, forums and SNSs for approximately two years before I officially started the current project. I engaged in the observation of individuals' online complaining behaviors, including the common subjects mothers often complain about, the length of their complaining posts, the way of complainer interacts with the respondents, the amount of sensitive and personal information disclosed, the strategies they use to protect privacy (e.g., anonymity), the frequency of posting complaints (e.g., I came across some familiar usernames who often share the negative experiences of their life), etc. The observation findings are valuable for exploring individuals' actual behaviors in the real world. The main reason for not including observation in the dissertation is due to some procedural obstacles in receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). For example, the IRB does not allow the researcher to use any data collected from internet/social media platforms that set restricted access to the public (e.g., an individual has to request to join or to be invited to a Facebook mother group) unless consent

or permission has been acquired from all in-group members³. Considering the large population of users in these channels, it is almost infeasible to request and receive consent from all users. Granted that there is an alternative option the researcher can post an announcement on these platforms informing the users that they will be under observation for a certain period of time (IRB may still decline to approve this option and their decision depends on the specific type of platforms to investigate), it is likely to affect users' behaviors when they are aware of that they are under observation (consider the difference between a lab experiment and a field study). For instance, users may stop posting complaints during the research period as a silent rejection of "participating" in the study. Users may be more careful framing their messages, and they rarely behave the same in a natural setting. Therefore, even if there is enough amount of data collected from this procedure, the findings are less convincing as a demonstration of individuals' actual behaviors in the real world.

Although observation is not listed as a research method here, I still performed a preliminary study in private based on the longitudinal observation of users' online disclosure behaviors. The findings will not be presented in the dissertation due to a lack of permission from the IRB. However, the preliminary research serves as a critical foundation for designing the interview questions, and it contributes to my analysis of users' intentions and behaviors.

Furthermore, to substitute the observational data, I was permitted by the IRB to request some previous postings from the interviewees. Upon the participants' agreement, they were asked to take a screenshot of some self-selected postings and send them to me. More details

³ More details regarding the policies of internet/social media-based research can be found at https://compliance.ouhsc.edu/Portals/1061a/Assets/HRPP/Policies/502L_InternetSocialMediaBasedResearch.pdf?ver=2019-09-20-134956-130

about the procedure will be provided in the following section. To a certain degree, these postings manifest participants' online disclosure behaviors and help me confirm the reliability of their self-reports in the interviews.

Last is an explanation of why conducting a cross-cultural study and selecting these two particular groups – American and Chinese – for comparison. As a Chinese who has been living in the United States for over seven years, I joined both American and Chinese online support groups and forums (I became a member of several of these platforms a long time before I was pregnant). I noticed that mothers from different cultural backgrounds communicated differently in terms of self-disclosing online. In Chapter Two, I reviewed the literature on how cultural differences may impact human communication. In the dissertation, I aim to explore in-depth the role of culture plays in the American and Chinese mothers' CMC channel selection for negative self-disclosure as well as privacy management. Due to some practical reasons (e.g., family responsibilities, visa issues), I was unable to go back to China in person to recruit participants and conduct interviews at the time of data collection. The time difference between China and the US became an issue for scheduling virtual meetings too. Considering that there are a large number of Chinese new mothers who are currently living in the US, I decided to recruit participants from this group instead. Overall, I believe my knowledge of both cultures qualifies me to conduct this cross-cultural comparison research.

Sampling Sites

Interviewees were recruited from local OSGs for new mothers. As a new mother myself, I am a member of more than ten relevant local OSGs. Some are developed by US users (i.e., US-based OSG). In these groups, the majority of members are Americans and their communication language is English. The other local OSGs I joined are exclusively for Chinese mothers (i.e.,

China-based OSGs) who are living in the US. The language used by members is mandarin Chinese.

One of the most common platforms for US-based OSGs is Facebook, as the “Groups” feature on Facebook allows users to form and join OSGs conveniently. By searching “new mothers” in the “Groups” section, a great number of relevant OSGs show up in a list. Examples of popular OSGs on Facebook are “New Moms, Moms-to-be and Experienced Moms” (27K members as of April 2020) and “New Moms - Newborn, Baby and Toddler” (16K members as of April 2020). Facebook users can easily find local OSGs by adding their geographic locations to the search keywords. Since many local Facebook groups are closed groups, users who are interested in joining are usually required to answer a few questions to verify their identity as an appropriate member. For example, to join a local new mothers’ support group, I need to verify my home address (e.g., street name of my house/apartment, nearest neighborhood park) and demonstrate my knowledge about the neighborhood (e.g., what is my favorite restaurant nearby). The American participants in this study were recruited from two local mother groups on Facebook.

Chinese participants were recruited from local OSGs on WeChat, the current most widely used social networking tool in China. Similar to Facebook, WeChat also provides the “group” functionality for users to create and join groups. Compared to Facebook mother groups which are relatively open and easier to join, WeChat groups are more private in the sense that there is no way to search groups on WeChat or request to join. Prospective members can only join the group by scanning the QR code shared by in-group members or by being invited. Similar to setting up filter questions on Facebook, these tactics are adopted by WeChat group

administrators to create a boundary and ensure a relatively secure space for group members to communicate.

The primary reason for recruiting participants from Facebook and WeChat is because they are the leading platforms for the American and Chinese general public to share personal experiences respectively. Granted that they are not the only platforms that people use for expressing emotions (the results show that other platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and forums are also common choices for mothers to complain), I decided to recruit participants from these two platforms because their “group” functionality significantly facilitated my recruiting process since I was able to post the advertisement in groups full of research targets. If I shared the recruitment flyer on other platforms such as Instagram or Sina Weibo (i.e., Twitter equivalent in China) where I personally had little connection on it, the message would have super limited exposure to research targets (i.e., new mothers who had experience complaining online). Even if I was an influencer on these social media or I contacted some influencers and asked them to share the recruitment message, there was no guarantee of the number of eligible participants in their audience. It is only reasonable and efficient to find the right niche group to recruit appropriate participants, and OSGs on Facebook and WeChat are the top places to go. This is a non-probability sampling (i.e., convenient sampling), but it is an appropriate method here considering the particular characteristics of the research target in my study.

Participants

IRB approval was acquired before I started the official recruitment. The first step of recruitment was contacting the administrators of the OSGs I planned to post the advertisement, including four Facebook mother groups and three WeChat mother groups. I was permitted to post the advertisement in two Facebook groups and two WeChat groups. The eligibility criteria

were listed in the post and I confirmed with each prospective participant via private messaging. Eligible participants should be new mothers who have at least one child under three years old (i.e., born after January 2015) and have experience using CMC technology (e.g., Facebook, online messaging) to complain about the new motherhood (especially about the support they received or not received after the baby was born).

All prospective participants were provided through email with an electronic version of the consent form to view before they decided to participate. Two printed copies were provided for each participant to sign when I met them in person for the interviews. I and the participant kept a copy of the signed consent form respectively. For the only Skype interview in which the physical copy of the form could not be presented, I asked the participant to sign via DocuSign, a widely used eSignature service that allowed the participant to sign the form electrically.

Considering that this is cross-cultural research which included participants speaking different languages - English and Chinese, two versions of the consent form were prepared. Being a native speaker of Mandarin Chinese, I was able to translate the consent form into Chinese and speak to Chinese participants in their native language. In general, the English version of the form was for English speakers, and the Chinese version was for Chinese participants. One thing that needs clarification is that the majority of Chinese participants were able to read and speak in English as they all had been living in the US for years. However, considering that they are not native English speakers and varied in English proficiency, I decided to offer them the Chinese consent form which they had no difficulty understanding the terms. I also confirmed their preference for using Mandarin Chinese for interviews, and all of them claimed that they could better express themselves using the mother language.

Once the recruitment advertisement was posted, 64 new mothers contacted me and expressed their willingness to participate, including 43 American and 21 Chinese (see Table 2 for details). After learning more about the research and reading through the consent form, a total of 35 participants agreed to be interviewed face-to-face, of whom 16 were American mothers and 19 were Chinese. The remaining ones withdrew participation due to reasons such as eligibility and availability. The mothers who agreed to participate were invited for an individual interview which lasted around an hour. All interviews were conducted in person with only one Skype interview.

Table 2 inserts here

Among American participants, there were 9 Caucasians, 4 Asians, 2 Hispanics, and 1 African. In this dissertation, *Americans* refer to the ones who were US citizens or permanent residents and also identified themselves as Americans. 6 of them were either the first or the second generation of immigrants who hailed from other countries (i.e., Italy, Mexico, China, India, Malaysia). English was not the first language for 3 of these participants, but they were all proficient in English in the sense that they were comfortable and competent in reading and talking in English. All Chinese participants were originally from mainland China except one was from Taiwan. 7 of them explicitly claimed that they were permanent residents of the US while still holding the nationality of China. Thus they identified themselves as Chinese rather than American. Another 7 Chinese participants were holding nonimmigrant visas (e.g., work visas, student visas) at the time. The remaining 5 Chinese mothers decided not to disclose their immigration status but stated that they could be counted as Chinese. All Chinese participants were native speakers of Mandarin Chinese.

Of 35 participants, two mothers had three children (including unborn babies and stepchildren), 13 mothers had two, and the remaining 20 mothers had only one child at the time.

Procedure

I contacted each participant to schedule a time and place for the interview. New mothers are usually busy taking care of the child(ren). To ensure the quality of the interview, I first asked the participants if they were able to find any time when someone else could help with the child(ren) while they were out for the interview. Nearly half of the participants came for the interview alone. Among the remaining interviews in which the child(ren) had to present, only two were severely interrupted because of the child(ren). I rescheduled with one of them and conducted the interview again. The other mother had no other availability, so we decided to continue and that interview involved some question repetition.

In terms of the interview locations, I suggested the participants pick a quiet public place where they felt safe, convenient and comfortable for the conversation. Six participants requested to meet at their homes⁴, and the others chose sites such as neighborhood parks, libraries, and coffee houses. For all interviews conducted in public places, I arrived at least 15 minutes early for preparation, including finding the best spot for audio recording as well as setting up the recorders and needed documents. I prepared two high-quality audio recorders and placed them in different positions, with one of them being used as a backup to check the unclear information retrieved from the primary recorder. For interviews conducted at the participants' homes, I

⁴ All six participants were stay-at-home mothers who had no helper during the daytime. The participants felt more convenient if the interview took place in their own house since they would be able to look after the child(ren) while being interviewed. The children were playing or watching kids shows by themselves on the side, or taking a nap in another room.

arrived on time and did all the preparation work while chit-chatting with the participants (e.g., introducing myself).

At the beginning of the interview, each participant was provided the consent forms to read and sign. I turned on the recorders once the permission for audio recording was received. A total of 32 interviews were recorded, and three participants declined to be recorded.

There were three parts to the interview. The first part collected the participants' basic information and included the following questions: number of children and how old they are, mothers' past and current employment status, expected and received social support since the baby was born, change of social circle, and overall feelings about their physical and emotional situations as a new mother. These icebreaker questions helped the participants adjust to the role of being an interviewee and quickly engage in the following conversation.

The second part included core questions for addressing the research questions: What was new mothers' major dissatisfactions in terms of seeking and receiving social support after the baby's born? How did they use different types of new communication technology to express negative emotions? What were their reasons for choosing a particular platform/channel instead of the others? What were their primary concerns and challenges when using CMC to complain and seek support? Was their experience using CMC to complain positive or negative? This part of the interview was semi-structured, meaning that all questions were open-ended so that the participants were able to share personal experiences and perspectives in a comparatively free mode. The interviewer asked follow-up questions to guide the participants to offer more details while still staying on track. Of course, the participants were allowed to divert as long as the information they provided was relevant to the topic (e.g., sharing their knowledge about others' experiences using CMC to complain).

Semi-structured interview was adopted due to its advantages compared to structured and unstructured interview methods. In a structured interview, the interviewees are highly constrained since they have to answer a set of questions in a rigorous order. In an unstructured interview, the interviewees may easily divert the topic since there is no guidance for them to stay on track. In comparison, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to probe by asking open-ended questions and a series of follow-up questions based on a protocol prepared beforehand. The interviewees are flexible in terms of the way they share information, but overall the flow of the whole conversation is guided and controlled by the protocol.

The last part of the conversation is an interview survey. At first, the participants were asked to describe their previous self-disclosure behavior online and their tactics for protecting privacy on different channels. Most participants were only able to provide a vague answer. To help them explain in detail, I prepared a table chart that demonstrated five levels of information disclosure (see Table 3). Unlike a questionnaire survey in which the participant can only select an answer without providing any explanation or justification, a face-to-face interview survey allows the researcher to probe the response from the interviewee to gather more information. The chart provides a guideline for participants to answer my core question about their strategies for protecting privacy while complaining through CMC channels. I asked the participant to select a level shown in the chart that best described their disclosure behavior in different contexts. In specific, they showed me their various choices when complaining through different channels and faced different types of audiences, following with their explanation of the choices. The variable – level of disclosure – is not discrete but continuous, meaning that the boundary between the two levels is blurry. Many participants claimed that sometimes they were somewhere between two levels (e.g., Level 2 and Level 3). Their answers are still meaningful since this chart was not

created for statistical analysis. Each participant's choices and explanations will help the researcher better define their behavior, compare their choices in various contexts, and even make a comparison with other participants.

Table 3 inserts here

At the end of the interview, each participant received a \$15 gift card as compensation for their time. New mothers are usually busy and their time is precious. \$15 is a reasonable amount of money considering the length of the interview which lasts 50 minutes on average⁵.

Data Analysis

Transcription

32 audio-recorded interviews were transcribed in two steps. First, I utilized an online computer program Autosub⁶ to convert audio to text automatically. This process of transcribing was fast and the programming code worked for both English and Chinese, which was the main reason this program was chosen. However, the output was lack of accuracy (lower than 50%) in the sense of including many mistakes and missing information. Next, based on the automatically generated texts, I transcribed each interview manually. Verbatim transcription was applied, meaning that the transcripts included not only words that could be heard but also other information such as stutters, false starts, repetitions, interjections, descriptions of emotional states (e.g., laughing), and unclear words. In the end, I reviewed all the transcripts by listening to the recordings again to ensure the accuracy of the transcription.

⁵ The minimum hourly wage in the state where the study was conducted is \$11. A small bag of diaper or a small size can of formula (general brand) is about \$15.

⁶ Autosub is a utility for automatic speech recognition and subtitle generation. More details can be found on github.com.

In terms of the three interviews that no audio recording was collected because of the participants' rejection of being recorded, I took notes during the conversations. Once the interview ended, I reviewed the notes immediately and added as many details as I remembered into a word document. Although the final notes did not include all the details provided by the interviewees compared to the ones that had audio recordings, I did my best to ensure all the key information was noted.

The average length of the 32 recorded interviews is 50.9 minutes (range 22.1-125.9; SD = 19.39). A total of 1630.7 minutes of interviews were transcribed, resulting in 670 single-spaced pages of transcripts (including 34 pages of notes for the three interviews without recording).

Confidentiality of Participants

Considering that the participants' responses may be directly quoted in the dissertation, each interviewee was assigned a pseudonym in the transcripts as a means of protecting their privacy. All names shown in the following chapters are pseudonyms. To differentiate American and Chinese participants in the analysis, I applied two naming strategies when choosing pseudonyms for each group. For American mothers, I utilized BabyNameVoyager – an online tool that generates graphs of the most popular names by decades – to pick their pseudonyms (Loviglio, 2012). There were 16 Americans in the study, and I searched for appropriate names alphabetically. For instance, I first typed in the letter A and selected “Girls”, and then popular girl names starting with the letter A would show up in a graph. I randomly picked one name that was popular in the 1970s or 1980s in which most of the participants were born. Examples of American participants' pseudonyms include Amy, Beth, Christina, etc.

Since Chinese first names tend to be complicated and difficult for English readers to recognize, I decided to use last names to represent Chinese participants because last names are

simpler and shorter in general. In China, there is a classic book titled *Hundred Family Surnames* (《百家姓》) that contains about 500 surnames of Chinese. I picked the first 19 surnames⁷ and assigned each Chinese participant one as their pseudonym. Examples of Chinese participants' pseudonyms include Zhao, Qian, Sun, etc.

In the results section, I will add superscripts (e.g., Amy^{AM}, Chen^{CH}) to show if the participant is American or Chinese. The *AM* stands for American, and the *CH* stands for Chinese. This further helps readers to recognize participants' groups when reading through the results and analysis.

Data Analysis Software

NVivo 12 Plus⁸ was utilized as a research tool in the dissertation. As a leading qualitative data analysis software, NVivo aided me in storing and organizing all my transcripts in one platform, as well as categorizing and classifying the data by automatically sorting the codes and themes I created in an efficient and clean manner.

Data Analysis Method. To answer the research questions, I adopted the constant comparative method (CCM), a systematic process for discovering themes that consists of identifying units, open coding, and axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

Constant comparison is the core process in the grounded theory methodology, which was first described by Glaser and Strauss (1967, 2017). The methodology was later developed into two approaches: the Glaserian approach and Straussian approach (Charmaz, 2006). According to Glaser (1978), it is crucial to maintain a sensitivity to data through learning not to know, thus the

⁷ I skipped the surname *You* that is listed as the 18th surname in the book because readers may confuse the surname *You* and the word *you*.

⁸ The student version of NVivo 12 plus was purchased with the dissertation grant funded by researcher's school department.

coding process should not be based on researcher's prior knowledge and understandings. The key here is induction process, referring to moving from data to empirical generalization and eventually on to theory (1978, 1992). In contrast, Straussian approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Strauss, 1987) recommends taking into consideration of prior knowledge and research questions while studying a certain phenomenon. Charmaz (2014) also claimed from a constructivist's perspective that the researchers are part of the world they study, and they construct grounded theories through past experience, interactions with people and research practices. Deduction and verification dominate data analysis in Straussian approach (see more in Heath & Cowley, 2004). This does not mean induction is wrong. The Straussian approach stressed less on induction than the Glaserian approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

A third approach in generating new ideas is abduction which was coined by Charles Peirce (Peirce, 1935; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Abduction is often called "Inference to the Best Explanation", which refers to a creative inferential process aimed at producing new hypotheses and theories based on surprising research evidence (Douven, 2021; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Abduction suggests explanations based on researchers' observations and can be further aided by careful methodological data analysis. Abductive analysis can be formalized into deductions (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012).

As an insider of the group of people I study (i.e., new mothers) as well as someone who designed the research, it is almost impossible for me to view and analyze the interviews from a completely objective standpoint. It makes more sense to me to explore the data based on prior knowledge and experience. I analyzed the data several rounds based on research questions I posed, and I tried to find the best explanations for new mothers' online disclosing behaviors. I

mainly followed Peirce's abductive approach for analyzing the 2nd and 3rd research questions. There were three steps in the whole analyzing process.

The first step was to identify the basic unit of analysis. The units can be words, lines, incidents, etc (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Since I decided to code the data based on the research questions, I focused on the units of meaning or semantic relationships that present participants' contributions to the phenomenon to be investigated (Spradley, 1979). To be more specific, for example, I started with analyzing the data to address the second research question which is about the types of channels new mothers use to complain. I read the transcripts line-by-line and thought about whether the data was relevant to the question – the types of channel the mother used to complain (or even self-disclosure in a broader sense), but I did not generate any code unless the data showed relevance to the question. The participants' answers I decided to code did not have to be precisely matched the question. I coded as long as the “meaning” was relevant to the question. For instance, one participant mentioned, “I prefer face-to-face. I generally don't share personal issues on social media.” The statement did not directly answer the second research question, but I coded it since its meaning is related to the question. In further analysis, the code may not be useful and may drop off. But at the early stage of analysis, I tried to be as open as possible.

This leads to the second step of analysis – open coding, which means “coding the data in every way possible” (Glaser, 1978, p. 56) and “exploring whatever theoretical possibilities I can discern in the data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 47). Thus, I may create multiple codes for every unit. To be noted, although I mentioned that I coded based on my prior knowledge and experience, I did not see my personal perspectives as truth. Instead, I saw them as representing only one view among many while I was coding (Charmaz, 2014). Besides, through literature and observation, I

have already possessed a repertoire of “psychological concepts that I ordinarily invoke to understand behavior” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 54). I tried to avoid invoking these concepts in the codes since it may make me prejudge what is happening to the participants. During the whole open coding process, I looked for how they understood their situations. The openness of initial coding can spark my thinking and allow ideas to emerge.

For instance, one of the research questions is about how and why new mothers use different types of CMC channels to complain. To address this question, I divided it into three sections: (1) what channels did new mothers use for complaining? (2) Why did they use a particular channel? (3) Why didn't they use the other channel? I conducted three rounds of open coding, and in each round, I only coded for one of the three specific questions. New codes emerged as I scrutinized the data again and again. In addition, in this initial coding process, I generated *in vivo* codes, meaning that I kept participants' special terms, if any, in the codes. *In vivo* codes help me to preserve participants' natural language and expressions, which allows me to explore their views and understand their actions through subsequent data (Charmaz, 2014). Considering that the transcripts involved two languages, I coded the two groups separately during each round of open coding (i.e., I first coded all the Chinese transcripts and then all the English ones). The initial codes were in two languages as well. Sample codes for the first specific question include the Facebook mother group, Facebook personal page, WeChat mother group (微信妈妈群), best friends small chatting group on WeChat (微信闺蜜群), and WeChat Moments (微信朋友圈). Sample codes for the second specific question include easier-to-get relevant opinions, audience sharing the same beliefs, being addicted to WeChat in daily life (日常依赖微信), and familiar with the blocking functionality (熟悉屏蔽功能). Sample codes for

the third specific question include the audience being biased, receiving mean responses, unfamiliar with features (不熟悉功能), and having no response (没人搭理).

To identify the facilitators and barriers to selecting a particular channel, I asked the participants to talk about their experiences of complaining in different channels, as well as the ways new mothers remedy or prevent potential negative outcomes. The question was operationalized into two specific interview questions: (1) describe past experience complaining via CMC technology, and (2) describe remediations or preventions of negative outcomes. In the interview, new mothers were welcome to share both positive and negative experiences. I did not ask for negative experiences particularly at first since I tried not to bias their answers. However, considering that I was more interested to know why a certain channel failed to serve as an appropriate place for negative self-disclosure, I asked participants to think about and share with me any negative experience if they had only mentioned positive experience. Only a few participants needed such a prompt to talk about negative experiences, and two of them merely described imaginary scenarios based on others' experiences (i.e., they explained why they did not use a particular channel because they saw others' negative experiences using the channel for complaining).

During the initial coding for this specific question, I coded both positive and negative experiences. Usually, the participants were telling stories and each story had a clear theme. For instance, a mother claimed that she no longer used online parenting forums for complaining because she felt that the community was unfriendly and the respondents were mean. She shared her negative experience of being verbally attacked by some individuals who replied to her post. I put this incident under the negative experience column and assigned three codes to this unit: unfriendly community, mean respondents, and being attacked by respondents.

In terms of the second part of the third research question, I coded the measures mothers took to remedy and prevent negative consequences. I assigned codes to the two categories (i.e., remediation and prevention) separately. Sample codes include “deleting the post” (remedy), “complaining to another party about the negative experience” (remedy), “no longer posting in XX mother group” (prevention), and “creating a block list” (prevention).

As mentioned above, I tried to create *in vivo* codes that can maximally present participants’ original perceptions. Meanwhile, when possible, I coded with gerunds which helped preserve the fluidity of the participants’ experience (Glaser, 1978). Charmaz (2006) pointed out the difference between the gerunds and their noun forms that the readers will “gain a strong sense of action and sequence with gerunds; and the nouns turn these actions into topics” (p. 49). Therefore, many of the codes I generated during open coding were gerunds such as “posting anonymously”, “deleting posts”, “sharing similar experiences”, etc.

Once I completed the open coding, the next step was axial coding, which was to bring data back again in a coherent whole (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). In other words, I fractured data into distinct codes in the open coding and then aimed to sort, synthesize, and reassemble the initial codes in new ways during the axial coding process (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Creswell et al., 1998). Again, the axial coding was guided by the research questions.

First, I sought to identify connections between existing codes, especially the ones that were conceptually similar in nature but with different descriptions and languages (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). I tried to group them together under the same conceptual heading (i.e., a theme). I remained true to the spirit of constant comparison by comparing codes with codes and units with units to find similarities and differences. For instance, the codes describing the comparatively mean environment of a channel included “unfriendly community”, “mean respondents”, and

“being commented by trolls and bullies”. These codes were collapsed into a theme: mean environment. Some codes were used repeatedly in different ways. For example, another theme I generated was “judgmental respondents”, which was created based on the initial codes “mean respondents”, “friends who viewed the post gossiped about me”, and “my family is judgmental”. The initial code “mean respondents” was used at least twice. In other words, I was trying different ways of sorting and reorganizing the initial codes to generate a theme.

Second, based on the research question, I attempted to identify broader relationships between themes and generate categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Strauss, 1987). The axial coding process involved at least three rounds of trials and vetoes. In the last trial, I selected the most salient and meaningful themes and renamed some of them by revisiting the literature (the others were fine at the stage), and then put the themes under the developed categories.

In summary, for the first research question, I performed descriptive statistics to present mothers’ different levels of self-disclosure in different channels. I coded mothers’ responses and recorded in a form which listed off all the selected channels and each participant’s disclosure level in each channel. For the second and third research questions, I utilized constant comparative methods to identify the codes and themes.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter includes two sections. The first section examines new mothers' varied levels of self-disclosure in different CMC channels. The five levels reflect how many details mothers are willing to share in their complaining posts, from level 1 (vague message) through level 5 (full of details). Participants labeled their average disclosure level in every CMC channel they have used for expressing negative emotions related to new motherhood issues.

The second section discusses mothers' areas of consideration when selecting a channel to complain. Based on the interviews, I first explored the facilitators and barriers for mothers to select a particular channel, then I categorized these facilitators and barriers into mothers' four areas of consideration, and they are a) emotion management, b) impression management, c) information control, and d) problem-solving.

In this chapter, I use interview data to develop my arguments. I include English translations for all Chinese transcripts being quoted here.

Levels of Disclosure in Different Channels

The first research question concerns new mothers' varied levels of self-disclosure while complaining in different types of CMC channels. In the interviews, the participants first talked about the CMC channels they used to complain about new motherhood-related issues. Then based on the survey questionnaire, they rated their average level of information disclosure in each channel they used.

For American and Chinese participants together, the five major types of CMC channels are a) instant messaging (including text, audio, and video conversations), b) online mom support groups, c) online (parenting) forums, d) personal page on social media (i.e., Facebook and

WeChat), and e) other social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, YouTube). Results show that mothers' level of information disclosure varies significantly in different channels (see table 4).

Insert Table 4 here

More specifically, these five major channels may have subchannels in which mothers' complaining behaviors may differ due to different audiences. Based on the interviews, instant messaging includes instant messaging with peers and instant messaging with parents/elderly family members. Interviews reflect a great difference in the levels of self-disclosure when the mothers complain to these two groups.

As explained in the method chapter, level 1 complaints refer to implicit ones in which mothers subtly express their negative emotions. Common examples include sharing posts of other mothers' complaints or using memes to express feelings subtly. Based on my observation and some participants' reflections, this level of complaining behavior mainly occurs on personal social media pages. Among 35 participants, 18 of them have complained on their personal social media pages, and 11 out of these 18 mothers claimed that they mainly made level 1 complaints on this type of channel. Five other participants made level 2 complaints, the other one is level 3, and only one participant ever posted level 5 complaints - a long post full of details - on her own Facebook page.

There is one Chinese participant said that she usually complained at level 1 in WeChat mom groups. She shared links and articles about daycare/preschool safety protocols to local mother groups to subtly express her concerns and disagreements towards local schools' safety measurements. She wanted to warn other mothers, but meanwhile, she did not want to talk too much about her personal opinions because she did not want to "get in trouble" as someone may

disagree with her. She believed that sharing a link only is a soft way to express herself, and experience told her that this was effective in avoiding direct confrontation.

Another Chinese mother claimed that she complained to her parents only at level 1 because she did not want her parents to worry. She did not want to hide anything from her parents, which is why she still wanted to share in the conversation with them, though she did not talk too much about it so that her parents would not consider it a serious issue.

Level 2 complaints are a short, clear, and concise message expressing mothers' negative emotions. The study finds that this level of complaining often happens in online mother support groups. 17 out of 34 mothers have complained at level 2, and about half (8) of them said they had posted short but clear complaining messages in Facebook/WeChat mom groups. As one Chinese mother explained, in WeChat mom groups, the topics changed quickly. She also noticed that sometimes mothers were discussing several different topics simultaneously. Therefore, she felt people would not have the patience to read any long complaint. When she needed to complain, she would have to compose a lucid message to get people's attention. Whether more information is shared depends on the audience's reactions. If nobody or only a very limited number of mothers responded, she might give up on this channel and try another channel if necessary. Other five mothers claimed that such a level of complaints are the ones they would post on their personal social media pages. Their mindset is similar to those who posted level 1 complaints on personal social media pages. They wanted an outlet to vent out negative emotions without expecting too much to receive specific and useful advice from the audience. Some also thought about protecting self or family image because most of the audience on their personal social media pages is real-life connections. Two mothers (one American and one Chinese) said

they would share level 2 complaints in online forums, and this happened when they replied to others' posts rather than making their own posts.

Level 3 disclosure involves more details. Based on the chart, mothers usually include a simple sentence example in their message. This level is a popular choice as 20 participants claimed that they have complained at this level. Results suggest that mothers are willing to share more details when complaining via instant messaging. A total of 10 mothers complained at level 3 when complaining via instant messaging. Among them, more mothers (6 out of 10) complained at this level when communicating with peers than with parents. A common explanation is that they did not want their parents to worry, which may in turn induce additional stress on mothers. The other seven mothers would include a simple example when complaining in mom groups because they believe "context is important". Without a specific story (even if it is only a few words), the audience may hardly relate to the mothers and provide any valuable or meaningful feedback.

Level 4 complaining is the most popular level of self-disclosure, according to the interviews. This level of self-disclosure involves more private information as mothers would share details about the incident that has triggered their negative emotions. Among 34 participants, 32 of them had experience making level 4 complaints, and this mostly happened when mothers were communicating in private CMC channels. 17 mothers (12 Chinese and 5 American) said they would provide details about what happened to them when they complained to peers (e.g., close friends, siblings) via instant messaging. Other eight mothers (5 Chinese and 3 American) claimed they felt comfortable sharing private details with their parents when communicating online. Four participants (3 American and 1 Chinese) said they used to complain

at level 4 when complaining in mom groups. What is worth noting is that no participant had ever posted level 4 complaints on their personal social media page.

Level 5 is defined as the type of long complaining message full of details. Sometimes the mothers may include multiple examples in one post and each example has many details. Seven participants (5 American and 2 Chinese) have made level 5 complaints before. The two Chinese participants only disclosed details in private, with peers or parents. As they explained, the private conversation includes rounds of interactions. The audience had questions and they would provide the answers. The two-way communication leads to a higher level of information sharing. Interestingly, four American mothers chose to complain at level 5 in public. One mother mentioned she created vlogs on YouTube and sometimes complained about new motherhood challenges in the vlogs. She would share many stories and feelings as she felt the storytelling was soothing and she believed her sharing helped others who went through the same. Two mothers loved posting long stories to Facebook mom groups and the other preferred sharing stories on her own Facebook page. Their positive experience of receiving support and help from the audience encouraged them to post more (and complain more) on these channels.

In summary, self-disclosure does not have to be all or nothing. Mothers' choices can be varied case by case. Even when they use the same channel, the way they frame the complaining message may not be the same every single time they post. In the next section, I will explore the areas that mothers take into consideration when they select the channel and frame the message. The above results provide a basic description of mothers' varied self-disclosure levels, and support the claim that mothers do make effort to protect their privacy while expressing negative emotions online.

Areas of Consideration and Corresponding Facilitators and Barriers

The next research question is regarding new mothers' preference for choosing one channel over the other. Based on the interviews, I first identified the facilitators and barriers that affect mothers' channel selection (see Table 5), then I categorized them into four areas of channel functions that determine mothers' choice: a) emotion management, b) impression management, c) information control, and d) problem-solving.

Insert Table 5 here

Emotion Management

During the interview, participants highlight their needs to help manage emotions through the complaining process. Participants' narratives highlight four facilitators that motivate them to use CMC channels to air grievances of their daily struggles as new mothers: (a) reciprocal complaining, (b) perspective-shifting, (c) therapeutic writing, and (d) channel appropriateness. On the other hand, the three barriers that constrain their desire to use online forums to vent negative emotions are (a) traumatic memory, b) stress-inducing, and c) expectancy violation.

Facilitators

To some new mothers, their choice of online communication channels depends on whether the negative emotions would be relieved after complaining via the particular channel. Four common facilitators for venting on a particular channel include (a) reciprocal complaining, (b) perspective-shifting, (c) therapeutic writing, and (d) channel appropriateness.

Reciprocal Complaining. Whether a channel involves reciprocal complaining can influence new mothers' likelihood of using the channel to vent their emotions. Reciprocal complaining implies that the complainer and the message receiver have gone through similar problems or shared feelings. New mothers from both cultures reported their consideration regarding whether the potential audience from a specific channel has the aforementioned characters. On the one hand, mothers believed that this type of audience is more likely to understand their feelings and show empathy. On the other hand, sharing experiences may facilitate reciprocal complaining, which is critical for generating the new mothers' sense of normalcy. Some participants noted that it allows them to feel that they are not "the only ones" who experience "socially inappropriate" emotions.

Affirmation of Emotions and Experiences. Many mothers need validation through the process of venting to each other. Hearing others going through a similar situation allows them not to feel isolated, alienated, or out of the norm. They are seeking the feelings such as "I'm not being unreasonable or insane or making a big fuss over a minor issue".

Easy access to reciprocal complaining is one facilitator for selecting a particular channel to complain. Kelly^{AM} preferred Facebook mom groups because she was "looking more for moms to be like 'this is what my husband does and also sharing their own similar circumstances'".

Lisa^{AM} also stated:

Lisa^{AM}: I find social media really helpful and I am super nosy and I read everyone's comments of that... (laugh) ...and in a way that makes me feel better, cuz "Haha, someone does know what I'm going through."

From this perspective, reciprocal complaining may be valuable not just because it provides a venue for one to release negative emotions through venting but also offers its

audience a sense of social norms. Several Chinese mothers noted that they feel comforted when hearing reciprocal complaints from the audience. As Zhao^{CH} reflected:

Zhao^{CH}: [妈妈群]大家会有比较相似的经历嘛, 就觉得, 啊大家都会经历这一阶段, 心里面就感觉好一些了。

[In mom groups, everyone has similar experiences. I feel better when knowing that all new mothers went through the same.]

Mothers may feel relieved when they realize the issue is common or at least not rare, which has not occurred to them until they see others' similar stories. The feeling of normality can help improve mothers' moods and provide them the courage to face the problem. As Chu^{CH} explained:

Chu^{CH}: 听到别人说“哎呀我也有这个问题!”的时候, 会觉得“啊原来我不是一个人。”

(笑) [...] 就会觉得“好吧大家都有这个问题, 那我也没什么好 complain 了。”虽然没有找到解决的途径, 但是因为别人跟你 share 了他们的事情了之后, 可能你会觉得“哦原来这个事情也不是太难了, 大家都经历过, 那我也经历了就好了。过去了就过去了。”

[When I hear people say, "Oh, I have that problem too!" I feel "Great! I'm not the only one!" (laughs) [...] Then I feel, "Well, since everyone has this problem, I don't need to complain then." After hearing others share their problems, even if you don't find a way to solve them, you still think, "Oh, this may not be that difficult. Everyone has gone through this. I just deal with it. It will be all right when it's over.]

That being said, mothers are willing to select one channel if they feel the feedback they receive from that channel benefits them in dealing with the challenging situation emotionally.

Like Beth^{AM} said:

Beth^{AM}: I also look for... me not being the only one that's going through this cuz I...that really helps me, encourages me...just encourages me to deal with this situation better. Like I said, when you feel like you are not alone, when you feel like someone's going through the same thing you are going through, it helps you deal with it a lot better.

Due to the need for affirmation of emotions and experiences, mothers tend to select the channel that they believe includes people who can offer such support. Online mother groups are prevalent and often selected as the place to complain because many moms believe that people who are not parents yet tend to be less empathetic and cannot share their own stories to lighten their mood. As Feng^{CH} pointed out:

Feng^{CH}: 我国内的闺蜜，她们都没有小孩，我就很少跟她们去吐槽我家里面带小孩、跟我婆婆关系的事情。因为跟她们吐槽，她们可能...没有共鸣，她也不一定知道怎么安慰你，或者她也没有她自己的事情可以抖出来，给你开心开心（同笑）。[...]（在群里）去吐槽的时候，你会聊出很多很多的事情。然后她们家的事情可能会把你逗开心。（笑）

[Because my best friends in China don't have kids yet, I rarely complain to them about the issues of taking care of the kids or my relationship with my mom-in-law. They may not resonate or don't know how to comfort you. They don't have similar stories to share with you to make you feel any better either (laughs)... While complaining in mom groups, you can see other mothers' stories that may crack you up. (laugh)]

Mothers compare the communication channels in either a conscious or subconscious manner in terms of whether the channel can satisfy their need for emotional affirmation which can be easily achieved through complaining to each other with peer mothers.

Normative Standards for Social Comparisons. Others' stories allow a new mother to establish a normative standard. The standard, then, can be strategically deployed to manage one's anxiety, uncertainty, and frustration. For example, Kelly^{AM} reflected that she would feel better after learning about peer mothers' worse cases and realized that her issues were not as horrible as she thought.

Kelly^{AM}: I feel like there's always someone else out there who's even worse, you know. It will be like mom saying, "well, I don't even have a husband. I was pregnant. It's all me. I don't have any help." I'm like... "Eh...that sucks." (laugh) Well, I don't want him (Kelly's husband) to like...go away, so...It's better than that.

Nicole^{AM} also pointed out, “there is a lot of misery loves company in those (mother support) groups”. Since the challenges and difficulties that mothers face are similar, comparisons are almost inevitable, yet mothers’ emotions while sharing or hearing the stories can be different or even opposite. Nicole^{AM} mentioned that she saw many sad stories (e.g., various complications during pregnancy that may cause a miscarriage) in one of the mom groups. Members often responded to others’ threads by claiming, “mine is worse.” Nicole^{AM} felt a high level of negativity in that group, though at a certain point, she did need that because the comparison made her feel relieved.

In comparison, some complaints are amusing rather than miserable, and they commonly occur when the mothers are roasting their partners. Mothers’ emotions tend to be positive while telling the stories even though they were truly mad or sad when the incident happened. Comparison still exists, though there is a lower level of negativity. As Sun^{CH} described her experience:

Sun^{CH}: 我吐[槽]完她吐，然后大家比一比谁惨（笑）。其实我是...我基本上是算是当个趣事给大家乐一乐，然后再从别人那里...（笑）...觉得，哎呀其实我没有她惨（笑）。

[After I complained, another mom would complain, then we compare whose situation was worse (laugh). Actually, I was sharing my story to amuse the group and see if others have similar stories to share too (laugh). Then I realized that somebody suffered more than me. (laugh)]

Reciprocal complaining exists in both circumstances, and mothers can develop a sense of normality through the interactions, which helps mothers reduce negative feelings such as abnormality, isolation, and self-doubt.

In summary, reciprocal complaining is more than venting one’s negative emotions. It serves specific functions for our participants. First, a venue rich with reciprocal complaining suggests that participants are likely to share experiences with others who understand their

experiences and thus, less judgmental or critical of their responses or actions. Second, participants rely on information obtained through reciprocal complaining to develop a sense of normative standards, which can serve as a tool for emotion management and social comparisons. Thus, reciprocal complaining is not just about venting complaints but also about hearing others' struggles, which are actively interpreted to give meaning to one's current experiences.

Perspective-Shifting. Several Chinese participants particularly mentioned that complaining provides opportunities to shift their minds to focus on something else. As a result, their negative emotions were reduced, sometimes even eliminated once they stopped thinking about the issues. As Chu^{CH} stated:

Chu^{CH}: 有时候你聊着聊着, complain complain 着, 她把你的思想转移了, 说一些其他的事情。[...] 包括我妈, 说着说着就开始说, 她怎么样怎么样了是吧? [...] 她把我的这个关注点给转移掉了。

[Sometimes you are talking and complaining, and then the listener shifts your focus by talking about something else. [...] Like my mom, when I was complaining to her, and suddenly she started talking about what was happening to her. She shifted my focus.]

The speaker's focus can be shifted when the listener starts to share their own troubles. The roles between the complainer and the listener have been exchanged – the complainer now becomes the listener while the previous listener becomes the main speaker. The shift of attention focus can lift the mothers from dwelling on their own issues, and it serves the function of relieving their negative emotions. As Feng^{CH} mentioned:

Feng^{CH}: 比如你吐槽自己, 她[指微信聊天的朋友]也会说出她家的事, 然后你就开始评论别人的事情的时候, 这个时候你的心情就不太一样了, 然后就可以得到了转换了。[For instance, when you complain to a friend, she may talk about her family issues too. However, when you start commenting on her issue, your mood changes and the focus is shifted.]

The mindsets of a commenter and a complainer tend to be different because they are thinking of the same issue from different perspectives. When the mother switches their role from the complainer to the commenter - either voluntarily or passively – their mindset may be changed and it makes them start thinking about their own problems from a different angle if they still remember the problems after the conversation. After all, not all issues that mothers complain about are serious, and it is not uncommon for mothers to forget about the problem after complaining, especially when their focus has been shifted. In other circumstances, the mothers still remember the problem, but their mindset is changed after being a commenter on others’ stories. According to our participants, sometimes they realized that they might be “overreacted” or “unreasonable” when dealing with disagreements with the family after hearing others’ stories.

Similar to emotion affirmation, perspective-shifting requires the audience’s feedback. The audience may play a more critical role in helping mothers shift their perspective since the feedback provided by the audience has to be “interesting” enough to attract mothers’ attention and comment.

Some participants particularly pointed out that they rarely started a complaining post online proactively. Instead, they were more willing to reply to others’ posts or respond to friends’ complaints by sharing similar problems. As Oliva^{AM} mentioned:

Oliva^{AM}: I have posted in there [a local Facebook mother group] a couple of times, just kind of a little...venting comment of like...I'm trying to get my frustration out on. [...] Not doing my own. But you know...um...a lot of women will post things like “I just have to vent.” And then...you get on there, and you read their story, and it’s like, “Oh my gosh, I feel that way, too.” So then I comment back like, “You're not alone. I feel the same.”

When connecting with others online, mothers can be more than victims of adverse events or emotions. The online sharing – both proactively and passively - allows them to exercise their

“expertise”—as a fellow new mother who understands the circumstances, they find authority in their voice and solutions.

Alternatively, audiences of their online complaints may reach out to encourage new mothers’ perspective-taking. Heather^{AM} mentioned that occasionally her friends who saw her complaints on social media would send her “a funny gift or response” which was meant to cheer her up. She felt that her focus had been successfully altered by the gesture a couple of times. Interviews also suggest that perspective-shifting usually requires deep-level communication between mothers and their audience in which the process involves rounds of interactions. As a result, fast responses often used on SNSs – such as clicking a “thumbs up” button to the post, sending a comforting emoji, or short feedback – could be much less effective in helping mothers stop thinking about the issues and change focus.

The distraction is even considered a failure if the mother’s focus is not shifted. For instance, Chu^{CH} and Qin^{CH} both mentioned that they did not prefer to complain in WeChat mother groups because “the topic changes too quickly.” As Qin^{CH} explained:

Qin^{CH}: 感觉每个人都沉浸在自我的世界中。她们看起来好像是在安慰你，说她们家也怎样怎样。但实际上她们根本不在乎你说的什么，她们吐槽的和我的并不是一件事，跟我没啥关系。

[Everyone seems to be self-involved. They (i.e., the mothers who responded) seem to comfort you by sharing their stories, but the truth is that they don’t really care about your problem because their complaining subject is not quite relevant to my issue.]

Perspective shifting, to a certain level, has similarities with avoiding. Mothers did nothing to solve the problem that caused their negative feelings but chose to ignore or withdraw from dealing with the problem, with help from the audience. Some participants believed perspective shifting helped purge their negative emotions, at least at the time they were enraged and near the edge of out of emotional control. If nobody is there distracting the angry mother

(even online), she might exhibit destructive behavior (e.g., lashing out physically, and threatening violence). Perspective shifting can be effective in calming people down, but not useful in terms of resolving the problem. However, as mothers said, oftentimes they complained about trivial matters that would not cause any severe consequences. Avoiding is perceived as an acceptable crisis management strategy in this situation.

Therapeutic Writing. Online complaining often involves writing down the issues and emotions. To some participants, the writing process serves as a therapy that calms them down. Such findings are consistent with Pennebaker's (1997a) work which highlights the importance and value of writing as a therapeutic process. When a communication channel offers convenience for new mothers to "compose" and edit their narratives, mothers are more willing to select that channel.

For example, many of our participants argued that holding negative emotions is unhealthy and that writing provides a valuable outlet to release some steam.

Irene^{AM}: Sometimes even you are just like typing the...even if you type it up and don't send it, just getting it like...out...is healthier than holding it all in. [...]
Sometimes I don't even post, I just like...type it up, and I'm like, "Oh! Never mind. I'm not gonna post." Just to like get it out of you though, because holding like negative energy is just not very healthy.

Li^{CH} also described her experience of purging negative emotions by editing the complaining post she wanted to post anonymously on an online forum:

Li^{CH}: 比如说匿名发一个帖子。因为我觉得难受了, 我需要去说一下。然后这个事情我又不能跟我老公说, 又不能跟我妈妈去说的话, 那我就打算匿名发一个帖, 但是我会写着写着就觉得说...算了吧。就是我在写的过程中, 我自己的情绪就消化掉了, 然后我就删掉了。

[For example, sometimes I want to post anonymously [on a forum]. Because I feel bad, and I need to talk about it. The problem is not appropriate to complain to my husband or my mom, so I wanted to post it online anonymously. While I was

writing, I felt like...forget about it. Through writing, my emotions have been digested⁹, then I delete it without posting it.]

It is worth noting that both Irene^{AM} and Li^{CH} eventually decided not to post the message to the public. Interviews reveal that many participants would avoid posting complaints online unless they believe it is necessary. As Nicole^{AM} mentioned:

Nicole^{AM}: There are definitely times I've written a whole venting post and gone...I don't want to make this public. And then just like to delete it. (laugh) Although like...I'm just gonna read this to my best friend. I'm not gonna post this online.

It is suggested from our participants' behavior that as long as their negative emotions are reduced, it is not always necessary to share complaining messages with the public. Because that sharing behavior further involves their other considerations toward disclosing personal issues on that channel, such as privacy violation and damage to personal image.

Nicole^{AM}'s words again demonstrate that many people need a channel to vent while depressed and further show that they want more control in deciding if to share the message or not once they calm down. The traditional way of venting (e.g., calling a friend and venting) does not offer the option of retraction. Once the information is shared, it is shared. There is no way to “delete” it or take it back. Whereas creating a message online – whether it is a Facebook post or an instant message - is different since it allows individuals to have more control over the information. Some people prefer a channel that not only offers them a place to air out their negative emotions but also provides them maximum control over their writing.

Writing, along with listening to music, exercising, drawing, and painting can be a spiritual healing process for individuals who have experienced traumatic or stressful events. This

⁹ According to Ancient Taoist philosophy, we can digest emotions. This is an ancient Chinese metaphor to describe how people process emotions. Just like how our body digests food, we “digest” emotions by differentiating what to assimilate and what to discard.

is a legitimate therapy used by mental health professionals and counselors to help treat mental illnesses such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, and bereavement (Ackerman, 2017; Smyth et al, 1999). Evidence shows that writing therapy has potential physical and psychological health benefits and improves patients' health outcomes (Holden & Mugerwa, 2012; Smyth et al, 1999).

Interviews show that writing helped some mothers manage their negative emotions, no matter if they published their writing eventually. Mothers with this mindset have been shown to prefer a user-friendly channel for typing, editing, or even deleting and retracting the message.

Channel Appropriateness. One channel is perceived as more appropriate for venting motherhood-related issues than the other if it meets mothers' particular expectations such as synchronous conversation, more views and responses, and a relatable audience.

For instance, Jiang^{CH} highly values instant responses. She mentioned that she could always receive responses within a short period if she posted complaints on a parenting forum. Due to the high popularity of that forum, there are many active members during the regular awake time so she can receive quick feedback from other members. In comparison, Jiang^{CH} had a less satisfying experience complaining to friends via WeChat messages or posting on WeChat moments because the message receivers could not reply promptly. “The moment had passed when I received their responses” (“收到他们回复时,我[负面]情绪都过去了。”).

Chen^{CH} and Christina^{AM} both echoed this by pointing out the delay in receiving responses from friends and family who live in different time zones. Chen^{CH} said that her best friend who lives in China used to be her top choice to complain about motherhood-related issues. However, as Chen^{CH} reflected:

Chen^{CH}: 我跟我闺蜜吐槽过,就是我太想吐槽,编辑一小段发给她,但是她...我俩有时差,所以她会第二天才回复我。但是那时候我气儿都消了你知道吗?

[I used to complain to my best friend. I wanted to vent so much so I sent her a short paragraph of messages. But we had time differences. She would reply to me the next day. But I was no longer angry at that point, you know?]

Besides synchronous conversation, another facilitator is a large number of views and responses in a communication channel. This only applied to the situation where mothers share their complaints on a public platform rather than in private. Mothers who need validation tend to prefer this type of channel which can provide more views and comments to their posts. Their negative emotions can be relieved if a satisfying number of viewers respond by agreeing with their posts. As Xu^{CH} shared:

Xu^{CH}: 我有时会去[论坛名称]发帖嘛。那里热门的帖子能有好几万的阅读量。我有次发个帖，当然不是关于吐槽的啦，是关于我备孕的经历吧，我那篇帖子显示有2万多的阅读量。所以我觉得那个论坛真的很活跃。[...]我曾经在上面吐槽过，还是婆婆的事吧。...忘记有多少阅读量了，应该也很多，别人的回复至少好几页吧。...很多人回复也说她们的婆婆怎样怎样，我看了就觉得，哎我果然不是一个人。...之后心情确实好很多。

[Sometimes I post on a forum named (name of the forum). Popular posts there can get tens of thousands of views. I once posted a thread there - which is not to complain but to share my experience preparing for pregnancy - and that thread had over 20,000 views. So I think the members of that forum were very active. [...] I once complained about my mom-in-law on there. [...] I forgot how many views that thread, but there should've been a lot and there were pages of comments. [...] Many people responded by talking about their moms-in-law. After I read those, I felt that "great, I was not the only one." [...] Then I was in a much better mood.]

Xu^{CH}'s words reflect some new mothers' psychological need not to feel isolated. Although it is not guaranteed, more clicks, views, and comments usually lead to more agreements, which makes mothers feel that others understand them. Melissa^{AM} mentioned that some of her friends "feel more socially validated if they can complain about whatever is going on in their life and have like...51 people like that post, that feels really good to them." Melissa^{AM} claimed that she did not feel the same, though she was aware of such emotional needs within her friends. Melissa^{AM}'s comments indirectly reflect a group of new mothers' needs and expectations of

receiving more attention from others. A channel is perceived as more appropriate if it can fulfill such an expectation.

In addition, a channel is preferred if mothers believe the audience is relatable to their complaints. For example, mother groups on Facebook are categorized based on different factors such as location, children's age, and mothers' or children's particular needs (e.g., breastfeeding, speech delay). A couple of participants pointed out that they would choose somewhere to post if the audience appeared to be more relatable to their complaints. As Danielle^{AM} stated, "like my February babies group, I posted there, somewhere where these people who are relatable to a certain level." Danielle^{AM}'s consideration is reasonable, considering that the common challenges of caring for a newborn are different from the ones of taking care of toddlers or school-aged children. An age-appropriate online support group includes more viewers who are relatable to her complaints. In contrast, Qin^{CH} said she did not want to complain to her big sister because her sister's kids were already in middle school and Qin^{CH} felt the age gap was a barrier to effective communication about new motherhood between her and her sister. Qin^{CH}'s sister was not relatable to the topic, and that is the main reason Qin^{CH} chose not to complain to her sister, either online or offline.

On the other hand, relevance may benefit the message receivers. As Wang^{CH} shared in the interview, she had a list of close friends to whom she may complain about motherhood. She thought carefully before she complained to her friends because she did not want to treat her friend as if they were her "emotional trash can".

Wang^{CH}: 我不想把好朋友当成[宣泄情绪的]垃圾桶。我吐槽的事, 可能她也在经历, 说不定聊天的时候, 讲的东西对她也有用。

[I don't want to treat my best friends as if they are "trash cans" and just dump my negative emotions on them. I hope that the issue I was complaining about is something she was probably experiencing as well, so the chat was beneficial to her too.]

In summary, one channel is perceived as appropriate to complain if it meets mothers' expectations of synchronous interaction, adequate message exposure and feedback, or relatable audience members. Mothers may consider channel appropriateness from both sides of themselves and the audience in the sense of if they are comfortable using that channel and if the audience is appropriate for accessing their complaints.

Barriers

In the interviews, participants also talked about barriers that hinder them from complaining on a specific online communication channel. As opposed to purging negative emotions, sometimes mothers are likely to face additional negativity if they complain in a “wrong” place. The top three barriers mentioned by participants are a) revisiting traumatic memory, b) inducing additional stress, and c) violating expectancy.

Revisiting Traumatic Memory. Unlike some mothers who perceived writing as a therapy for recovering from negative emotions, other participants described writing the whole story as “revisiting the trauma”. Therefore, they were reluctant to recall the incident, let alone create a detailed complaining post online.

Some participants' experience using online parenting forums has left them with an impression that creating long posts with full details is either “necessary” or “critical to attracting more viewership and likes”. Heather^{AM} pointed out that a high level of vagueness in the messages may confuse the readers who are usually strangers and not familiar with the mothers' situation. She would consider someone who posted a short and vague message as “just fishing”, which is the behavior she tried to avoid doing while posting online. This mindset makes many participants spend a long time recalling the details of the incident and writing up a post to

describe the story and their feelings. The whole process, however, according to Li^{CH}, is “going through the tragedy again”.

Jiang^{CH} claimed that writing up the story is “making my (Jiang^{CH}’s) mood even worse and may prevent me from looking at the issue objectively” (“因为它[写作]会让我的情绪在写的过程中，更加地崩溃，然后让我看事情会更加地不客观”). As Jiang^{CH} further explained:

Jiang^{CH}: 因为我觉得情绪...你是需要去调节跟解决的，那这些论坛不能够解决问题，反倒会扩大问题的严重性。[...] 我是一个很实际的人，带娃已经这么累了，干嘛还要费那个心意去写这些没有用的、就是娱乐别人的一些东西？就没有必要。
[I think the emotions must be regulated and resolved, but those forums cannot make it happen but make things worse. [...] I’m a practical person. I’m already exhausted from taking care of the kid. Why bother to write those useless things just to entertain others? It’s unnecessary.]

A channel will not be chosen if mothers had the feeling that the audience did not truly care about their issues but merely read the stories for entertainment or “looking for the sense of superiority that they were doing better than the mother who posted the thread.” (“寻找优越感，就好像他们做得比那些发帖的妈妈强” – Xu^{CH}) In that case, these mothers would rather “not easily cut open to irrelevant, because others are hilarious, and the pain is yourself.” (“不要轻易揭伤疤给无关的人。别人只是看热闹，痛的还是你自己” -Jiang^{CH})

However, Jiang^{CH} used to post short complaints (e.g., one or two short sentences) on WeChat Moments, and Li^{CH} occasionally messaged close friends via WeChat using a few short sentences to complain. According to them, such communication involves a limited number of details. They aired out the negative emotions by ambiguously mentioning what happened. They believed that they had received needed comforts as well without revisiting the whole incident and recalling the disturbing memories.

Revisiting what happened (usually a trauma) is perceived as harmful by this group of participants. As a result, they tried to avoid recalling the details of the incident even if they

decided to complain. They focused on their feelings rather than what had happened specifically. They needed to find a channel where its audience was responsive to this type of complaining message.

Inducing Additional Stress. Mothers usually complain with the expectation of reducing stress. Unfortunately, such expectation is often violated due to reasons such as worrying about little or upsetting feedback and continuous negativity.

Being anxious about the feedback adds more stress to new mothers, especially those who care about how others think of them. As mentioned previously, some individuals feel socially validated if they receive many likes and comments. Unfortunately, a constant need for social validation leads to discouragement. Mothers may feel inadequate when they see fewer clicks and likes on their posts or even negative comments. All these are likely to add more mental stress to mothers. Some of our participants are cautious in selecting channels that may induce such stress. For instance, Amy^{AM} explained her mental activity while posting complaints on Facebook mother groups:

Amy^{AM}: And the other thing was...if my posting gets as much attention as other posts? Or if my post...or I felt that way, then it adds to the stress. [...] Like, what's special about my situation? Or what's special about their situation...that warranted all these comments? Versus mine that only got maybe one or two helpful comments. [...] ...if my post only got like five comments, then I'm like...you know, who's judging me? You know. Why they are not responding? Am I not posting often enough? Because you know how boards move quickly. And if you don't bump it... and then you're like...if I bump it, then does it make me look desperate? So it was just too much. There's too many societal pressures and concerns that come with posting in a general group.

Some people tend to overthink, and Amy^{AM} claimed that she is such a type of person. Therefore, the uncertainty regarding the potential feedback - quantity and content – can lead to anxious emotions, which is counterproductive for reducing negative emotions.

Some channels have a higher level of uncertainty than others, and mothers learn from observation (e.g., reading other posts and comments) and their own user experiences. It is suggested from this study that private communication channels (e.g., Facebook Messenger, WeChat instant messages, video chat) are relatively low in uncertainty due to the mutual knowledge between the complainer and the listener. Therefore, the conversation outcome is often anticipated, no matter if it is satisfying.

In contrast, the public ones that include a large number of strangers (e.g., national-level Facebook mother support groups, online parenting forums) may be highest in uncertainty. As Amy^{AM} said, “you had the one thing in common (i.e., being new mothers), but all of our backgrounds...our entire backgrounds are different.” It is more challenging to anticipate others’ responses in those channels, which becomes a stressor for some of our participants.

The situation of those semi-public channels such as personal Facebook pages or blogs is complicated. The level of uncertainty may depend on the constitution of the audience members. The ratio of acquaintances and strangers is likely to decide an individual’s anticipation accuracy. The more familiar the mother is with the potential message recipients, the less uncertainty could be. Thus, the more accurate their anticipation is.

This further leads to the discussion of another common phenomenon many of our participants decided to block their family members on personal Facebook pages and WeChat moments when complaining through these channels. One plausible explanation is that the mother can anticipate receiving upsetting comments from this audience group. As a result, to avoid “trouble”, using their words, some mothers chose the tactic of blocking to avoid dealing with the potential additional stress. For instance, Chu^{CH} talked about her mother’s reaction after reading her complaining post:

Chu^{CH}: 我妈很烦。[...] 她会说“哎你发这个干嘛啦？你让别人看到看笑话干嘛啦？”她很烦。[...] 有时候我妈会跟我说，家里亲戚朋友看到了，会讨论这件事情。所以说，会觉得我不懂事，或者说会觉得我....可能不太尊重公公婆婆或怎么样。[...] 她不但会在朋友圈给我留言，还会私下里找我说，你知道吗？(同笑) 然后就很烦。[...] 她有时候就这个事情跟我唠叨了老半天。我火气也很大你知道吗？[...] 就我妈会比较好面子，然后她就会骚扰我，骚扰我了之后...我觉得她骚扰我了之后我会很烦。

[My mom was so annoying...she would say, “why are you posting this? Why do you want others to laugh at us? ...Sometimes my mom told me that our relatives and friends would see my complaining post and discuss it. So she thought I was immature or did not respect my in-laws...Not only would she comment on my WeChat moment page, but she also talked to me about this in private, you know? (laughs). So annoying...Sometimes she nagged about it for a long time, and I was so pissed off, you know? ...My mom cares about face, so she always looked for me and nagged about such issues. I felt this was so annoying.]

The repeated use of the word *annoying* shows how Chu^{CH} was averse to her mother's behavior. Parents' disagreement and even interference with mothers' online disclosure behavior become top reasons for mothers to block parents and close relatives on their personal social media pages. “Some complaints are inappropriate to share with parents. Sometimes they would panic and keep calling you to ask what is going on. That makes me even more stressful.”

(“有些吐槽不适合让爸妈知道。他们会很紧张，然后给你‘连环夺命call’。我就感觉压力更大了。”)
) As Sun^{CH} reflected.

A couple of participants mentioned that it is not uncommon that the feedback *per se* adds more stress to them. While it is not surprising that disagreeing comments can worsen people's moods, agreeing ones may also induce additional stress rather than providing comfort or encouragement as expected. For example, Zhu^{CH} talked about her experience complaining about her mom-in-law on WeChat moments:

Zhu^{CH}: 我要是发[朋友圈]的话，可能有人去附和。但是呢，就是跳入那个怪圈，就情绪是越来越差。最后的结果肯定是你看...跟婆婆在一块更不自在。

[If I post on WeChat moments, some people may comment and agree with me. However, it makes me jump into that weird loop - my mood is getting worse. Then it turns out that I'm feeling even more uncomfortable living with my mom-in-law.]

The agreeing comments keep mothers focusing on negative things. Mothers may feel worse because when they think about negative things, they are more likely to notice other negative aspects of the incidents. The negativity will stand out as it is lit up with neon, and the positive side will not be noticed or paid attention to (Austin, 2018).

Unlike mothers who think others' agreement makes them feel "normal" and "not alone", other mothers argue that the agreeing comments sometimes make them feel powerless. They pointed out that the more agreements they saw, the sadder they felt because nobody seemed to be able to change the upsetting status quo. As Xu^{CH} claimed:

Xu^{CH}: 我们常常在抱怨“丧偶式”婚姻、“丧偶式”育儿，但是抱怨了又有什么用？老公不帮还是不帮。

[We keep complaining about *widow-like marriage* and *widow-like parenting*¹⁰. But what's the point? The husband still doesn't help.]

Seeing peer mothers suffering as well yet no one seemed to be able to change anything, some mothers become more stressed due to the feeling of powerlessness. They may switch to other channels to avoid this situation. It is suggested from the interviews that private channels could be a better option in this circumstance. The number of agreeing comments is limited since it usually includes only one or two message receivers. Moreover, rounds of interaction are likely to warrant deeper meaningful conversations that ease the feeling of powerlessness.

¹⁰ These are Chinese metaphors describing the phenomena of "absentee husband" and "absentee father". The husband or father is still alive but acts like they are already "dead" since they never participate in family activities or help with parenting.

Besides the feeling of being powerless, Zhao^{CH} particularly pointed out that complaining on a more “official” channel such as WeChat Moment is not help to lift but to keep the negativity within her mind. As she explained:

Zhao^{CH}: 这些鸡毛蒜皮的小事，虽然我吐槽，但是没感觉是那么严重的事情。就是大家聊一聊，心情爽一爽。但是发朋友圈呢，我就感觉，这个就一直存在在那里，一直负能量在那儿，就是自己感觉很不好。[...]就大家（在妈妈群）开玩笑一样吐吐槽，然后互相就是骂一骂，然后就过去了，挺好的。

[Although I complained about those trivial matters, I didn't perceive them as anything serious. So we just casually talked about it and then our mood was lighter. However, if I post it on WeChat moment, I feel the negativity is always there, which makes me feel uncomfortable...Whereas in mom groups, it's nice that everybody just complains, like saying a joke, then vents a bit. After that, we were over it.]

To Zhao^{CH}, WeChat Moment is a more official channel for complaining than mother group instant chatting. Posting on WeChat Moment is more stressful for her since the post is going to exist for a long period of time whereas her message in the mother group will soon be buried in tons of new messages. The negativity can disappear soon in the later channel.

In addition, people may perceive the same message differently. A comment is encouraging to one mother but can be annoying to the other. For example, Elizabeth^{AM} found many advising comments annoying rather than constructive:

Elizabeth^{AM}: I don't typically like post things on my Facebook page about like...negative things just because I don't want to hear other people's nagging...cuz usually it's like... they just...you know, people just get into your head and try to like...tell you how to do something and you're like “I'm not asking for your help!” Sometimes you just want to vent.

The audience may comment by asking a series of questions, which can become a mental burden to some mothers. As Gina^{AM} explained the reason why she rarely complained on her personal Facebook page:

Gina^{AM}: I'm not gonna get anything out of it rather than more negative emotions. It would be not only negative emotions from my own husband "What are you doing?" but from other people like "Is everything okay?"

Gina^{AM}'s additional stress came from two sources. One was her husband who turned angry after seeing her complaining post. The potential negative impact on her marital relationship caused more emotional burdens. The other one is from the "other people" which she meant by her Facebook friends (including her family) who asked questions in the comments or via private messages after viewing her complaints. The stress came from her obligation to "explain the whole thing to a thousand people", in Gina^{AM}'s words, which cost her additional energy and time.

Our participants also pointed out that audience confusion and sometimes misunderstanding is more common in public channels such as mother groups and forums than in private ones, due to diverse backgrounds and limited mutual knowledge between each other. As Li^{CH} said:

Li^{CH}: 各家情况不一样, 我也不可能把我家的所有情况去说。你如果不能理解我, 还招来更多的...乱七八糟的事情, 我就不想要再去增加更多的负面情绪, 所以我也不会去(妈妈群里)写。

[Each family's situation is different. I can't share all the information about my family. If you can't understand me, the complaining may cause more trouble. I don't want to add more negative emotions. So I don't complain in WeChat mother groups.]

Another stressor is suppressing negative feelings after reading unpleasant comments. For instance, Jennifer^{AM} mentioned:

Jennifer^{AM}: When they [her friends] say things that I don't like, and...I don't want to just say "Hey, can you just shut up?" you know? Or... "Just do your dame thing." [...] But usually, I feel like every time when I do that... like I suppress myself, when I come back I'll be like...I get mad because I cannot say.

In summary, interviews reveal that if an inappropriate channel was selected, mothers are likely to face additional mental stress coming from receiving less validation, uncertainty about feedback to be received, family interference, feeling less powerful of changing the unsatisfying status quo, and being stuck in negativity.

Expectancy Violation. Mothers' expectations of reducing negative emotions via online disclosure and communication are often violated for reasons such as receiving paradoxical responses or being verbally attacked by responders. The negative experience of expectancy violation complaining in a channel can be a barrier for mothers continuing to use that channel to complain in the future.

Expectancy violation can occur in both private and public online communication channels. For instance, Qian^{CH} and Olivia^{AM} talked about how family's reactions - usually disagreements - increased their negative emotions. As Qian^{CH} said:

Qian^{CH}: 你就本来想吐槽一点，得到一点他们[父母]的安慰，结果呢人家指出你N多的不对。然后就觉得，跟你心目中的这种...解决方案...是南辕北辙的。所以，虽然[和父母]视频，但是视频这个事情对我来说，打击多于鼓励。[...]一般都是不欢而散。说到后来我就...有时候不想说了，我就想把手机给砸了，但是又觉得不礼貌是不是？“哦好，那就这样吧，我都好，你们都好吧？再见！拜拜！”就这样。
[You just wanted to complain to the parents and receive some comfort from them. However, they ended up pointing out many of your mistakes. Then you would feel that this is the opposite of what you've expected. Therefore, although I video chatted with my parents, oftentimes this was more discouraging than encouraging... Usually, it became a bummer and everyone ended up being unhappy. So I stopped complaining sometimes and even wanted to smash my phone. But that's impolite, right? Then I would just say "Oh all right. That's it. I'm doing good. You are doing well, too? OK, bye-bye!"]

Olivia^{AM} echoed Qian^{CH}'s words by sharing her negative experience complaining to her family online:

Olivia^{AM}: Sometimes when I FaceTime my mom to vent to her about things, she tells me things that I don't want to hear. [...] I was messaging my grandma last night too on Facebook, venting to her about something and...it was pretty much...telling me things I didn't want to hear toward the end of it. (laughs) I'm like... "I already think we're done talking." (laughs)

It is not uncommon that parents and sometimes close friends, as reflected by other participants, did not "take the mother's side" after hearing mothers' complaints. According to some participants, relationship intimacy level often decides if a person is willing to share their honest opinion which sometimes hurts mothers' feelings and worsens their emotions.

The same issue can also happen when mothers complain on public platforms. For example, Lisa^{AM} once posted a story on her Facebook page complaining about the cyclists who yelled at her because she was blocking their way while comforting her crying baby. Lisa^{AM} mentioned that even one disagreeable comment could make her even angrier, even though all the other ones were supportive.

Lisa^{AM}: Like the post I was telling you about cycling. So a lot of the comments are really supportive like "Cheer up!". But this one girl goes "Well you know, cyclists had it really hard too." And I was like...you almost made me angrier!

This experience made Lisa^{AM} become paranoid about complaining on public communication channels such as Facebook groups. "I'm too scared to know what they're gonna write back. They could be really harsh. I'm more afraid of somebody hurting my feeling even more by posting something mean with the comment."

Danielle^{AM} also talked about how she had been criticized by other members of a Facebook group in which she complained about the disagreement between her and her mother:

Danielle^{AM}: I posted about living with my mom, and people was like "Well you shouldn't be...complaining about...your mom when you're relying on her." [...] I don't have to rely on her (laughs). [...] Even if I'm living in her house, I deserve certain level of respect. [...] People don't always see that on social media. So

you always get the occasional person like “Well you shouldn’t...you don’t have a right to complain about that kind of a thing.”

Lisa^{AM} and Danielle^{AM}’s hesitation in continuing to use a particular Facebook mother group reflects their fear of expectancy violation. Most participants pointed out that they expected agreement and validation from the audience. Disagreeable comments, especially the ones which were not constructive advice either, were often considered against their anticipation for posting online in the first place.

Felicia^{AM} commented that public channels, especially the ones where people could be anonymous, tend to have an unfriendly atmosphere that people were just being mean without offering constructive criticism. Her expectation on Facebook mother groups was:

Felicia^{AM}: Don’t be negative. Help. Help each other. We’re all in this together whether we want to admit it or not. We were all somebody’s kids at one point. That’s the way we got here. We’re somebody’s mother, sister, brother, cousins, something, we need to act like it. Help people. Don’t hurt them.

Unfortunately, as Felicia^{AM} stated, only a few online mother groups could fully meet her expectation while most mother groups she was in included members who were “just being mean and even trying to hurt her”, which she felt unacceptable and angry.

One thing to be noted is that mothers may have multiple reasons for using one communication channel. Therefore, it is likely they will continue using that platform even if one of their expectations is violated. For example, Felicia^{AM} claimed that she stayed in those Facebook groups for information, but she discontinued complaining there.

Many participants talked about their journey from complaining a lot to complaining little via a particular online communication channel. This happens more often for public channels as the anonymity functionality in these channels. Anonymity is a double-edged sword for many participants. For instance, Heather^{AM} was not fond of anonymity on parenting forums because

she felt some people “abused the freedom to criticize and started randomly attacking people by commenting on the posts”. This aligns with the research on *cyber violence* which refers to online behavior that constitutes or leads to assault against the well-being of an individual or group (Susan, 2002). Being targeted and offended is obviously not the mothers’ expectation for complaining online.

In addition to anonymity, the size of the support group impacts the probability of experiencing expectancy violation. For example, Nicole^{AM} claimed that she preferred small online mother groups – which included less than 100 members and the members are better to be local, as Nicole^{AM} defined - to large groups because the responses from this type of channel were more likely to violate her expectation. As she explained:

Nicole^{AM}: I really cut back on my engagement in the... in larger groups...that I don’t have personal connections to. [...] They could be having a terrible day, but for some reason pick me as their punching bag. Because I’m just some face behind a screen, like I’m not...either they don’t see me as a fellow person or a fellow mom going through the same shit.

Nicole^{AM} felt that the relational ties between members in large groups were much weaker than in small groups. As a result, the members feel less “guilty” about offending each other. The discrepancy between expecting support and receiving unfair or unfriendly criticism hinders mothers from choosing a particular channel to complain.

In summary, expectancy violation can occur in both private and public online communication channels. This study shows that the violation can result from paradoxical, unfair, or aggressive responses. Mothers’ perceptions on various CMC channels regarding their possibility of receiving counterproductive feedback vary, which can be influenced by anonymity and the size of the support groups.

Impression Management

Impression management involves new mothers' efforts to maintain a positive public impression. It is a salient concern for individuals who often struggle with the choice if they should complain online. Because complaint involves face-threat not just to others but also to self, issuing complaints publicly online may heighten the level and complexity of face threats within one's social networks. From the interviews, I have identified two facilitators that have effectively motivated our participants to complain online without causing damage to their image: (a) adopting anonymity features and (b) creating humorous complaining messages. I also found out the two barriers that refrain mothers' from selecting a particular channel to complain: a) causing detrimental effects on self-image, and b) damaging collect-face.

Facilitators

Adopting Anonymity Feature. Anonymity is the most mentioned facilitator that motivates mothers to complain online. Many participants prefer online communication channels that allow them to hide their identities which often refer to their identification information in the real world. For example, many people use real names on Facebook whereas they may use pseudonyms on Instagram and Twitter. An individual can be identified easier on Facebook than on Instagram or Twitter. Using pseudonyms is better than using real names in the sense of identity protection, though it still has limitations. Family and friends, even active followers on social media, can easily identify a person through pseudonyms.

It is a completely different story if a platform allows users to be anonymous. Several mothers preferred online parenting forums because the anonymity feature helped protect their public image. For example, as Xu^{CH} stated:

Xu^{CH}: 在论坛上我不担心面子的事。反正我是匿名呀，没人会知道我是谁，也没人认识我公婆。[...] 不匿名没有安全感啊。我在微信妈妈群里，因为没法匿名的，所以我都

很少去说负面的事情，尤其还是关于家里的。但是论坛就不一样了，可以匿名，就觉得比较安全，反正谁也不知道我是谁，也不用担心被熟人看到了伤面子什么的。 [I don't need to worry about face on forums. I'm anonymous anyways. Nobody knows who I am and no one knows my in-laws. [...] I don't feel safe if I can't be anonymous. I rarely talk about negative issues, particularly family issues, in WeChat mom groups because I can't be anonymous. But forums are different. I feel much safer complaining. Nobody knows me and I don't need to worry about losing face.]

There are some options mentioned by participants to be partially anonymous while posting online. For instance, Danielle^{AM} mentioned that she liked to complain on large national/International Facebook mother groups in which she believed most of the viewers were strangers.

Danielle^{AM}: I would post that on like...a general mom group where I have no mutual friends in the group, or where I could just kind of be of another person on that page...you know. Like my February babies group, I post there, somewhere where these people who are relatable to a certain level, but also don't know me in real life.

Not being able to be anonymous may lead to negative consequences of hurting self-face, such as being gossiped about or judged, feeling embarrassed, and fear of being laughed at. These are potential barriers for new mothers to complain publicly online, which will be discussed later.

Some channels include a large number of audience members. There can be as many as 500 members in a WeChat group and more than 10,000 members in a popular Facebook group. Several mothers consider themselves “partially anonymous” in these channels because they believe people cannot identify them from the large group. This motivates them to use these channels to complain since they believe their personal image would not be affected here because “nobody knows who they really are in real life”.

However, Melissa^{AM} mentioned the possibility of unknown network overlap on public channels. As she explained:

Melissa^{AM}: Most of them are like strangers, but then like five of them...are like your coworkers. [...] There's like a thousand people in that group or two thousand people in that group, right? And of that, like two of them are like my friends in real life who just also happen to be in that group, and then like a couple of them are my coworkers who also live in [name of place]. [...] Then there's other people that you don't even know that you know that are in that group, probably, you know what I mean? (laughs) Like...you're not friends with them on Facebook, so you don't know that they're also in that group, but there could be like...people from like your synagogue or your church or your school or like your son's friends' parents who might be like "Why?"

That being said, "partial anonymity" may not be a good solution for mothers who protect their privacy seriously. They prefer a channel that allows for full anonymity.

In summary, anonymity allows mothers to express themselves without fear of judgment, discrimination, stigmatization, or even retaliation. Online forums and large (mother) support groups are CMC channels that allow for anonymity and they are preferred by individuals who have concerns about the backlash of online complaining.

Humorous Complaining Messages. Complaints are often considered negative because complaints document negative emotions such as dissatisfaction and disappointment. However, on social media, it is not uncommon to see humorous complaining which is "a behavioral expression of dissatisfaction that elicits a response characterized by the positive emotion of amusement, the appraisal that something is funny, and the tendency to laugh" (McGraw, Warren, & Kan, 2014, p. 1153).

Many mothers choose not to complain if they fear the audience will consider them whiny or annoying unless they believe the behavior may help them cultivate a positive image. Several participants mentioned that sometimes the problems they complained about were not that serious, or "it's not the end of the world" and "not going to ruin my life", in Irene^{AM}'s words. In that case, on some occasions, they would generate humorous messages on social media to

complain about challenges in new motherhood. This is consistent with the benign violation theory (McGraw & Warren, 2010) that human arises from things that seem wrong yet okay.

For instance, Olivia^{AM} felt it was “too intense” if she complained about her husband too seriously on social media, which may make the audience develop a negative impression of her husband and her marital relationship. As Olivia^{AM} explained:

Olivia^{AM}: I need to portray in a humorous way... and people can relate to. Like Instagram, it's always caption with a picture. [...] So you know I'm frustrated about whatever... it may be that my husband can't help me as much or whatever. And I'll find a meme online somewhere, you know, post it to my Instagram story, and you know...like...put under...like... “True.” or something in like a little face emoji. [...] I don't know if you watch Game of Thrones, but there was one character, and she's like burn some from fire, and afterwards it's like... “Me after I've been home with the kids all day.” Or I send this to my husband after I've been home with the kids all day. And my friends will comment back like “Girl, I don't know how you do it.” [...] I do a lot of like...picture stuff, not so much writing, and it's just I finally say things that are like...that's all I need to say...is just what that says.

The study suggests that some online communication channels can be more suitable for humorous complaining than others, but people's perceptions of each type of channel vary depending on their audience's characteristics on each channel. For example, Olivia^{AM} considered Instagram a better platform than Facebook for her to post humorous complaints as most of her followers on Instagram are young friends who enjoy entertaining messages. Olivia^{AM} also believed that being humorous is instrumentally beneficial for her to maintain a positive social image of being a woman who “has experienced a lot of challenges being a new mother but still stays positive and optimistic”.

The study also found that even if two mothers face the same situation, one tends to be optimistic while the other could be more pessimistic. Depending on the nature of the issue, the mother's mood and her personality, it is normal that different mothers may portray the same

thing in different ways. Mothers tend to create humor-oriented messages if they believe a good sense of humor is a desirable trait. Literature also suggests that the adoption of humor may help better increase the sense of intimacy between the message sender and receiver (Kim, Zhang, & Zhang, 2016).

Mothers' goals of complaining also decide if they will make humorous posts and on which channel to post them. Sun^{CH} claimed that most times she complained on WeChat mom groups was to entertain other peer mothers, thus she often shares funny stories about her husband doing silly things while taking care of their baby. As McGraw et al (2014) described, to make a complaint humorous, the complainer has to portray the source of dissatisfaction (e.g., Sun^{CH} was dissatisfied with her husband's behavior) in a way that makes it seem okay (e.g., Sun^{CH} mocked her husband but also pointed out that the baby was doing fine even the dad was practicing something unsafely). Sun^{CH} mentioned that based on other mothers' reactions, she believed that she was viewed as "an understanding wife" who appreciated her husband's help even though he was not doing a satisfactory job caring for the baby.

Barriers

Interviews also reflect two major barriers that are concerned with mothers' face protection while complaining through CMC channels, including a) detrimental effects on self-image and b) damaging collective-face.

Detrimental Effects on Self-image. Disclosing online is a type of self-presentation. Everyone has a desired public image and they may try to control others' impression of their public image by manipulating the messages they post publicly. Our participants have shown their concern that complaining in the wrong channel would have detrimental effects on their self-image.

For instance, Chen^{AM} did not want her friends to think of her as someone who treats friends as “trash cans” to take her negative emotions. As she stated:

Chen^{AM}: 我还是觉得朋友圈也好, 是我跟朋友平时相处也好, 我希望朋友觉得我是一个正能量的人。我希望朋友觉得我带给人家快乐, 而不是一见面就跟人家吐槽。你说你把人家当个垃圾桶, 谁愿意跟你交往, 对不对? 所以说还是发一些快乐的事情, 给别人有益的事情, 有用的事情。

[I still think that no matter if I am posting on WeChat Moments or communicating with my friends in person, I hope that my friends think I am a person with a positive spirit. I hope my friends feel that I bring joy to people rather than complain to them every time we talk. Who wants to be friends with you if you treat them as trash cans that take your negativity? So I'd rather post more things that are beneficial and helpful to others.]

Most participants agreed that social media is a place for them to build and maintain a desired self-image. Therefore, some of them expressed their concern about impression management if they complained (too often) on their personal social media sites. Echoed with Chen^{AM}'s statement, Chu^{CH} said she did not want to be perceived as a “boring” person who likes to complain online:

Chu^{CH}: 我不希望别人一看到我的微信、我的朋友圈, 就觉得“哎这个人发不出什么好东西。”...我希望自己是一个比较幽默的, 比较能够传播一些你想看的...也不是完全迎合别人, 但是我也不希望你觉得我很 boring, 或我整天在发这种东西, 让你觉得要一划而过的那种。

[When people see my WeChat messages or Moments, I don't want them to have such an impression of me that I “won't post something positive”. I hope I am perceived as a humorous person who can share something that interests others...I'm not saying that I was trying to cater to my audience, but I don't want them to think I am boring who posts something that they just want to skip.]

Lisa^{AM} also said that she did not want to be viewed as a “downer” who often complains to the public online:

Lisa^{AM}: I start to see the same names over and over again and it's kind of like “Oh that's the downer, that's this person.” [...] I just don't want to be perceived that way which is...I guess...you know that is kinda sad. [...] I want the world to see that “I got this together, I can do this, you know, our home is not falling apart.” In general, I'm trying to put out a good image of myself out there.

The participants used different terms but expressed the same idea that they tried to avoid leaving others with a negative impression. They did not want to be perceived as a “complainer”, a “whiner”. “a downer”, “someone who is boring”, “a negative person”, or “someone who remembers all the bad matters that happened in life”.

In addition, several mothers expressed their concern about being perceived as an “unethical” person (in Melissa^{AM}’s words) complaining about family members (e.g., in-laws) on the Internet, or an “ungrateful” person who “bitches about someone who was actually helping you” because of disagreement and conflict (in Nicole^{AM}’s words). They believed it was bad impression management behavior to complain about family members in public, even though it was online.

Another interesting point of view mentioned by Amy^{AM} is that one barrier for her to complain to a large group of people online is that she had to “watch for grammar” while creating the post, which suggests that she was worried about being viewed as a poor writer. Amy^{AM} preferred to vent in person or in a mode where she did not have to type anything. This is another aspect showing people’s concern about losing face while expressing themselves online.

Interviews provide several specific examples of how mothers might be perceived negatively if they chose an inappropriate channel to complain. The list can be expanded by adding more examples, but the essential idea is that mothers want to protect their self-image when they engage in behavior that potentially threatens their self-image. Some channels are better at fulfilling this need.

Damaging Collective-face. Collective-face is a concept closely related to collective identity which emphasizes an individual’s relationship with others. Collective identity refers to the way people define themselves in relation to others (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe,

2004). In this study, collective-face is different from the self-face as the collective-face highlights mothers' relationship with other parties.

For instance, a couple of participants mentioned that they did not want others to think that they were in an unsatisfying marital relationship or that their marriage was "falling apart". As Kelly^{AM} reflected:

Kelly^{AM}: But also a lot of my friends...even the ones with kids know my husband, and they are probably...you know, their husbands are really close to my husband. So I don't need them to be like...“Oh Kelly's gonna divorce XX (Kelly's husband) soon. Watch it.” [...] I don't want them (Kelly's friends) to be like “Oh there's trouble with them.” You know? Have them look me like that, you know. I just don't want my husband's friends or our friends to think that there's something wrong with us. [...] I would prefer that he [her husband] doesn't like... get embarrassed because all of his friends would read my post...know that I'm shaming him. (laughs)

The concern of being gossiped about family relationships hinders many participants from complaining on certain platforms where their close network is at. They are protecting a collective-face of themselves and their family members.

In China, the concept of face (*mianzi*) is associated with the morality and honor of an individual or a group of individuals, and it plays an extremely important role in Chinese culture. Chinese mothers tend to feel embarrassed if others know about their family conflicts. Feng^{CH} pointed out that face (*mianzi*) was her top priority to consider when sharing negative issues on her social media page. To Feng^{CH}, privacy is less important than face.

Feng^{CH}: 如果你家庭很和谐，你有个很好的婆婆，这反而可能很多...会愿意去告诉别人。“我们家有很好的婆婆怎么怎么样。”。但如果是不好的事的话，大家宁愿烂在肚子
里面，也不想告诉别人，或者说不想告诉一般的家人和朋友吧。
[If your family relationship is harmonious and you have a very nice mother-in-law, maybe you are willing to tell others something like "I have a wonderful mother-in-law and so and so." But if it's something bad, people would rather keep it to themselves rather than tell others, at least not to tell family members or friends who are not very close].

Feng^{CH}'s comments reflect an important aspect of protecting face in Chinese culture. People are willing to share positive family information with the public regardless of the fact that this may violate privacy protection as well. In contrast, if it is something negative happens in the family (家丑, jiachou), Chinese mothers will hide it from family outsiders to protect the whole family's face. In other words, privacy protection may not be every mother's top concern while complaining online, but collect-face protection could be.

Feng^{CH}'s example is about collect-face protection rather than self-face because it emphasizes her relationship with her husband and mother-in-law. When Feng^{CH} complains about her mother-in-law in front of others, it is likely that the audience who shares the same cultural background (e.g., Chinese culture) may think she has a difficult family relationship or her husband is weak in managing the relationship between his wife and mother.

American mothers who have an Asian cultural background or share a collective culture also talked about their consideration of protecting collective-face while selecting online channels to complain. For instance, Jennifer^{AM} and Amy^{AM} are both second-generation Asian Americans, and they described how their family was unhappy about their complaining about family issues online due to potential damage to collective-face.

Jennifer^{AM} used to complain about her unhelpful husband on Strava (a fitness mobile App that incorporates social networking features). Her husband used the App as well and got angry when he saw Jennifer^{AM}'s complaining post. He asked Jennifer^{AM} to stop complaining about him on Strava as he believed that Jennifer^{AM}'s behavior harmed others' impressions of him and his family, especially considering the fact that the couple had many mutual friends on Strava.

Amy^{AM} also pointed out that if she complained about her mother on her Facebook page where other relatives could see the post, her mother would "freak out". As Amy^{AM} said:

Amy^{AM}: Oh my god, my mom...my mom is all about *Mianzi*, all about *Mianzi*. She is at the point she worries about what other people think of my relationship with her. I'm like...whatever.

The above shows that mothers' choices of selecting complaining channels can be influenced by their family members. Mothers often choose to respect family members' opinions and discontinue complaining on a channel if that channel is "disapproved" by the family members. This also suggests that in Chinese or other collective cultures, people tend to perceive family conflicts as a type of family information owned by all family members. If any family member does not feel comfortable about such information being shared with the public, usually the mothers choose not to share (publicly).

Other than in Asian culture, similar situations would occur to mothers who are from other collective cultures. Gina^{AM} has a Hispanic cultural background. According to her, it is their culture that the family would talk about each other's issues. To her, family gossip is a "headache", and she tried to avoid it by not posting complaints somewhere that her relatives could see (e.g., personal Facebook page).

Gina^{AM}: My family talks a lot...like Hispanic family they talk a lot...like behind everybody's back. (laughs) ...I guess it's just the cultural thing, I don't know. ...I don't want my family to talk about me a lot when it comes to that stuff. [...] They would think your life is ruined. "Oh my gosh, what is she going through?" [...] They would think, "Oh Gina's going through something." "Oh this is the end of life for her." "Oh you know her marriage is screwed." "Oh the kids are so bad." You know? (laughing) So...it's a lot. [...] So I don't really post that stuff on my Facebook because I just...my family like...I think it's just a cultural thing, they just talk so much. Like they talk so much negativity. And then just like "I don't want to delete you but I mean I really don't know how to...how to vent...to...on social media, I think it would give me more of a headache than trying to figure everything out and then...this or that.

Lisa^{AM} was born and raised in the US and her parents were immigrants from Italy.

According to her, Italy shares a face-saving culture with China. Lisa^{AM} was raised not to share family problems with outsiders:

Lisa^{AM}: I think...part of my...my parents still like ...my parents are from Italy.
So...Italian...so it's a very...it's like a save-face culture...like you can argue and do whatever you want in your house, but you don't do it out, like...no one knows that there's a problem. Like you do whatever you want at home, but you do not let it go out the front door. (laughing)...I can see if I put something on Facebook, my mom would be like...horrified...like... "Why would you say that?" (laughing) [...]. You can yell and scream at home, but like,...that doesn't go out the door. You put on your smile and you go out the door. (laughing)

Even in American culture, there is a saying of "airing the dirty laundry" which means talking about private issues to others who are not involved. Heather^{AM} mentioned when she explained why not posting motherhood-related complaints on her personal social media page because to her this was "embarrassing" and "the judgment is rampant", and this has a detrimental effect on her family's image.

Another example is from Danielle^{AM} who lived with her mother for several months when her husband was deployed. Danielle^{AM} had many disagreements with her mother in terms of parenting styles. She chose to complain to other mothers in the online support group rather than posting the complaints on her Facebook page which included many of her relatives. According to Danielle^{AM}:

Danielle^{AM}: I don't want other relatives to judge her...or me for talking about her. I don't want to be taken negatively when I'm just trying to...you know...tell somebody what I have been going through and deal with something that was stressful to me.

Danielle^{AM}'s words show that she wanted to protect both her and her mother's faces in front of their relatives. This further shows that many complaints about new motherhood involve

other family members such as the spouse, parents and in-laws. It is not only about the mother's face, but the other party's face.

Kelly^{AM} claimed that when she complained about her husband, she would select a channel that did not have any of her husband's friends:

Kelly^{AM}: As long as I know that none of my husband's friends are on these groups cuz I don't want to embarrass him, that's the only thing. [...] If I post something, it's gonna come up on his feed right away. I would prefer that he doesn't like... get embarrassed because all of his friends would read my post...know that I'm shaming him. (laughs)

Kelly^{AM}'s example shows that protecting the family's face is a critical step in maintaining a positive impression in front of family outsiders.

Some channels are perceived as more friendly to protect collect-face than others. The existence of mutual connections is a key indicator of an inappropriate channel in this sense. If a mother wants to avoid family gossip (i.e., family members and relatives gossip about a mother's family issues), she may avoid complaining in a channel where her message is likely to be exposed to other family members (e.g., personal social media page). If a mother does not want her friends to gossip about her family, she may choose a channel where no real-life friend can see the message (e.g., online forums). Mothers tend to worry less about collective-face when the audience members in a channel are strangers.

Information Control

Information control is the third major channel function discussed in the interviews that mothers believed would affect their CMC channel selection for complaining. Information control mainly concerns information access. Interviews have shown that stable groups and allowing restricted access effectively facilitate information control. In contrast, the two barriers for

mothers in selecting a channel are the possibility of leaving a record or trace and the risk of unauthorized sharing.

Facilitators

The participants perceived some channels as more convenient for controlling who had access to their complaining messages. Interviews have revealed two facilitators regarding information access control: a) stable group and b) allowing for restricted access.

Stable and Private Group. It is a great facilitator for new mothers to choose one channel to complain if that channel consists of a stable audience. A stable and private group usually means a high familiarity between group members, which is easier for mothers to control information access.

For instance, Heather^{AM} claimed that she often complained in a Facebook group in which she was a member for years. To her, that group was stable, and the members were trustworthy in terms of accessing her complaints:

Heather^{AM}: In the group that I was telling you about, my crazy cat lady group, we haven't added anybody since we initially made that first...or we've added very few people. So it's the same group of people that we had from the beginning. [...] And so that's why I feel safe in that group is because it hasn't changed, with the exception of maybe...maybe 20 people since that group was initially created. So...I feel more comfortable there. [...] I don't know personally everyone. I personally know maybe 20 of them. That I've met face-to-face. But the rest of them we've known...we've been talking in this group and online for maybe...Gosh probably 10 years. I graduated from college 10 years ago, so it's been...you know, that long that we've been talking online. You know, some of us have kids at that time, you know, so it's an online family of sorts, you know, the online network. So...but yeah. So if I really have anything that I need to vent about, I do it in that group. It is a safe...it's a safe place. It's a safe place.

The multiple times stressing “safe” shows the level of how Heather^{AM} trusted the group members and the trust was developed in ten years. The strong family-like ties are the main reason for Heather^{AM} giving access to these group members her private information. In

comparison, she felt less safe sharing private and sensitive family issues with a group that constantly added new members. She felt less powerful in controlling her message when facing an ill-defined audience.

Zhao^{CH} also talked about one WeChat mom group she was in. All the mothers in that group had close due dates and they communicated frequently throughout their whole pregnancy. Most of them did not know each other in real life. However, Zhao^{CH} felt the members were close enough to talk about motherhood-related issues, including complaining about unsupportive family members and other private family issues. This was thanks to the stability of the group as very few new members were added after the initial group was created.

Heather^{AM} and Zhao^{CH}'s statements indicate that for public channels, the stability of the group constitution usually guarantees a high familiarity and intimacy between group members, which helps trust building that motivates mothers' disclosing behavior.

A couple of participants also talked about private online communication channels where only a limited number of people can access their complaining messages. The group in private channels can be large or small, as long as the participant perceives it as private. It is without a doubt that the one-on-one conversation between mothers and their family members is private. But on Facebook, there are many large-size private groups. Some mothers were willing to complain there as long as "only people who are in the groups can see these posts" (Kelly^{AM}).

In summary, some mothers prefer a channel where their information is safely kept in an imaginary information bubble. Anyone outside the bubble cannot access the inner private information. However, the bubble might break, which causes privacy turbulence. Mothers may engage in an evaluation of how sturdy the information bubble is for every CMC channel they plan to use, either consciously or subconsciously.

Allowing for Restricted Access. Some online channels offer users the feature of creating restricted access to their messages, which is an advantage that our participants often consider while choosing the channel. The most common tactic is grouping the audience and blocking part of the audience while complaining. Both Facebook and WeChat have this feature and it facilitates mothers' complaining and sharing behavior on them.

For example, Amy^{AM} said she would create a small friends list to share her venting messages on social media because she “knows everybody who sees it” and positive feedback is almost guaranteed. Nicole^{AM} also mentioned that she preferred communication channels that allow for customized privacy settings, and she had “all the highest privacy settings” to protect her messages from being seen by unauthorized parties.

Xu^{CH} likes the grouping feature of WeChat Moments as well. As she explained:

Xu^{CH}: 我的每一条朋友圈都会屏蔽一部分人的, 取决于发什么。[...] 这些组都是事先设置好的, 比如家人组, 好朋友组, 同事组, 妈妈群的组。我还分了能分享晒娃消息的和不晒娃的, 因为有些人没孩子嘛, 我总发关于孩子的事情人家也没兴趣。[...] 抱怨类的朋友圈比较少, 不太想大面积地传播负能量, 要发的话会屏蔽掉很多人。
[I would block a group of people for every WeChat Moments post, and whom I block depends on what I'm posting. [...] These groups are all pre-setup, such as family group, close friends group, coworkers group, and moms groups. I also group people in terms of if they can see my posts about the kid. Because some of my friends don't have kids and they are not interested to see those posts about kids. [...] I rarely complain via WeChat moments because I don't want to spread negativity broadly. If I do complain, I would block a lot of people.]

Jiang^{CH} echoed Xu^{CH}'s opinion by explaining the reason she complained on WeChat Moments. It is because WeChat allows her to set up audience groups so that only the selected have access to her complaining posts.

Christina^{AM} and Xu^{CH} talked about the importance of setting up restricted information access in CMC channels by describing the situation where no such feature is included. For instance, Xu^{CH} mentioned the benefit of the anonymity feature in online forums:

Xu^{CH}: 如果论坛不匿名的话, 万一遇到什么有心人去点击我的profile, 就可以看到我发的其他帖子, 我会觉得隐私被侵犯。虽然我不匿名的时候也不太说比较隐私的家事, 不过想到有可能被人刻意翻出来, 还是觉得有点恐怖的。

[If I can't be anonymous in online forums, I will feel my privacy is being invaded if somebody clicks my profile and sees my other posts. Although I rarely talk about private family issues while I'm not anonymous, I still feel it is creepy that if somebody looks up my previous posts deliberately.]

Christina^{AM} explained the difficulty of restricting information access on some channels which made her mentally uncomfortable sometimes, especially considering that she did not want to share some private information with her "friends" on social media.

Christina^{AM}: [On Facebook] It's too much to make up. The profile...I mean, I could change my settings and put a picture but...people who are all my friends, they will know that I have that profile picture. So assume we have a mutual person in the group, that's my friend, they could still...find out.

Compared to online forums, Facebook is more difficult to hide an individual's identity. Most people use real names on Facebook whereas they create a pseudonym for forums. It is much more challenging to recognize someone based on their pseudonym unless the audience knows that person's pseudonym across platforms.

People's needs to create information boundaries range from rigid and strict to loose and even open. If a mother wants to have a rigid boundary for others accessing her private information, she tends to do more research on the different privacy settings in every CMC channel she plans to use and picks the one that she believes is most effective or efficient to control information access. Suppose a mother has more loose boundaries or in some extreme cases the boundary appears almost nonexistent. In that case, she may make much effort in selecting a channel that facilitates information boundary restriction.

Barriers

There are two major barriers for mothers to control information, including leaving a record and trace and the potential risk of unauthorized sharing,

Leaving a Record or Trace. The online communication channels that are often avoided by some mothers are those where their messages may leave a permanent record. The residual data could be some information that mothers do not want others to view in the future. That is why many participants preferred video or phone calls over posting on social media.

For instance, Amy^{AM} said she preferred video chatting with family members and friends when she needed to complain rather than posting on her Facebook. As she explained:

Amy^{AM}: It (One-on-one Facetiming) wasn't on paper, it wasn't...there's no record. [...] whereas everything on Facebook is searchable, even though you deleted it, it still doesn't die in Facebook world. Right. But when it's one on one, I feel like there...it's just...not as concrete, not as set in stone.

Felicia^{AM} was very active in Facebook mother groups and she posted frequently on these groups. But she also stated that “do not trust the Internet to protect your information.” According to Felicia^{AM}, even if an individual is anonymous when posting online, there is still a trace left that others are able to identify that person. As she stressed:

Felicia^{AM}: Nothing is anonymous. Nothing is anonymous. Because when you post anonymously, it still records your pin, it still records your IP. [...] Unless you do some really great hacking stuff...to hide that, people can still find out that information. No.(laugh) NO! I am always very careful about what I do post and whom I post it to. It's always been like that.

Felicia^{AM} further explained her seeming conflict between thinking and action. As she did not trust the Internet to protect her information, she relied on herself and learned and applied some tactics to cover her sensitive information online, such as using personal pronouns (e.g., my husband) instead of names and being ambiguous about irrelevant and noncritical information (e.g., age, occupation, location). She believed that the benefits of communicating problems on social media outweigh the cost, and “it is worth the effort” to apply these tactics while complaining online. Felicia^{AM} also pointed out that not everyone knew about the tactics or was

willing to take the time “craft the post”, so the issue of residual data can be a barrier for many mothers to complain on Facebook.

Some mothers compared different online communication channels in terms of if one channel allows them to “wipe out” previous posting records. For instance, Yang^{CH} liked using an online forum because that forum allowed her to delete previous postings permanently when she no longer wanted anybody to view them. She did not worry about others accessing these deleted messages.

Xu^{CH} mentioned a unique feature of WeChat Moments that the users can set the visibility of their postings as “past three days only”, meaning that her followers can only view her postings that are published within the past three days. Only she, the account owner, can see all the previous postings. Xu^{CH} believed that this setup was friendly to users who were concerned about leaving traces on the Internet as it helps users prevent others from viewing previous posts that they no longer want others to view. However, not every mother knows about this feature or wants to set up their account in this way for other reasons. In that case, they may not choose to complain on WeChat Moments due to concerns of leaving a trace on the Internet.

For most participants, leaving a record or trace refers to leaving the type of record that was written down (electrically). They tend to think “talking” has the least risk of leaving a trace on the Internet. She thought some listeners would remember her words and may use them against her in the future. As Qin^{CH} explained:

Qin^{CH}: 我坦诚讲，我这人非常没有安全感。我很少在公共场合来...公开来...表达我这种情绪。就是... (笑)就觉得这个情绪我可能会过了，但是看的人她会永远记得。说不定在某一个时刻，她会又...又会说”你以前怎么怎么的”。

[Honestly, I'm a very insecure person. I rarely express my emotions publicly. I think it's... (laughs) I think my emotion is gone soon, but the person who viewed my message will always remember it. Maybe at some point in the future, she'll say, "you used to do so and so".

The potential trace left in viewers' minds became a barrier for Qin^{CH} to complain on WeChat Moments because that information would be shared broadly, which made her feel she had less control over the information.

In summary, if a channel is more convenient and straightforward for mothers to remove or mask their digital footprints, this channel is more likely to be chosen by mothers who care about their online information records. Mothers' minds can be changing. A complaining message that appeared to be fine to share may not be appropriate to share in the future. Some mothers wanted to make sure that they would have the ability to erase any information they no longer want it to display online. Private video chatting is most popular among mothers who prioritize this need. Other private channels are preferred over the public ones as mothers believed that even if the trace and record is still there, it will not cause serious privacy invasion due to very limited number of audience in private channels.

Risk of Unauthorized Sharing. When speaking of information security issues of complaining via CMC channels, several mothers mentioned the risk of unauthorized sharing of the postings, which was a significant threat to (private) information protection.

The most mentioned example is the mother's posting being taken screenshots and shared with an unauthorized party, which may cause unanticipated troubles to the mother because oftentimes the unauthorized individual shares the message has malicious purposes. "You never know how they (the potential audience) can use it against you", in Irene^{AM}'s words.

Christina^{AM} gave an example that people would take a screenshot of her complaining post and send it to her husband, which caused some trouble between the couple. She felt that once her posting was public, she no longer had control over the information. Her husband was not supposed to see the message, but somehow, he did. This experience made Christina^{AM} "nervous"

(in her words) in the future when she again wanted to complain about her husband on social media.

Jiang^{CH} talked about her negative experience of being taken advantage by a friend who saw her post on WeChat Moments:

Jiang^{CH}: 我不跟你说我之前工作定好了吗? [...] 我可能当时生了宝宝之后发了个朋友圈, 就说是母乳一段时间, 很累了老公不能帮忙什么的。然后我就有一个师妹, 她... 其实刚开始没问我, 但是她可能... 是因为通过学校招聘的, 所以她可能知道那个渠道。过了一段时间之后, 公司催我上班的时候, 然后那个recruiter就跟我说, 我学校有人联系他, 说可以顶替我, 然后说我有小孩了之后... 因为我当时没有告诉recruiter我是要怀孕, 所以要晚一点去工作。她说我有小孩了之后, 那个工作肯定会那个什么。那个时候我就知道, 哦, 朋友圈不是那么... 很安全。因为你不知道是不是会有一些跟你利益相关然后... 别有用的人。
[I just mentioned that I got a job offer before I got pregnant, right? [...] I once posted on my WeChat Moment – after giving birth to my baby – that I would breastfeed for a while and I was exhausted and my husband couldn't help. Then a peer from my school who knew the contact information of the recruiter contacted the recruiter and say she could take my position. She told the recruiter that I wouldn't be able to work due to breastfeeding and lack of family support. The recruiter shared all this information with me. Since then, I realized that WeChat Moments is not a safe place to complain and share private information. You never know if there's anyone who sees your message may take advantage of it.

Obviously, Jiang^{CH} did not want her future employer to know about her pregnancy and the potential postponement of the onboarding. However, this message was shared with the employer from a potential competitor of Jiang^{CH} without her authorization. This is the type of risk that Irene^{AM} and Christina^{AM} were worried about. Although it was not sharing a screenshot in Jiang^{CH}'s case, the message was shared with the unauthorized party against her will.

Unauthorized sharing is likely to cause detrimental effects on the mother's interpersonal relationships. For instance, Xu^{CH} had concerns that if they knew her complaints about the in-laws on WeChat Moment, it would escalate the dispute.

Xu^{CH}: 朋友圈我还会担心万一谁泄露给了我公婆。虽然我肯定会屏蔽他们[公婆]啦, 但是

还有别的亲戚在，比如我表哥表姐啦，我老公的表哥表姐啊，我一般不太屏蔽平辈。虽然我觉得他们应该不会故意把我的消息给他们爸妈或其他长辈看，但万一是不小心给长辈看到了呢？就是有这个可能吧，那对我们的关系肯定是雪上加霜。
[I also worry about the potential risk of my complaining WeChat Moment being revealed to my in-laws. Although I would block them (in-laws) for sure, there are other relatives who can see my posts, such as my cousins and my husband's cousins. I generally don't block relatives who are similar to my age. Even though I believe that they won't share my posts with their parents or other elderly relatives on purpose, what if the post is accidentally seen by their parents from their phones? It's possible. In that case, this may worsen my relationship with my in-laws.]

Chen^{CH} was also reluctant to post her complaints on a public online channel because she believed that “there is no windtight wall” (“世上没有不透风的墙”), which is a Chinese old saying meaning that no secret can be kept forever. Dannielle^{AM} expressed her same concern about complaining about her mother online as she “didn't want to make things worse as there's clearly already issues that need to be fixed” between Dannielle^{AM} and her mother.

Zhou^{CH} further mentioned that picking the wrong channel (e.g., there's a social network overlap) may cause damage to real-life relationships. She explained how her complaining post about her husband might damage the relationship between her parents and her in-laws.

Zhou^{CH}:如果他们把这个事情记在心里，觉得我们已经为你们付出很多，但是对方父母不够用心，对小孩或者是不够出力的话，就反而会...我就担心他们会对我公婆会有这种...积怨。

[If my parents remember this incident, they may feel that they devoted a lot to us while my in-laws did not do much to help us or take care of the baby, they would...I'm afraid that they would develop an accumulated resentment of my in-laws.]

In Chinese culture, the young couple is usually considered the “glue” of two independent families. Therefore, Zhou^{CH} was very careful in selecting an online channel to complain about her in-laws.

In summary, unauthorized sharing is a serious invasion of an individual's privacy. Most participants did not want this to happen to them. Untheorized sharing and voluntary sharing may

lead to the same consequences (e.g., damage collective-face, harm family relationships), but it is against the mother's will when the former happens. Selecting a safe channel is critical in terms of significantly reducing the likelihood of mothers' complaining messages being shared without her authorization.

Problem Solving

This refers to new mothers' task-oriented and utilitarian approach to problem-solving, including support-seeking and support-giving, for issues of concern. The study has identified three facilitators that help people solve the problem after complaining on a certain CMC channel: a) credible source, b) support-giving, and c) efficient communication, as well as two barriers that hinder mothers from using a particular CMC channel to complain: a) audience's inaccurate interpretation and b) not helpful for solving the problem.

Facilitators

Credible Source. One facilitator under this category is that mother are able to get responses from credible sources. Based on the interviews, a credible source is defined by mothers as the audience is a) familiar with the complainers' background, and/or b) relatable to the topic, and/or c) has experienced the same situation.

Familiar with Complainers' Background. Unlike Irene^{AM}'s claim that the audience from a close network may give a biased opinion, most participants believed that the audience who was familiar with their situation (e.g., close friends, peer mothers who gave birth around the same time) was more credible and their opinions were more meaningful.

For example, Melissa^{AM} mentioned that whenever she wanted to complain about her mother-in-law, she would talk to her sister-in-law who understood what the "real problem" was

and provided useful suggestions accordingly. Melissa^{AM} found this helped her address the problem between her and her mother-in-law better.

To Felicia^{AM}, oftentimes her top choice was her mother who not only knew her well but also helped Felicia^{AM} using her analytical skills developed from her career. As Felicia^{AM} explained:

Felicia^{AM}: My mom's retired school teacher. She's INCREDIBLY analytical. So I'm an extremely emotional person. So usually when I am up on cloud I'm freaking out, (laugh), I will call her and say "Mom, they're doing this, I don't like it. It doesn't make sense to me why are they doing this." And she will quickly tell me, "First, calm down and breathe. [laugh] This is not the end of the world. Just Breathe. They are doing this because of X, Y and Z, type of situation.

Besides family members, close friends were often mentioned as credible sources because of shared worldviews and past experiences. Like Shen^{CH} claimed that her friends from an intimate small WeChat group could provide "positive feedback" that may help Shen^{CH} solve the problem whereas people from large groups could not offer such feedback she needed. As Shen^{CH} described:

Shen^{CH}: 因为小群里的人跟我有交集啊，大家彼此都认识，也都比较有感情，互相也都了解。但是大群里，大家都不认识，我也不知道我和那些人思想啊观念啊是否一样。她们不知道我的过去，也不能给我一些正向反馈。你懂我的意思吗？就是当我情绪不好时，要吐槽时，她们不能给我一个很好的（解决）方向，不能给我提供有用的信息。

[Because I had many interactions with my friends in that small WeChat group. Everyone knows each other and is familiar with each other. The connection is tight. But in those large WeChat groups, most people don't know each other in real life. I have no idea if they share similar worldviews with me. They don't know my past, so they can't offer me *positive feedback*. Do you know what I mean? Positive feedback means useful information that may help me solve the problem.]

Some mothers did not necessarily need close friends every time they complained. However, they still showed a preference for choosing an audience group whom they had met in person before over complete strangers or someone with whom they had only communicated in

online mother groups. As Melissa^{AM} put it, the opinions from random strangers are “less meaningful from somebody whom she doesn’t know”, and she preferred getting advice from “one of her good friends in real life” rather than from “hundreds of strangers in the Moms of [name of place]”. Similarly, Zhu^{CH} said:

Zhu^{CH}: 像私下交流的妈妈我会...对她...我觉得她们可信度会比群里面的妈妈高一些。我是说那个群里妈妈那种整体...高一些。因为私下里的妈妈,我接触过,我跟他们聊过,我大概知道她们是怎么样的一个为人处世方式,然后我才会去跟她们说家里的事。

[I feel I trust moms whom I have met and talked to in person more than those random moms in the WeChat mom groups, I mean in general. Because I kinda know what type of person they are if I have ever communicated with them in person. Then I feel more comfortable talking about family issues with them.]

Olivia^{AM} also said she trusted people with real identities on social media more than those anonymous users. As she reflected:

Olivia^{AM}: I like at least on Facebook or Instagram...the fact that people aren’t anonymous. I would rather put a Facebook person if they are commenting back, you know...the hidden screen names where it’s like “teacher123” or whatever, it’s like...so who are you really giving me this advice back to my venting or whatever? So I’d like to at least put a face on someone.

Generally speaking, the familiarity between the mother and her audience usually indicates a higher intimacy level and a stronger relational tie between them, which significantly increases mothers’ trust in this group of audience. For these mothers, context is critical for the audience to provide relevant, meaningful, specific feedback that can truly help them solve the problem that caused their negative emotions. They believed that although it is still possible to receive useful advice from strangers, deep down they trusted familiar relations more and relied more on them to improve the situation. That being said, a private CMC channel or a relatively smaller online group that consists of the same members is preferred by mothers who have expectations on problem-solving after they complain.

There are two participants mentioned that information from professionals (e.g., doctors, therapists, counselors) is credible as well, although the conversation with professionals usually occur face-to-face rather than virtually. The interview was conducted before COVID-19, and it is plausible that the situation has changed after COVID-19 as telehealth developed drastically in the past three years. Now more people will consider getting support and help from professionals online.

Relatable to the Topic. Mothers did not always complain for their own sake. A couple of participants pointed out that sometimes they hope their complaining messages could benefit the audience as well. In that case, they prefer a channel where the audience is relatable to their complaining topic.

Broadly speaking, many mothers select online parenting forums and mother support groups to complain about motherhood-related problems because they believe the audience will resonate and care more about the topic than other populations. A more specific example mentioned by Danielle^{AM} is that she chose to complain in a Facebook group named “February babies group” because that was “somewhere where these people who are relatable to a certain level.” Qin^{CH} echoed this opinion by stating that she often complains via WeChat instant messaging to a friend who gave birth to the child within the same month as Qin^{CH} because they “went through many similar difficulties as a new mother” and they “understand each other so they can provide useful information and advice.” In accordance with the discussion in the above section, an obvious benefit of choosing a communication channel in which the audience is relatable to the topic is that mothers can “receive relevant feedback and suggestions”, as Kelly^{AM} put it.

In addition to receiving relevant feedback, another benefit is that it is more likely to receive credible and reliable from this group of the audience as they “really understand what is going on”, in some mothers’ words. Therefore, some mothers have developed an expectation of receiving useful information from the audience rather than venting out their negative emotions only.

For instance, as Zhu^{CH} explained:

Zhu^{CH}: 朋友圈吐槽完了以后，基本上跟我关系好的都是...看了以后就直接给我发微信去说，然后他们就说他们的建议. [...] 第一条[朋友圈]就是纯吐槽。后来我发现，哎？怎么大家都给我建议？所以后面我就改成...我就改成一些求宝妈...那个...给建议这样。这样就是...有针对性地问了。然后我就觉得心态可能不太一样。之前就是纯吐槽。然后之后的话，就是我觉得朋友圈也是一个工具。
[The first time I complained on WeChat Moments, some close friends sent me direct messages to give their advice. [...] So the first WeChat Moments post was for complaining, but I noticed that people were willing to give me advice. So I changed. I changed the way I constructed the message. In the post, I would clearly ask for advice rather than just venting. I believe my mindset has been changed afterward. I think WeChat Moments became a tool for me to get information.]

Channel selection is more like audience selection in this regard. Mothers have to think about who is relatable to the topic that they want to complain about, and then select the channel that includes the target audience. Both private and public channels can be chosen. Some mothers wanted to share some specific issues that may only concern one or a small number of people. For example, complaining about the poor management of a daycare that only mothers in the neighborhood may use. The mother will also decide if she only wants to share the experience with a mother she knows in private or posts it publicly (e.g., Nextdoor.com, or a local Facebook mother group). Mothers’ final decisions might be influenced by other factors I discussed here.

Unbiased Input. The third facilitator in this category is that the audience from a particular channel tends to be unbiased, at least they appear to be unbiased from the mothers’

perspective. Irene^{AM} pointed out that her friends were often biased. To Irene^{AM}, only strangers from public online communication channels could provide her with honest unbiased opinions. She shared an example of her selecting a large public Facebook group to complain, as most of the members were strangers in real life. Irene^{AM} described the relationship between group members as:

Irene^{AM}: They [people in that large Facebook group] don't know you, they don't know the other person, they don't know your kid, they don't know anything about you, so they can give you an honest unbiased opinion.

To Irene^{AM} and several other participants, family, friends, and even acquaintances would be biased and only tell them what they wanted to hear, which made their complaining less meaningful because they were unable to receive honest feedback that may help them solve the problem. It then became a barrier for Irene^{AM} and other like-minded mothers to select a channel for complaining which included a (close) network in real life.

People seeking unbiased opinions is a legitimate need. Some entrepreneurs have spotted this niche market and developed websites and mobile Apps to help people seek and receive unbiased advice. For example, Unbiased.me is a website created in 2014 to help people get advice from complete strangers who are not emotionally attached to the message sender's situation. The philosophy behind the website's creators is that "when you ask a friend something you get one kind of advice. They know you, they don't want to hurt your feelings, and sometimes can sugarcoat it. But when you ask a stranger—anononymously—you get blunt unbiased feedback because they aren't afraid to hurt your feelings and be completely honest. An unbiased person has an easier time seeing something for what it is." (Annear, 2014). This aligns with Irene^{AM}'s statements.

In the interviews, participants mentioned two common CMC channels that mainly consist of strangers who can provide unbiased comments, including online parenting forums and large mother support groups. The audience from private CMC channels usually is a strong-tie connection with the mother, and the mother may hold a lower anticipation of receiving objective and unbiased opinions from this group of audience. To be noted, whether feedback is unbiased or not is based on the mothers' perception. A close friend may give honest and objective advice which can still be perceived as biased advice by the mother.

Support Giving. The interviews reveal that mothers not only seek support from complaining but also want to provide support to the audience sometimes. Several mothers stressed that they complained because they wanted others to learn the lesson from their experiences. One example is that Wu^{CH} once saw a mother asking for reviews of a preschool in a WeChat mother group. Wu^{CH} contacted the mother privately to share her son's negative experience in that preschool. According to Wu^{CH}, such complaints can help other mothers avoid making the same "wrong" choice as she did.

Similarly, Dannielle^{AM} complained in a local Facebook mother group about a local hospital where she gave birth. According to Dannielle^{AM}, she decided to complain publicly because she wanted to warn other mothers who may choose that hospital in the future:

Dannielle^{AM}: For that hospital post, that was actually a post on [name of place] Moms. And it was about that hospital. [...] I posted it there so that a) is to inform those moms who are most likely to use it, and also they were the ones who are most likely to have experience with it. [...] I was posting was strictly just a vent. [...] and also partially...as a heads up to people like... you know, know what you're going to if you're pregnant, know that...this hospital this and this kind of thing. Sometimes informative to other moms.

Beth^{AM} also mentioned that she complained on those Facebook mother groups because she wanted "any other moms that are going through the same thing to feel that they are not

alone”. Interestingly, the interviews also show other mothers' opposite mindset that they choose not to post publicly on social media because they do not want to increase the potential audience's mental burden. If one believes that a CMC channel is not an effective channel to give support but rather adds additional stress to the potential audience, she may avoid using that channel to complain.

For example, Heather^{AM} rarely complained about new motherhood to an online channel that her mother had access to view. As Heather^{AM} explained:

Heather^{AM}: But if I...were to tell my mom like I'm feeling really overwhelmed right now because of this, she would feel the need to come over and help me with it. But I don't want her to...add more to her plate, you know, to take on more of my burden than she already does when she comes over to help me when he (Heather's husband) leaves. So...or help me watch the kids when I go to work. I want her to have her own...she has her own life, I want her to live it too.

Several participants – both American and Chinese mothers – claimed that they tended not to complain somewhere where their parents (especially the mothers) could see the message because they did not want their parents (or sometimes intimate friends) to worry. The fundamental consideration was whether the complaining could benefit the potential audience. If the answer is positive, then many mothers were willing to share the message as a way of providing informational or emotional support to the audience. Otherwise, they may not complain or choose another appropriate channel with the right audience to complain. For example, Nicole^{AM} did not want to complain about her negative experience during the pregnancy on her personal Facebook page because she did not want her friends to worry about her. She felt more comfortable discussing her previous miscarriage on online forums with strangers who may have experienced the same problem and she could offer emotional support and some useful information about where to receive care and service.

Through complaining, mothers are mainly providing informational and emotional support to the audience. Such support-giving behavior can occur in both private and public channels, depending on how large a group of people a mother aims to help.

Efficient Communication. Another facilitator in choosing one online channel over the other is whether that channel facilitates communication in a relatively easy and efficient manner. This is especially important to new mothers because they are generally busy taking care of the kid(s) and the family. For working mothers, their schedules can be tighter. When they need to complain online, time management is a factor many mothers consider.

This study found that channel familiarity, quick responses, and audience closeness are three influential factors affecting mothers' user experience, which in turn help them choose online complaining channels for the future.

Channel Familiarity. According to many participants, they often choose the online channel(s) they use for daily social networking to complain because of their familiarity with the channel. Almost every Chinese participant said that WeChat is their most used social media application for most social needs. They are familiar with the application and its features. As discussed previously, WeChat integrates three communication channels – private messaging, group messaging and WeChat Moments. Some mothers have shown sufficient knowledge and experience of all of them while others only used partial features. They all stressed that they “need to find the channels I’m familiar with to express myself.” (“我觉得我要找熟悉的[表达渠道]”).

Qian^{CH} claimed that she was “addicted to” using WeChat. She “can’t live without WeChat. Not a day. Not even an hour.” (简直就是太依赖微信啦。一天都离不开，甚至就是一个小时都离不开). Due to high user stickiness to WeChat, the first option that Qian^{CH} would think of was WeChat. The familiarity facilitated her whole complaining process on WeChat. Chu^{CH}

also said that she was used to all the functions on WeChat. She did not choose other similar social media applications (e.g., Facebook) partly because she had no idea if these applications had the same features (e.g., message blocking) as WeChat that she was familiar with.

Language is another influential factor affecting communication efficiency. Most Chinese participants are fluent in English, and several have difficulty speaking English. Even Chinese mothers who can speak English fluently still prefer complaining in their native language because it needs the “least effort to express the feelings”. This reflects their expectation of efficient communication for complaining. A channel is preferred if it allows mothers to use their first language, and more importantly, the audience from that channel can understand the language. People can quickly understand each other without language barriers and the chances of misunderstanding reduce significantly.

Chinese mothers who are living in the United States have access to other popular English social media platforms which are blocked in China (e.g., Facebook and Instagram). However, none of them used these channels to complain, not even to share family life in general. One main reason is that they needed to become more familiar with the channels, so it could take extra effort to use them. They were not motivated to learn and to spend more time making posts on these English platforms because their main social network was not on these platforms. For example, Jiang^{AM} said that her Facebook only included her ex-coworkers (she is a stay-at-home mom now) and ex-supervisors, and she did not feel that close with them to share family issues.

Some channels are more efficient than others because of the all-in-one possibility of communicating with different social networks. For instance, as Wang^{CH} talked about WeChat”:

Wang^{CH}: 是因为这个[微信]是我知道的里面唯一的一个既能有老一辈、又有年轻的同龄人、又有小一辈的。比如说我用微博，我爸妈不会。那我就...用两个方式很不方便。但这个连爸妈都用的很溜。因为经常要跟他们实时的更新消息嘛。那我的同

龄人，我的同事，我的同学，唯一这个是全部能够弄在一起的。所以其他那些就渐渐不用了，就慢慢慢慢被淘汰了。

[Because WeChat is the only application that I know of that is used by almost everyone in my social network, including elders, similar age friends and younger friends and family. My parents don't know how to use Sina Weibo, so it's inconvenient to use both applications to send messages. But my parents use WeChat very well because we often use it for instant messaging. WeChat is the only platform that includes all my same-age friends, my coworkers, my cohorts at school. So I gradually stop using other online communication tools.]

In other words, it improves communication efficiency if both communication parties (i.e., mothers who complain and the audience) are both familiar with the communication channel. The familiarity saves them time and energy from exploring the functions of the channel as well as finding the right target audience.

Jiang^{CH} also explained her dislike of online forums from a different perspective. As a user experience researcher herself, Jiang^{CH} felt the design of most popular parenting forums was “messy” and “not very user friendly from the UI (user interface) perspective”. The way these forums organize information is a barrier for many mothers, including Jiang^{CH} find the appropriate category to share a complaining message or seek useful solutions. Jiang^{CH} felt that using such forums was time-consuming and not efficient at all.

In summary, a CMC channel may be chosen if it is a hub that connects many, if not all of a mother's potential audience for receiving her complaining messages. This saves mothers the time to switch accounts and redo all the settings in a variety of places. The UI/UX (user interface/user experience) design of a channel is critical in terms of improving mothers' communication efficiency.

Quick Responses. Whether mothers could receive instant or prompt responses is another factor influencing mothers' choices of channel selection. Interviews show that if a mother knows that the audience from one channel is usually available to provide quick responses or can have

synchronous conversations, she will be more willing to use that channel considering the communication efficiency. For example, Christina^{AM} often sent her mother Messenger messages when she wanted to vent because her mother often responded immediately. As Christina^{AM} further explained:

Christina^{AM}: Sometimes posting like...you don't know like...who's awake. Cuz sometimes like... late at night and I have to wait for a response. But my mom...for the most part is quick to respond back, to help me like...figure out how to relax...stuff.

Similarly, Zhao^{CH} mentioned that she liked to complain to WeChat mother groups because there were always some members online who provided her feedback promptly. In comparison, Zhao^{CH} did not like the asynchronous communication in online forums as many messages and information were not updated daily. To many participants who have a similar thought with Zhao^{CH}, a quick short response often can be more helpful than long responses that are received after days. Quick response is considered the most critical and effective for helping mothers calm down. Whether a late but long response is helpful depends on the quality of the response content. A late and short response is generally considered not helpful.

Overall speaking, to Chinese participants, WeChat groups are the best channels to receive quick responses. The situation in WeChat Moments, small WeChat groups (e.g., less than 5 group members) and one-on-one private messages vary, depending on if the recipients are available (e.g., awake, in the same time zone, free to talk, check messages frequently, etc.)

To American mothers, the situation is more complicated. Some participants felt that Facebook support groups and /or parenting forums were the best places to get quick responses because of the large number of members and a relatively higher percentage of active users who showed great engagement in group communication. Some mothers mentioned that they always get immediate responses from family and close friends online.

Efficient communication also refers to the situation that it saves mothers time to find resources which they may have limited knowledge about where to find relevant information. For example, Zhao^{CH} felt that the responses from WeChat mother groups were more informative than other online communication channels, which saved her much time in looking up information elsewhere. Christina^{AM} echoed this point of view by claiming:

Christina^{AM}: People with kids... sometimes they have a lot of resources, I don't need to find them myself...looking...and they can give me a good start to find other things, forums, or other needs I'm looking for.

Online support groups and forums have shown great advantages in terms of information sharing. For one-on-one communication, mothers will only receive very limited information from a single person. In contrast, mothers are able to receive much more information from groups due to a much larger number of information sources. Although many people doubt the credibility of information received online, it is hard to deny the possibility of receiving more information from online groups than from one person.

Several participants pointed out that this was helpful because it “saved them a lot of time browsing randomly online”. Like Xu^{CH} pointed out:

Xu^{CH}: 这样非常省时间。哪怕我对她们提的...有疑问，有不确定，但是我可以根据她们说的那些，有针对性地做功课。
[This saves a lot of time. Although I may have questions and uncertainties about their suggestions, I can start from there and do further research based on what they said.]

Audience Closeness. The intimacy level between the complainer and the audience can affect communication efficiency. If the audience from one channel is familiar with the mother, then the mother can save time and effort in explaining the background information of the incident. Several participants pointed out that if they complained to strangers on public channels such as parenting forums or large Facebook mother groups, they felt obligated to provide more

details of the context to prevent others from misunderstanding them, which could be time-consuming and inefficient. As Irene^{AM} described:

Irene^{AM}: When you post something and people comment on it, like you're obligated to like...tell them...even if you're just like vaguely venting. You say something like...doesn't go into description, everybody will come like... "Oh well what's wrong? What's wrong? What's wrong?" And you are like...I don't have to explain myself to a million people, you know?

Zhou^{CH} also mentioned that sometimes she "spent more time explaining to others rather than getting useful advice from people." (我要花更多时间去跟别人解释发生了什么, 而不是就直接能得到一些有用的建议), which is neither productive nor efficient. Zhou^{CH} said this is especially true for online channels where people post anonymously. One has to give enough details to get potentially useful feedback. One channel is considered more efficient if the complaining process does not include this step.

In summary, it motivates a mother to use a CMC channel to complain if the communication on that channel is efficient. In contrast, some channels are time-consuming for mothers to seek and receive needed help or support, that channel may be avoided by people. For example, Heather^{AM} said she used to complain on Reddit. She soon realized that she would spend hours on Reddit after she posted a complaint. Sometimes she was reading the comments, other times she started browsing related topics pushed by Reddit. Although reading these threads might be helpful to her as well, she still felt this was a waste of time as she had more prioritized tasks need to be completed. "I don't have the time or the mental energy", in Heather^{AM}'s words. Zheng^{CH} also pointed out that once she posted a complaint on Sina Weibo, she could not help herself from keeping checking the responses. On a few occasions, she turned defensive after reading some disagreeing comments, and she had to spend hours on replying and explaining

what really happened to her. This is counter-effective in terms of problem-solving and wasting time. She gradually stopped complaining on that channel.

Barriers

Participants talked about two main barriers to selecting one particular CMC channel that is related to problem-solving: a) audience's inaccurate interpretation and b) not helpful for problem-solving.

Inaccurate Interpretation. Accurate interpretation concerns whether the complaining message can be accurately interpreted by the message receivers. Confusion and misunderstanding are easy to occur in CMC channels. In the interviews, mothers talked about three major causes of the audience's inaccurate interpretation: a) lack of nonverbal cues, b) complainer's accountability and c) different cultural backgrounds between the complainer and the audience.

Lack of Nonverbal Cues. The importance of nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, tones, and body language has been proved by many nonverbal communication studies. Compared to face-to-face communication, most communication via CMC channels is limited to nonverbal cues. Some mothers mentioned they preferred video-chatting tools (e.g., Facetime, Skype) to complain to their family and friends as this communication channel can show more nonverbal cues than others. For example, Christina^{AM} is a fan of using Facetime to complain to her family. She rarely chose other types of CMC channels because she "needs to hear tone" and "see the body language". She further described the type of message she would receive from channels that lack nonverbal cues:

Christina^{AM}: Someone can write back "okay" and no punctuation [...] You could read it like "Okay!" or like "Ugh...Okay." I don't know if this is a happy okay or sad okay.

Most CMC channels discussed by participants (e.g., Facebook and WeChat mother groups, forums) do not allow for too many nonverbal cues, which often leads to the audience's misunderstanding of complainers' messages, as reflected by participants.

One thing to be noted is that the possibility of inaccurate interpretation also relates to the level of closeness between communicators. Christina^{AM} said she could "imagine the tone of her mother and close friends" from plain messages. The strong ties guarantee the low possibility of misinterpretation between communicators, even without nonverbal cues. Christina^{AM} and several other mothers pointed out that misunderstanding can easily occur between the complainer and her audience if they are unfamiliar with each other and there is a lack of nonverbal cues.

Complainer's Accountability. Accountability is defined as "the fact of being responsible for what you do and able to give a satisfactory reason for it, or the degree to which this happens" (Cambridge Dictionary). The concept applied to this study refers to mothers' "obligation to explain, justify, and take responsibility" for their complaining behaviors (Dictionary.com).

Some CMC channels require higher accountability compared to others. For instance, parenting forums require higher accountability than small private Facebook mother groups due to unfamiliarity between members. Mothers feel obligated to provide preambles to decrease the possibility of the audience's misunderstanding. As Nicole^{AM} talked about her experience complaining about her mother-in-law online:

Nicole^{AM}: I just didn't...without having to go into like tremendous detail about "Oh but I really like..." I didn't want to have to get defensive to then complain...cuz I didn't want it to sound like...I just don't like her. [...] So I talked to people who already know the background of my relationship with her, like my husband, like my best friend, like they already know the relationship there, so I don't have to say like "Oh I love her, but..." You know? I don't have to like give a bunch of...excuses about why I'm complaining about her. "Don't hate on her, but yeah...cuz it's just this one thing."

Nicole^{AM} was concerned that if she chose a channel where its audience was not familiar with her family situation and she did not explain clearly her attitude toward her mother-in-law, the audience might misunderstand her.

Different (Cultural) Backgrounds. Misunderstanding often happens when the complainer and the audience do not share the same (cultural) background. This often leads to mothers' feeling that the audience does "not really understand the pain point" (不理解我的痛处), in Xu^{CH}'s words.

Amy^{AM} is a second-generation Chinese American. Many of her complaints were about her mother who "forced" (in Amy's words) her to follow some "crazy" rules of the golden month – the traditional Chinese postpartum recovery methods. She pointed out that the audience from the Facebook groups she complained to did not understand her pain because of different cultural backgrounds. As she said:

Amy^{AM}: Because once you tell them (peers in the mother group) about the golden month, they're like "Oh you guys are so lucky. I wish we had that. I wish I had somebody taking care of..." Blabla. You don't understand! You know? My mom wanted me in my bed 24/7, I couldn't shower, I couldn't... I don't know if I could brush my teeth, I couldn't go outside, the window couldn't open, I couldn't be on my phone, I couldn't...like literally you just lay there. But they don't understand that. So...they just see the positive. [...] Once I got that kind of feedback, I knew they don't really understand. [...] And people from the Hispanic culture, they're like "Oh yeah we have something like that too." But... they are like "Oh that's so cool! I wish we had that". But I'm like...you don't understand! You don't know everything that entails. You just see the bright shiny side. That's not right. So for me it was kind of actually counterproductive, because while if I was upset, I would look to somebody that understood what was going on, I can commence with this. They would be on the flip side, telling me ...how good I had it. I'm like, okay, never mind.

Because the audience and Amy^{AM} did not share the same culture, Amy^{AM} felt that their focus was off (i.e., only looking at the bright side of the golden month) and did not get her point.

They were not communicating on the same level. Amy^{AM} was also complaining about her mother's controlling behavior, but people only focused on the positive side of the golden month. The complaining is counterproductive because it did not lighten Amy^{AM}'s mood or help her fix the relationship with her mother. Different cultural backgrounds became a noise in the communication between Amy^{AM} and her audience. One channel may be avoided if the audience does not understand the mother's cultural background.

Amy^{AM} continued to explain how different cultural backgrounds may lead to miscommunication:

Amy^{AM}: So you had the one thing in common, but all of our backgrounds...our entire backgrounds are different. Right. So while we all babywore, some of us vaccinating, some of us don't vaccinate. Some of us breastfeed, some of us don't breastfeed. Some of us are vegans, some of us are not. So it's like...lifestyle differences, you know? So while you have one thing in common, it's not necessary...there's not necessarily...you know. [...] And I knew if I ask a question on that page about that, I wouldn't...I would just feel...they would make me feel worse, because they would be like... "Have you tried this and this and this?" I'm like, "Yeah, I tried." Or...you know, it was just...because there is a different focus, you know what I mean?

That being said, it is a barrier for some mothers to select one channel if there includes a large audience who has different backgrounds from theirs.

Not Helpful for Problem-solving

Conflict Escalation. Many participants mentioned that the conflict might be escalated if an inappropriate communication channel was chosen. One common issue is caused by the overlapped network on the channel. For example, Feng^{CH} talked about an argument she saw in an online forum where a renter complained about his landlord. Even though the post was made anonymously, the landlord recognized the renter through the details in the post. The landlord was angry and accused the renter of ruining his reputation by telling something untrue. The complaining behavior did not help resolve the problem but escalated the conflict between the two

parties. Feng^{CH} developed concerns about posting on that forum due to witnessing the incident because she was worried about the possible overlapped network on that forum. If her complaining post was viewed by the complaining target, she worried that this might worsen her relationship with that person. This reflects mothers' fear of the backlash of their complaining messages.

Irrelevant Response. Another barrier discussed by participants is that many responses they received were not relevant to their problems. Wu^{CH} believed that only mothers themselves knew the problem well. Others' advice is developed based on everyone's experience and oftentimes does not apply to the mother's situation (“因为只有我自己最清楚...这件事情。然后别人是基于他们的生活经历和观点来进行评价，对我并没有太大的帮助。”）。Therefore, the advice is not as meaningful or effective for helping solve the problem as many would think.

Gina^{AM} pointed out many common supportive comments such as “I hope it gets better” and “My prayers go out to you” were not helpful because she still “did not know what she was supposed to do” after reading the comments. To Gina^{AM}, these general responses were “useless” and “not relevant” to her issues.

Melissa^{AM} did not prefer online forums because she did not believe the strangers from there could provide valuable advice to her to help solve any problem. The uncertainty of the audience's “quality” (e.g., whether they have great judgment, in Melissa^{AM}'s words) cannot guarantee a valuable or reliable response.

Summary

Interview surveys show new mothers' varied self-disclosure levels in different selected CMC channels. Overall speaking, mothers from both cultural groups tend to share more details in private channels than in public channels. Mothers' channel selection and message-framing

behaviors can be significantly influenced by their consideration of if they facilitate emotion management, impression management, information control, and problem-solving. Mothers think of these factors in a systemic way, and try to achieve an optimal balance every time they want to complain online. This is an ever-changing decision as mothers' needs and expectations can be in each scenario. In the following discussion chapter, I will delve into depth into the underlying influential factors that impact mothers' choices.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter includes three sections. The first section discusses factors that may affect people's channel selection and disclosure behavior when complaining on CMC channels. I explore these factors' influence through a combination review of literature and results from this study. This section founds a critical component of the framework I propose in the following.

The second section aims to provide a framework presenting a whole picture of all types of decision-making during the whole process of completing a complaint on CMC channels. To be more specific, from a systematic view, I discuss how various factors together influence people's decision-making on channel/audience selection and complaining message framing. The framework can show better how people manage privacy issues dynamically.

The last section is the study conclusion in which I summarize the major findings of the research and discuss the limitations and the future directions for research on privacy management on CMC channels.

Influencing Factors

One of the main goals of the dissertation was to attempt to find out what influences new mothers' choices of CMC channels to complain about motherhood-related problems. Results reveal people's four areas of consideration: a) whether a channel is effective in managing mothers' negative emotions, b) whether a channel is beneficial to mothers' impression management, c) whether a channel is friendly for controlling (private) information, and d) whether a channel is useful of solving the problems that cause new mothers' negative emotions. For each area of consideration, the participants explained specific facilitators and barriers that impact their channel selection.

One thing to be noted is that the facilitator and barriers are not mutually exclusive but complimentary to each other. Sometimes the opposite of a facilitator is a barrier to selecting a particular channel, even though it is not explicitly listed as a barrier in the results and vice versa. For instance, reciprocal complaining was listed as a facilitator because some mothers feel relieved when hearing others complaining about the same. They prefer a CMC channel (e.g., online mom support groups) that encourages reciprocal complaining (e.g., viewers are willing to share their family stories when seeing other mothers complain about their unhelpful husbands). It is not listed as a barrier if a channel does not welcome or enable reciprocal complaining, although, in fact, it is a barrier to some people selecting a certain channel to complain.

Whether one is listed as a facilitator or barrier depends on the participants' responses. In the interviews, participants were asked the reasons for selecting one channel over the other. When they talked about the facilitators, oftentimes it is implied from their answers that a channel may not be selected without the existence of one or multiple facilitators they mentioned. As a clarification here, one factor was defined as a facilitator if the majority of participants mentioned it when they explained why they chose a particular channel. On the other hand, a factor was defined as a barrier if most participants mentioned it when they explained why they did not choose a certain channel to complain. Facilitators and barriers should be combined to think when discussing participants' choices.

Based on the results and literature, I want to discuss four underlying factors across mothers' four areas of consideration of channel selection: a) expected social support types, b) nature of the complaining subject, c) online privacy literacy, and d) cultural differences.

Expected Social Support Types

Results have demonstrated that new mothers' expectations regarding the types of social support to be received from CMC channels significantly affect their choices of channel selection. Here I explore in depth in regard to how different types of expectations make a difference in mothers' changing choices during the whole complaining process.

A ton of research suggests five basic social support types: a) emotional support – to receive comfort and security from others, assuring an individual that he/she is cared for, loved, and valued; b) information support – be provided with guidance and advice to help solve the problem that causes the negative emotions; c) instrumental support – be offered with tangible assistance and necessary resources for coping the problem; d) esteem support – to bolster one's self-esteem or sense of competence; e) network support – to strengthen the feeling of belonging to a group who share common concerns (Cobb, 1976; Cutrona & Russell, 1990; Eichhorn, 2008).

All five types were mentioned by participants in the interviews, and findings indicate that mothers' varied expectations of receiving a certain type of support determine their channel/audience selection and complaining message framing processes.

Emotional Support. First of all, emotional support, compared to other types, is the easiest and usually the main type of support to obtain from all CMC channels. Therefore, emotion management is a critical area of consideration that has been mentioned by most participants in the interviews. Literature and this study both found the effectiveness of emotional support varies in different channels. In other words, mothers' expectation of receiving emotional support can easily be met in some channels whereas it is violated in other channels. For example, some people hoped for others' cognitive understanding of their suffering; thus they expected empathic and sympathetic responses (Cutrona & Suhr, 1994). Results suggest that online mother

support groups and private online communication with strong-tie peer mothers/parents are highly preferred CMC channels to complain as the audience from these channels tend to be more empathic and sympatric due to sharing similar experiences. Reciprocal complaining often occurs and the audience group from these two channels is particularly relatable to the topics, which are two facilitators revealed from the interviews.

In contrast, such an expectation was often violated when a wrong or inappropriate CMC channel was chosen. For instance, many individuals anticipated encouragement and reassurance (Rook & Underwood, 2000). Many participants talked about the unfriendly and judgmental environment in online forums where they could not receive a comparable amount of encouragement as from other channels (e.g., Facetiming with close friends). Complaining in online forums, relatively large mom support groups (e.g., over thousands of members), and private online interactions with friends who are not parents yet appear to be more likely to violate mothers' expectations of receiving emotional support. Thus, inducing additional stress is a commonly mentioned barrier for mothers to select a CMC channel. Results suggest that additional stress often comes from mothers' overthinking the unwanted feedback they receive and/or being trapped in the negativity zone after viewing too many agreeing comments who shared negative experiences of their own.

It is also worth mentioning that expectation violation may occur due to delayed or no response received at all (Ashford, 1986). This is confirmed by some participants. Delayed response can be caused by different time zones between the complainer and the audience (e.g., private online conversation), or low engagement in an inactive online support group. No responses sometimes happen in large support groups as the topics change too quickly, and the complaining message can easily be missed or buried in the flood of new messages. There are all

barriers for new mothers to select a particular channel where they have noticed the existence of certain issues because they foresee a risk of not receiving emotional support as expected.

There is little evidence shown from the interviews that the amount of information disclosed in the complaining messages has an impact on the quantity or quality of the emotional support being received. Mothers may only post a level 2-3 complaint on their personal social media pages but receive many supportive responses. It also happened to two mothers who posted level 5 complaining messages on mom groups but received either little feedback or many mean responses that were completely against their anticipations. Oftentimes the outcome is random and hard to control through manipulation of complaining messages – the uncertainty is also a reason that induces additional stress to some mothers - though I did find several influencing factors from the interviews and observation, such as the social influence of the complainer (e.g., the number of supportive responses can vary very differently between a celebrity, an influencer, and general population), complainer's social network size (i.e., usually a larger social network leads to more supportive responses), complainer's daily engagement in a particular channel (i.e., an active user who is well known by the group members is more likely to get positive feedback), and the communication environment in a channel (e.g., audience members in some channels are more friendly, empathic, tolerant and less judgmental than the ones from other CMC channels such as online forums).

Information Support. Literature (e.g., Rains & Keating, 2011) reveals that information support has been increasingly sought and obtained online due to the exceeding ability of CMC channels to transcend geographic and temporal boundaries to enable users to access diverse networks (Carr et al., 2016). When new mothers broadcast online the problems that caused their negative emotions, they broaden the boundary of information accessibility, increasing the

possibility of them obtaining valuable advice and suggestions. This was supported by many participants as a major advantage of CMC channels compared to traditional communication ways for complaining. To new mothers, it is especially harder to go through a difficult and challenging time if they only depend on their real-life social network, although many still count on real-life social relations for emotional support and/or instrumental support. Instead, weak ties show more power and ability to provide diverse information and opinions (Granovetter, 1973). Many public CMC channels (e.g., online mom support groups and online forums) are perceived as more valuable places for receiving information support because they are usually full of experienced peers who went through the same path, compared to private CMC channels where only a limited amount of information can be received. This is supported by the interviews that revealed how mothers appreciated many great pieces of advice they received from those support groups and how this encouraged them to post more and engage more in those channels. In contrast, it is a barrier for mothers to select a channel if they consistently fail to receive any useful or relevant information that helps resolve their problems.

In terms of the disclosure level, there is a lack of evidence to support a claim that a more detailed disclosure can result in receiving more meaningful informational support. Similar to mentioned in the above section about emotional support, there is no guarantee that a higher level of self-disclosure ensures more information support, according to this study. However, I would argue for its plausibility since several participants talked about their willingness to share as many details as possible in the complaining post because they believed people had to learn enough amount of necessary information to provide helpful solutions. Imagine one is being vague or beating around the bush in her message, it is less realistic for her to obtain specific answers as she is holding a moving target and asking for people to shoot accurately.

Instrumental Support. Third, instrumental support refers to offering help or assistance in a tangible or physical way. Instrumental support is valued by many people who seek support. Some may not appreciate emotional support as others because they do not feel emotional support only is sincere or genuine, especially when they feel that the individuals they seek support from have the ability to provide instrumental support (Hsieh & Kramer, 2021).

Results suggest that some channels (e.g., local ones, smaller groups, private channels) are more practical and helpful in this regard than others. More specifically, CMC channels afford users the opportunity to interact with all kinds of network ties ranging from super strong ones (e.g., family) to super weak ones (e.g., strangers) (Blight et al., 2015; Marwick & Boyd, 2011). Instrumental support is unique from other forms of social support in the sense that successful instrumental support usually requires a stronger relational bonding between the message sender and receiver, or a closer geographical distance between the two parties considering the feasibility of providing and receiving physical support.

Interviews indicate that those channels mainly consist of weak ties have a much lower likelihood of providing instrumental support. As many mothers stated, they often chose to complain to their parents about how exhausting and stressful taking care of the newborn was and how unsupportive the husband was. These mothers believed that complaining via this channel (super strong ties) was the most likely to obtain instrumental support such as parents coming to help for a period of time or providing financial assistance hiring a professional to reduce some burden. In most situations, it is much more realistic to acquire such tangible support from strong-tie relationships. Another scenario is, as one American mother specifically mentioned, that neighbors may offer physical support thanks to close geographic distance. She complained in a neighborhood mother group about a lack of support because her husband was deployed and her

parents lived far away. One of her neighbors offered to purchase groceries for her once a week without asking for any compensation. The mother was grateful for this kind gesture which helped her go through the most difficult time. For instance, on Facebook, there are online support groups that only serve mothers who live nearby (e.g., share the same zip code). Such channels were also proposed by many participants as valuable channels for seeking instrumental support.

In terms of the disclosure level, interviews suggest that being specific and straightforward is the most effective way to obtain instrumental support. The length of the message is less important than being clear about the problem and requests. That being said, one does not need to sacrifice her privacy by disclosing too many irrelevant or less critical private details to receive instrumental support. Another point I want to add but mentioned little by the participants is that when an individual is complaining to a family or a close friend (i.e., strong ties), oftentimes she can still receive instrumental support even though she was vague and ambiguous during the conversation. A person who is familiar with the complainer is able to “read the mind” and interpret the implications of one’s complaints. In other words, high-context communication can be effective in seeking instrumental support between strong-tie relationships. However, in a relatively public channel where few people know about a mother, she may have to provide a necessary amount of information to receive instrumental support because the audience has limited knowledge of what the mother needs.

Esteem Support. The fourth type is esteem support. It was rarely explicitly mentioned by participants but suggested by literature that self-esteem is a significant predictor of postpartum depression (Beck, 2001; Fontaine & Jones, 1997). Some new mothers need reassurance from others to bolster their hope and confidence (Rook & Underwood, 2000), as many of them start having doubt in themselves (e.g., “why can’t I do this as good as other new

moms?”, “Am I doing anything wrong that causes this bad consequence?”), as reflected by a couple of mothers.

Results show that an online support group is a great channel to receive esteem support as it is an important place where new mothers are able to find a relatively large amount of reassurance and validation, such as comments like “You’re doing great!” Receiving a significant number of comforting and supportive responses was stated by participants as a facilitator of selecting a particular channel. Although they did not further explain why, it is highly plausible that they received esteem support during the process. One mother talked about “self-esteem” when she shared her opinion of why many new mothers complained in a Facebook mom group she was in. She personally felt embarrassed to complain publicly, but she had seen many mothers complaining in Facebook mother groups. From her perspective, she felt these mothers “just need validation from others” because “they have low self-esteem”. This partially reflected some people’s belief that complaining and getting supportive feedback can help boost an individual’s esteem.

Another facilitator suggested by participants is that “misery loves company” may relieve mothers’ negative emotions as it helps mothers regain self-esteem in themselves after viewing others’ similar struggles. As mentioned previously, mothers may lose self-esteem and start doubting themselves when they are “under huge stress with so many going on”. One explanation is that by reading others’ stories, mothers no longer feel they are the only ones who “cannot make things right”. Another explanation is that through comparison, some mothers may have more confidence in themselves and gain esteem as they realize that their situation is better than others and/or they handle challenges better than other peer mothers. It is worth noting that in this

case, mothers may not seek esteem support in this way at the first beginning, but gaining esteem becomes an unexpected outcome and benefit after reading others' stories.

One interesting finding worth mentioning here is that some mothers claimed that a CMC channel is preferred if they are able to provide support to others. Several mothers explained that one of the reasons they posted complaints publicly online was because they believed that their messages might alert others from making the same mistakes or help others who went through the same. It is a different type of esteem boosting. One American mother mentioned that her cousin posted vlogs on YouTube in which she shared many difficulties and challenges she went through as a new mother. Her cousin received many compliments from the audience, which significantly boosted her esteem. The cousin is a stay-at-home mom and she has always been struggling with this new identity. After starting the YouTube channel and posting daily vlogs, she began to realize that she was very good at storytelling, public speaking, and video editing, and soon she perceived herself as a competent social media influencer. The participant said she was about to do the same as she believed this was a great channel to receive esteem support. These vloggers also feel they are valuable to others because they "tell people who are struggling that they are not alone".

However, a channel might be a wrong source for esteem support if the responses from that channel cause more damage to new mothers' decreasing self-esteem. As shown in the results, a couple of mothers mentioned they were being criticized when complaining to their parents about the conflict with their husbands. Oftentimes it confirmed mothers' self-doubts, and they would blame themselves more for the troubles, difficulties, and conflicts. This aligns with the literature that new mothers' decreasing self-esteem may result from their maternal feelings of guilt or shame (Dunford & Granger, 2017). When complaining in a channel that includes peers

who share similar experiences, mothers may be able to rebuild self-esteem by receiving responses such as “It’s not your fault.”, “Don’t blame yourself.”, and “You’re doing nothing wrong!”

In regard to the relationship between self-disclosure level and obtaining esteem support, there is a lack of evidence from interviews to show any correlation between the two. However, Social Penetration Theory (Altman, 1973) proposes disclosure reciprocity, meaning that when an individual reveals personal information of a certain intimacy level, the other person will in turn disclose information of the same level. According to this, when a mother provides many details in her complaining messages, she is more likely to receive others’ detailed stories which help reduce her concern and assure her confidence in selves.

Network Support. The last expectation often discussed in the literature is network support, referring to people’s enhancing feelings of belonging to a group or community. Braithwaite et al. (1999) proposed three subcategories of network support – access, presence, and companions – that help people broaden their social network by connecting them to others who share common interests or situations. In general, an individual’s social circle tends to overlap more with close relationships than with strangers (Granovetter, 1973). Compared to close relationships, casual acquaintances “are more prone to move in different circles than oneself” (Granovetter, 1973, p. 205). Therefore, it is less likely for someone to receive network support from strong ties than from weak ties. That being said, new mothers have more opportunities to expand their social circle through the help of network support from weak ties. For example, as mentioned by some mothers, including both American and Chinese mothers, they might be invited to a new support group by someone who viewed their complaints. The new group could be a more appropriate place for mothers to obtain valuable information specifically regarding

their issues. One great example is a mother who complained about the daycare center where she sent her infant son to within a large WeChat mom group. She was soon invited to a smaller local mom group whose children were about similar age and the group members often communicated about daycare center information in the neighborhood. The mother became friends with some nearby mothers, and she switched her son to another daycare recommended by one of her new friends. This example is consistent with the literature which suggests that a public channel that includes weak-tie members is considered a better channel for seeking network support.

One facilitator mentioned by participants for channel selection is a stable and private group. Mothers believe the members in this type of group are more trustworthy and that it is safe to share personal stories there. This is seeking companions, one subcategory of network support (Braithwaite et al, 1999).

Limited data from this study can support the claim that a higher level of self-disclosure leads to more network support. It is suggested from interviews that a reasonable amount of information shared in the complaining message is helpful for receiving network support in terms of expanding the social circle. The audience knows the mother better from the details, and the mother may have more opportunities to be introduced to a different network. In terms of the other two subcategories of network support – presence and companions, it is hard to tell if more information shared is helpful due to data limitations.

In summary, mothers' expectation of receiving different social support types can impact their channel and audience selection. They also consistently evaluate the helpfulness of the social support they receive from the selected channel. Successfully support seeking and provision of social support oftentimes requires more than an individual imagines. The two parties – the complainer and the audience – may need to develop a mutually agreeable understanding of the

incident, and coordinate their efforts to meet the complainer's expectations (Hsieh & Kramer, 2021). An individual can evaluate the helpfulness of the expected social support from aspects such as the relationships between the complainer and support providers, source credibility, the co-existence of different forms of support, and how support is delivered (Hsieh & Kramer, 2021).

Whether expectation violation would occur may depend on the intimacy level and the commitment to the relationship between the message sender and receiver (Wong, 2018). This has been illustrated in the results as well. Mothers may react differently to the same comment received from parents, friends, and strangers because they hold different expectations of these groups.

This study shows that some CMC channels may have significant advantages in helping mothers get the type(s) of support they need for managing negative emotions. In other words, they will appraise the helpfulness of receiving the expected support from different CMC channels. In terms of the relationship between expected social support types and level of self-disclosure, results show a limited correlation between the two, though sharing more details is often believed to be helpful in support-seeking behaviors.

Nature of Complaining Subject

Another influencing factor that was discussed across the four areas of consideration of channel selection is the nature of the complaining subject. "What am I complaining about?" and "Whom am I complaining about?" are two critical questions many mothers would consider when they choose CMC channels to complain. Based on the interviews, the complaint subject can be simply divided into two categories: human beings and non-human targets. Some common non-

human targets in new mothers' complaints include maternal-related policies (e.g., maternity leave policy, sick leave policies) and facility management (e.g., hospitals, daycare centers).

When a mother complains about a human subject, the decision-making process of CMC channel selection can be complicated. Once again, this part of discussion starts with Granovetter's (1973) classification: strong ties and weak ties. The former includes those with whom a person feels strongly connected (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987), whereas the latter typically occurs between individuals who interact within limited capacities or contexts but do not consider each other as members of a close personal network (Wright & Miller, 2010). The strength of relational ties is not dichotomous but varies in degree. In the context of this dissertation, a super strong-tie complaining human subject refers to a new mother's husband/significant other, parents, and best friends. A regular strong-tie subject mainly includes in-laws, siblings, close relatives, and close friends. Relatively weaker-tie targets could be casual acquaintances from the mother's offline network, such as their obstetricians, pediatricians, daycare center staff, nannies and babysitters, supervisors and coworkers, neighbors, clergy, etc. The weakest type of relationships is the ones with strangers and online friends who have limited history related.

Each individual's definitions regarding the strength of various types of relational ties could be different. For example, some mothers treat in-laws as family members (i.e., super strong ties) whereas others consider in-laws acquaintances whom they only see once or twice a year for big holidays (i.e., weak ties). Nonetheless, results demonstrate that the nature of the complaint subject determines mothers' channel selection and level of disclosure.

Non-human subject. First of all, mothers generally were more comfortable sharing their negative feelings about a non-human subject, both in public and private CMC channels. For

instance, several participants mentioned their experience complaining about their short or low-paid maternity leave or the poor management of daycare centers. They felt “less guilty” and “less immoral” to harshly criticize a non-human entity. Results also suggest that under some circumstances, mothers even perceived their disclosure as a contribution to the audience as they believed their complaining message could serve as a lesson or an alert to someone else who may go on the same path in the future. Support giving thus was a facilitator for mothers to select a channel if the audience members in that group were relatable to the topic.

Furthermore, many people think information about a non-human entity is much less private than family information. Some mothers did not even perceive such information as a part of their privacy, so mothers tended to be less concerned about disclosing the information in public. They did not worry about damaging their self-image or the collective face of the family, because they believed that they were not the party at fault, which are two barriers to selecting a particular channel

According to CPM theory, “shared boundary” means that private information is shared by more than one party (Petronio, 2002). Technically, a mother’s complaint about a daycare center includes the privacy of at least two parties: her family (especially her child who is in that daycare) and the daycare. The mother only partially owns the private information of the daycare. When she expresses her dissatisfaction toward the daycare center to others, especially when she publishes it online publicly, her complaining behavior may cause privacy boundary turbulence – a situation in which the privacy rules are intentionally or unintendedly violated (Cho & Sillars, 2015; Petronio, 2002).

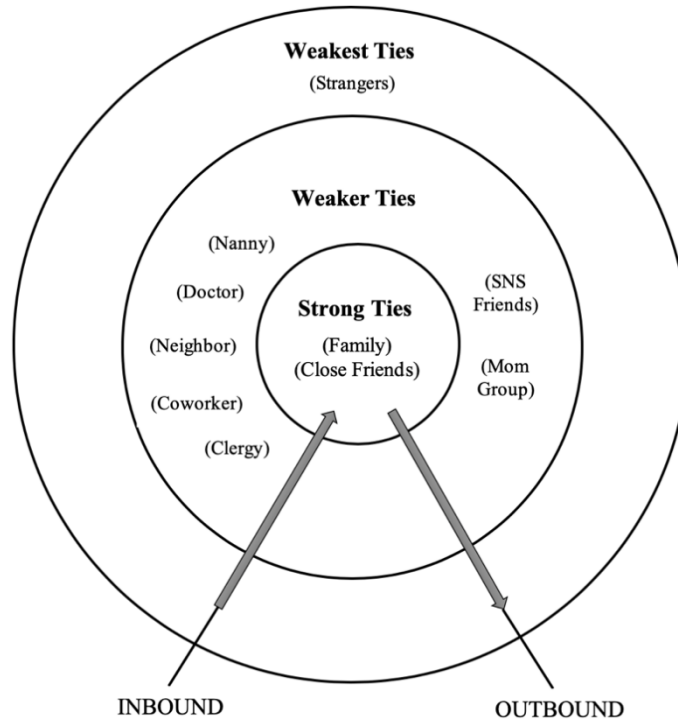
Interviews reveal mothers’ different perceptions of shared privacy boundaries on complaining about a non-human subject. In general, they showed less concern about privacy

turbulence when they complained in private CMC channels. In other words, they felt freer to disclose more details in these channels even though some privacy was co-owned by the complaining target. In comparison, mothers were more careful when posting in public channels (e.g., online mother groups), and they would hide sensitive information from others identifying the target. This is reflected in results about mothers' consideration of impression management. The possibility of damaging collective face hinders mothers from complaining in public CMC channels. They wanted to protect the shared privacy between themselves and the complaining target. Results also show mothers' concern about the detrimental effects on self-image when complaining in public. To avoid being criticized or judged by others who hold different opinions toward the incident or a mother's complaining target (e.g., target should not be blamed from the audience's perspective), mothers tend to think more before they complain in public channels. One thing to be noted is that both findings in the study and literature show that the others may not consider too much about potential repercussions for boundary turbulence especially when the target is a non-human (e.g., Child et al., 2012).

Human subject. Interviews show mothers' more flexible decisions when their complaint target is a person. As mentioned above, their closeness with the target determines the channel selection and the disclosure level. Results indicate a potential negative association between a mother's relational closeness with the target and her willingness to complain about the target in public. For example, a mother is more hesitant to post her complaint about her family on a Facebook mother group than to complain about the nanny she hired. The closer the relationship is, the less likelihood for mothers to share the message with a wide range of audience. The privacy degree of a channel could be a mediator. According to some participants, a more private channel (e.g., video chatting with close friends) increases their trust in the audience and their

sense of information safety, therefore it increases their willingness to disclose despite the strong relational tie with the complaint target (e.g., husband). In contrast, a relatively public channel (e.g., personal SNS page) often means mothers have to face an ill-defined group audience, which reduces their willingness to complain about a strong-tie target considering the increased risk of privacy violation and collective face damage. Anonymity has been proved by interviews as a strong facilitator for mothers to complain in public channels due to its benefits in impression management. Anonymity will not help boost the impression in a positive way but can help protect one's image.

This can be explained more straightforwardly from the following figure. Image one's social network as concentric circles (see figure below). The inside circle includes an individual's strong-tie relationships, the middle circle consists of weaker ties which mainly are one's casual acquaintances, and the outside circle refers to the weakest ties such as strangers. The concentric circles include both the potential complaint target as well as the potential audience. When the target is within the inside circle (e.g., a new mother is complaining about her husband), the complainer's trust in the audience – about privacy protection – decreases as the audience's position moves outbound. In other words, for instance, a mother feels the safest complaining about her husband when facing her close friends (inside circle), and may feel less safe when complaining to members of mother groups whom she may or may not know offline (middle circle), and then feels unsafe to disclose this information to an ill-defined audience whom she has no idea about their real identity (outside circle). No matter what position the target at in these circles, the inbound direction tends to be more secure than the outbound direction when selecting a channel/audience to share private information.



When the complaining target is a human, mothers also prefer a stable and private group to share the complaints, due to their consideration of information control. As reflected in the interviews, a stable group means that members know more about each other's history and background, and they view each other as an insider who is trustworthy for learning more private details about each other. Members may have a history of sharing personal stories, and it feels natural for them to share more private and sensitive information. Familiarity and closeness are shown as facilitators for mothers to select a channel to complain. This aligns with the Social Penetration theory (Altman, 1973) which states that as relationships develop, communication moves from relatively shallow, nonintimate levels to deeper, more personal ones (Altman & Taylor, 2973).

Mothers have more concerns about leaving a record online when their complaining subject is a human than a non-human. Mothers feel less powerful in information control, and

they would worry their complaining message will be released to the target or another unauthorized party, which may cause troubles in their life (e.g., conflicts, network damage).

Mothers are more willing to create humorous complaining messages when the subject is a human. They tried to avoid being considered an ungrateful person or who does not know how to appreciate others' work. For instance, mothers may post something funny when complaining about their in-laws. One great example is a Chinese mom who complained about her father-in-law's cooking skills by creating an entertaining meme on her WeChat page. For non-human subjects, in contrast, none of the participants claimed they had ever made an entertaining post to complain about a non-human subject. The message tone tends to be serious because they want people to take their words seriously.

In summary, the nature of the complaining target does have an influence on mothers' decision-making regarding channel selection, mainly in the area of impression management and information control.

Online Privacy Literacy

The first research question of the dissertation investigates mothers' different levels of self-disclosure when complaining on various CMC channels. This closely relates to the concept of *online privacy literacy* which still receives a limited amount of discussion in the proliferating research on online communication (see details in the meta-analytical review in Baruh et al., 2017a). One definition proposed by Givens (2014) states that online privacy literacy is "one's level of understanding and awareness of how information is tracked and used in online environments and how that information can retain or lose its private nature" (p.53). Trepte et al. (2015) elaborated that "online privacy literacy may be defined as a combination of factual or declarative ('knowing that') and procedural ('knowing how') knowledge about online privacy. In

terms of declarative knowledge, online privacy literacy refers to the users' knowledge about technical aspects of online data protection, and about laws and directives as well as institutional practices. In terms of procedural knowledge, online privacy literacy refers to the users' ability to apply strategies for individual privacy regulation and data protection” (p. 339).

Regarding its empirical measurement, the meta-analysis by Baruh et al. (2017b) listed the five types and a total of 22 measures that were used in the research. The five types are a) knowledge (e.g., web-use knowledge, knowledge about privacy settings, knowledge of online security tools), b) awareness (e.g., online security awareness, privacy awareness), c) experience (e.g., online social media experience, internet-related experience), d) skills (web skills, technical familiarity), and e) general (e.g., Internet literacy, social privacy literacy

The results reflect all five types of online privacy literacy and how they affect mothers' online complaining behavior, including channel/audience selection and privacy management in the disclosure. In other words, online privacy literacy is a cognitive experience or thought process that takes place as information is shared. Further discussion on each type of online privacy literacy is shown below.

Knowledge. The first is about knowledge, which generally includes knowledge about Internet use, various types of online services, privacy laws and regulations, privacy management strategies, etc. In the specific context of the dissertation, knowledge refers to new mothers' knowledge about various CMC channels in terms of how to use them (e.g., post, reply, delete, and save messages) and how to protect privacy while using them. Results show that efficient communication is an important facilitator for mothers to select a channel as they believe efficient communication benefits problem-solving. Channel familiarity is a specific reason proposed by participants that it helps them communicate with the target audience efficiently. When a mother

claimed she was familiar with a certain channel, it usually means she believed that her knowledge was sufficient in these two categories: the channel's key features and the potential audience (i.e., who they are and how many they are). Mothers' self-perception of their channel familiarity determines their willingness to utilize that channel. However, the results cannot support any linear association between knowledge and channel preference. For some people, the more they know about a channel, the higher confidence they have in themselves for information control during the sharing process, which leads to a higher level of preference for expressing via that channel. However, it is also common for many other participants that the more they are familiar with a channel, the more disadvantages they are aware of, which leads to their lower confidence in controlling and protecting their private information there.

Providing anonymity features is another facilitator for new mothers to complain via a particular channel. This concerns their impression management. Their knowledge of whether a channel allows for anonymity and how to set up information boundaries (e.g., blocking, creating pseudonyms, turning on the anonymity feature, etc.) has been proven from the interviews that have a substantial impact on mothers' choices. The more knowledge a mother has on these issues for a particular channel, she shows higher confidence in complaining in that channel while protecting her identity.

Knowledge is not only about channels *per se*, but also includes their audiences. To mothers, if the audience is an ill-defined group that they know little about, they show higher concerns about complaining in that channel as they fear the disclosure may hurt their self-image and collective face of their family.

Awareness. Second is people's awareness. A search from Google Scholar shows that this specific type of measure is more technical and mainly studied in the fields of computer science

and information technology. Briefly, it concerns people's awareness of data and information security and protection (Langheinrich, 2002; Zhu et al., 2014). In the interviews, several participants mentioned the risk of being hacked by others' tracing and tracking their IP addresses when they talked about communicating anonymously on CMC channels. One mother expressed her strong opinion that "nothing is anonymous" online. She mentioned that her husband works for a background check company thus she was very aware that it is almost impossible to be completely anonymous online as someone with strong hacking skills can easily break the disguise. This mother believed in herself as having a high privacy awareness. Some other participants, in comparison, showed a relatively lower level of awareness by stating that they knew little about hacking or IP address tracking. Of course, this is only one aspect of privacy awareness, but it reveals the technical side of this issue. It can be suggested from interviews that when people perceive themselves as having a high privacy awareness, they are more confident about their choices of channel/audience selection as well as disclosure behavior.

A couple of participants mentioned their concern about leaving a record or trace when posting complaints online. It relates to awareness as many participants did not even realize some potential risks of complaining in a public channel. Participants' responses clearly show their different levels of awareness and knowledge regarding internet information security. Some mothers believed that as long as they deleted or retracted the messages that they no longer wanted to present in public or set message visibility correctly, their messages would disappear as they wished. Other participants were more alert and they believed that those deleted messages "won't just die in the Facebook world". In their opinion, the Internet saves anything and nothing that has ever been stored online can ever be erased entirely.

Mothers' varied perceptions do show a significant impact on their channel selection and self-disclosure behaviors. The ones who complained more in public channels and disclosed many details in the complaints tended to show more confidence in themselves in terms of information control. In other words, those who showed less awareness of the Internet information security risks tended to think they had (full) control over the messages they sent out, thus they felt safer to disclosing online publicly. In contrast, mothers who were more aware of information security issues raised their concerns about leaving a record or information trace online, which was a barrier for them to choose public channels to complain. Private channels were considered a much more secure channel for them, although a few mentioned that even private ones were not 100% safe. For example, two Chinese mothers explicitly pointed out that they had heard that WeChat is monitored by the Chinese government and any sensitive information disseminated in WeChat will be deleted, and the WeChat account will be at risk of being suspended or terminated. Granted that motherhood-related complaints rarely involve sensitive information that may trigger such strict regulations¹¹, this shows some participants' higher awareness of Internet information security, and they tend to be more cautious when selecting a CMC channel to complain. To be noted, mothers' self-disclosure behavior is affected by their perceptions of the world, not necessarily the reality. In other words, no matter if it is a rumor or a fact that an individual's social media account would be suspended or closed by the government if she/he posted any inappropriate speech online, this individual may take actions to protect her/his privacy when there is a need to complain online. As long as people's awareness of potential risks increases,

¹¹ The interviews were conducted in 2019, which was before the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2020, the author has noticed many Chinese mothers who were living in the US complained about the strict travel bans and restrictions between the US and China, which caused them losing support from grandparents who lived in China. Some complaints were politically sensitive and the complainers' WeChat accounts may under the risk of suspension or termination.

they may engage in a more comprehensive appraisal of the benefit/risk ratio for complaining in a particular CMC channel.

Some exceptions do exist, according to the interviews. Several mothers demonstrated their great awareness of online information security issues, but they still chose to complain in large online mother support groups, online forums, or some other channels where their complaining messages were exposed to a large audience. One reason is that they believed that the message would benefit others, especially when the complaining target is not a human being, as discussed in the previous section. Another explanation is that “it is no big deal” if their deleted messages were re-discovered by others. For example, one mother acknowledged the possibility of being traced back or hacked by some random people, but she was not worried at all because “I’m not asking about where to hide a body. I’m only complaining about dealing with pregnancy complications while taking care of my other kid.”

Awareness is among many factors that influence mothers’ choices. The results suggest that overall speaking, the more a mother is aware of online privacy, the more cautious she tends to be when complain online. Her final decision can be an outcome of a comprehensive evaluation of other factors.

Experience. The third type of measurement is experience. People acquire and develop abilities and learn lessons from experience. In terms of online communication, most general public would not learn to do that from reading a book or participating in a training program. Their digital literacy improves mainly from the past user experience. As to privacy literacy specifically, experience also plays an important role in people’s gaining and improving literacy. Based on the interviews, I divide experience into two subcategories: firsthand and secondhand experience. The former refers to an individual who experiences it himself/herself and learns

directly rather than being told by others, whereas the latter means learning from others and gaining experience in an indirect way.

Many mothers talked about the influence of their experience complaining on CMC channels, including both positive and negative ones of their own or others they heard about or observed. A positive experience encouraged them to try and continue using a channel and conducting a specific type of disclosure behavior (e.g., detailed or vague). In contrast, a negative experience may lead to a couple of outcomes, including but not limited to withdrawal from using the same channel or disclosure mode, switching to another seemingly more appropriate channel and communication way, and modifying communication strategy while continuing to use the same channel. In other words, when a mother has a negative experience complaining on a certain channel, she may either proactively or passively seek alternative options and solutions. For example, some participants talked about how their privacy was violated after making a complaint post on online mother support groups. Among them, some learned to set up information visibility (e.g., block some people from viewing their complaints), some tried to frame their messages more ambiguously by eliminating sensitive private information, and some started to downgrade their disclosure level (e.g., from level 5 to level 2), and some just stopped posting on the same channel or even gave up using CMC channels for expressing negative emotions.

The strategies – proactively or passively – of coping with the disclosure dilemma are easily identified from their behaviors. I would argue that the more proactively an individual is when dealing with a negative experience, the more improvement of privacy literacy she may acquire from it. As the proverb goes, practice makes perfect. To be noted, this is not a judgment for those who go along the passive route, which is no longer using a particular channel or sharing negative emotions in detail. It is a legitimate self-protection mechanism from being hurt in the

whole self-disclosure process. Especially for those who are already in the mood of depression and frustration tend to be more vulnerable to bearing any extra stress generated from disclosing on CMC channels. This is supported by participants' claims that inducing additional stress is a major barrier for them to pick a particular channel to complain. For example, several mothers mentioned that they could see all the previous posts and responses. They might overthink when their messages are ignored by group members. The comparison added stress to some mothers in their previous complaining experiences, which has negatively impacted or may potentially impact their future complaining behaviors.

In addition, when two people apply the same type of remedy to pursue positive outcomes, it does not necessarily mean that their privacy literacy level improves the same. Different personality traits (e.g., sensitivity, openness) are potential facilitators or barriers to privacy literacy development. Some people adjust their choices and behaviors after only one incident while others may learn the lessons from repeated incidents.

Observations of others' experiences have also been shown to affect mothers' choices. For example, many participants mentioned they had witnessed escalated conflicts happening in some public CMC channels (e.g., online forums, large mother support groups), which increased their mental stress and hindered them from complaining in that channel due to unpleasant memory of seeing the conflicts. Another example shared by some participants is that they personally viewed a mother who complained a lot as a complainer or a downer, and they tried to avoid being perceived the same way. Their observations taught them that a complainer would not be taken seriously all the time. They may get less attention, support, and feedback if she keeps using that channel to vent. This aligns with my personal observation as well. This happened a couple of times during the period of my observation of online mother support groups which lasted about

two years. Someone who complained too much would soon be ignored by the group members, no matter how many support messages she received in her first several complaining messages. The mother's voices would gradually disappear in that group. Chances were she found a better channel to complain, or she no longer needed to deal with problems as the child got older, or due to some other reasons that we could not simply guess from her behaviors.

In summary, experiences can be considered the most important type of online privacy literacy as it has shown influences on all four areas of consideration when mothers select CMC channels and their level of self-disclosure.

Skills. The next is about skills. Similar to awareness, this mainly measures people's technical ability in terms of privacy protection. As presented in chapter four, participants showed their different levels of proficiency in applying the strategies to protect privacy when complaining on CMC channels. Interviews revealed three major categories of measures: anonymity, accessibility, and permeability. Skills relevant to anonymity include: if a mother knows how to be anonymous when complaining online, if a mother knows how to disguise her username and profile photo, and if a mother knows how to hide her IP address. Not all CMC channels allow for anonymity (e.g., private messaging). For the ones that enable anonymity, some participants claimed their strong preference for using these channels (e.g., online forums) if they had confidence in their skills in being anonymous there, as they believed that this helped protect their real identity and avoiding the risks of causing detrimental effects on self-image or collective face.

Some mothers have demonstrated better skills in hiding identity online. For example, one American mother was very knowledgeable about this and she attributed this to her husband who works for a background-checking company. This mother was an active user of a local Facebook

mother support group, and she posted very frequently in the group discussing with other mothers about parenting. She complained several times in the group as well. Interestingly, she believed that nothing is truly anonymous online as she heard about many tactics that professionals may use to search for all information about a person online. She was near fully aware of all the potential risks of complaining online. She still chose to do so because she believed that sometimes the benefits outweigh the risks, and she was confident in her skills being “close to anonymous” online. In the results section, I displayed her tactics of protecting privacy while seeking support from peers, such as using general terms to address her kids (e.g., a 7-year-old), not using real person images as profile pictures, never posting any photos of the family in any social media platform, and not disclosing any private information about the family but focusing on the details of the incident (i.e., what happened and not mention any specific names or locations).

In comparison, many mothers showed limited knowledge and skills in hiding identity online, thus they tended to choose private channels or public channels they felt secure enough to share private information.

Skills related to accessibility include but are not limited to: if a mother knows how to create small private groups, if a mother knows how to activate the blocking functionality, and if a mother knows how to use the “searching” functionality to check network overlap. Mothers who were more skilled in these strategies felt more comfortable complaining online. For example, one Chinese mother said she never posted complaints on WeChat moments because she did not want to hurt the family image (collective face) and shame her husband on a large group of WeChat friends. She knew nothing about the blocking functionality on WeChat and claimed she would

consider posting on WeChat moments if she knew how to set up groups of the audience for sharing different types of content.

Several mothers claimed that they “knew all the tricks” but felt too much trouble of doing this every time they wanted to post online. The other participant stated that “anyone who felt this (information accessibility setup) is too much trouble is because they are still not truly familiar with the steps.” She strongly believed that anyone skilled at these tactics could finish setting up quickly and it was worth the effort as these strategies could significantly protect mothers’ privacy while getting the help and support they wanted.

Skills of permeability control include but are not limited to: If a mother is a good writer/storyteller who can explain the problem in a simple but clear way if a mother knows how to highlight the key issues while attenuating the less important but private information, and if a mother is sensitive enough or capable of framing the message in different ways when facing different audience groups? The lists of questions are not exhaustive but were all mentioned by the interviewees and have been presented in the findings. In general, people who perceive themselves as being skilled in these strategies tend to show more confidence when using CMC channels to express negative emotions. Due to people’s various levels of familiarity with different channels, their levels of proficiency also vary when using them. For instance, one could be an expert in using Facebook but an unskilled user of online forums. Usually, people feel more comfortable expressing themselves via a channel they are familiar with because they possess the necessary skills to protect their privacy specifically on there.

General Privacy Literacy. Last is privacy literacy in general. Kokolakis (2017) proposed two obstacles relevant to privacy literacy: a) lack of “cognitive ability to calculate privacy risks and disclosure benefits” and b) bounded rationality – limitations of both knowledge

and computational capacity – for making “informed judgments about the trade-offs that are involved in privacy decisions” (p. 130). Although almost every participant in the study mentioned their consideration of the cost-benefit ratio when they decided to disclose online, their levels of the aforementioned ability and rationality varied. Based on their knowledge and experience, some showed a comparatively high privacy literacy in the sense that their decisions were made through a thorough consideration of all the relevant parameters they could think of, whereas others only conducted a quick and rough calculation mentally before they curtly made a decision. Granted that sometimes the outcome may not be as satisfactory as one expected even though she has considered thoroughly the decision-making process, and we should not neglect the fact that some people have greater intuition than others, I would still argue that having a higher level of privacy literacy is more likely to help an individual achieve the optimal outcome – maximal benefits and minimal costs.

Two other concepts are closely related to privacy literacy: privacy concern and privacy paradox. As mentioned in the literature review, privacy concern refers to an individual’s worry about the risks and potential negative consequences regarding the information disclosure (Baruh et al., 2017b; Cho et al., 2010), such as personal information is illegally or improperly collected, stored, used, and disseminated (Zhou & Li, 2014). Privacy paradox is a phenomenon of the inconsistency of individuals’ privacy concerns and the privacy management choices they make (Kokolakis, 2017; Taddei & Contena, 2013). A meta-analysis of the online privacy (Baruh et al., 2017b) showed a mixed conclusion on the privacy paradox. In the review, Baruh et al. (2017b) suggested that privacy concerns did “predict the extent to which individuals use online services and engage in privacy management” (p. 45). However, they also pointed out that for SNS use specifically, a privacy paradox did exist: “For both the intentions outcome and the behavioral

outcome, privacy concerns were not significantly correlated with SNS use” (p. 45). Based on the predictions in the CPM theory (Petronio, 2002), Baruh et al. (2017b) explained this contradiction in their study results that user motivations played a critical role in causing the paradox.

Compared to other online services, SNSs serve users better in terms of the need to express themselves.

While qualitative research, compared to a quantitative study, may be more challenging to discern the statistical nuances regarding the privacy paradox, the findings from this dissertation are still revealing partial fact in the specific context of individuals’ expressing negative emotions via CMC channels. In the interviews, participants talked about their behavioral intentions (i.e., what they would do to protect privacy) as well as their actual disclosure behaviors (i.e., their past experience of complaining on CMC channels). Overall speaking, people with a high privacy concern tend to be more conservative in their actual behaviors, which is contrary to the premise of the privacy paradox.

As Baruh et al. (2017b) discussed the SNS specifically, here I probe this issue from each type of CMC channel covered in the current study. The first is about private CMC channels such as Facetiming and instant messaging with family and close friends. Participants showed the lowest level of privacy concern when using this channel. However, a couple of mothers still mentioned the risk of being “betrayed” by their message receiver. For example, when a mother – let us label her as “A” - complains about her husband “B” to a friend “C”, the friend may share the complaint with her husband “D” who accidentally or intentionally divulges the message to “B”, which causes trouble to mother “A”. Many participants talked about their consideration of such a risky flow of information while discussing information control, and research shows that for someone who was more concerned (i.e., high privacy concern), she tended to be more careful

of selecting audience and/or framing the messages (i.e., privacy management). This part of the findings does not support the idea of a privacy paradox.

The second is regarding the most open type of CMC channels such as online forums. Such CMC channels are more open in terms of their public access. In the majority of scenarios, the message sender and receiver are strangers to each other. Results present polarization of participants' privacy concerns when using this type of CMC channel. While some perceived sharing personal information with an ill-defined audience group as super risky, others believed that there was a lower possibility of privacy violation when disclosing to strangers, especially when they could post anonymously. Nonetheless, for this specific type of channel, results still suggest that an individual's privacy concern is a valid predictor of her privacy management intentions and behaviors. Many participants decided to give up using such a channel or only use it as a content consumer (e.g., reader) when they were highly concerned about privacy violations there. Some who decided to continue using it would apply advanced management techniques for privacy protection. Overall, in line with the general conclusion from Baruh et al. (2017b), this part of the findings does not support the privacy paradox either.

The last category is SNSs, the most used type of CMC channels by new mothers to complain. As mentioned in the methods chapter, an SNS platform (e.g., Facebook) includes multiple channels (e.g., Facebook personal page, Facebook mother groups). It has already been discussed that mothers' privacy concern levels varied from channel to channel. The potential of privacy paradox manifested in different degrees while mothers navigated between channels. Some mothers showed consistency in terms of their concern level and privacy management on any SNS channel. For other mothers, a privacy paradox emerged when they could not resist the potential benefits to be gained from a particular channel, so they chose to "endure" the risks of

privacy violation. This supports the literature that people's motivations and gratifications play a critical role in the decision-making process of the disclosure behavior (e.g., Baruh et al., 2017b).

To sum up, the findings suggest a potential curvilinear relationship between the openness of a channel's accessibility and the possibility of the appearance of a privacy paradox. A closed information boundary (e.g., private CMC channels) and super open accessibility (e.g., forums) are least likely to cause privacy paradoxes. A middle level of openness and accessibility (e.g., SNSs) is highly likely to trigger individuals' fluke minds, meaning that they tend to take the risks that they are fully aware of for the benefits.

Cultural Differences

Numerous studies have demonstrated the impact of cultural differences on people's support-seeking and self-disclosure behaviors (e.g., Krasnova et al., 2012), which provided the theoretical support for me to recruit participants from two very different cultural backgrounds. Baruh's (2017) meta-analysis further revealed that cultural difference is a crucial influencer on privacy concern and management. In chapter two I reviewed Hofstede's (2001) Cultural Dimensions Theory and presented how the US and China differ in five of all six cultural orientations. In the following, I continue exploring specifically how these cultural differences affect American and Chinese mothers' privacy concerns and management in the whole complaining process when using different CMC channels.

Individualistic vs. Collectivistic. First, a ton of research claimed that the US tends to have an *individualistic* culture whereas China has a more *collectivistic* one. This has been proven true in terms of family support (especially from elder family members) expected and received by participants in this study. Kinship and family are essential in a collectivistic culture. Therefore, a new baby is considered a strong glue for all family members, including parents and grandparents.

It is a Chinese tradition that grandparents offer physical help to the child(ren) for months and even years. In contrast, in an individualistic culture like the US, offspring is considered an independent unit. Grandparents may help take care of the grandchildren a little but not too much, for example, weeks after the baby is born, two hours after school, and during summer/winter vacations.

An interesting phenomenon in the interview is about the word chosen by participants to describe the length of grandparents' or in-laws' helping with the newborn. Chinese mothers usually used the word "month" whereas most American mothers used the word "week". According to the majority of Chinese participants, the grandparents of the newborn would stay in the US for a couple of months to help. American mothers claimed that physical help from grandparents, if there was any, usually lasted 1-3 weeks after the baby's arrival. This caused a major difference in terms of the target in new mothers' complaints. The human type of target in American mothers' complaints mainly include the significant other, nanny/babysitter, and other casual acquaintances. For Chinese mothers, grandparents are a lead source of their negative emotions due to different living styles and parenting ideas.

As discussed before, the nature of the complaining target has an impact on mothers' choices of complaining behaviors online. The difference between American and Chinese mothers in terms of their primary complaining targets led to some differentiation in their disclosure process. For instance, when Chinese mothers wanted to complain about their in-laws, they usually chose a comparatively private CMC channel (e.g., private messaging to close friends) and/or shared it with peers who showed more empathy (e.g., WeChat mother groups). They avoided channels that have a higher risk of information leakage to the target (e.g., personal SNS page).

American mothers rarely complained about their in-laws. One explanation based on their responses is that they had much fewer physical interactions with in-laws and even grandparents, so there were fewer related negative emotions. On the other hand, when such negative emotions did emerge, they preferred to talk to their husbands face-to-face rather than share via any of the CMC channels, no matter private or public ones.

There are two plausible explanations for the distinction between the two groups. First, according to the CPM theory, people believe that private information is a possession owned by each individual who has control over whether to share or conceal the information (Petronio, 2002; Petronio & Durham, 2008). A closely relevant concept is the *co-ownership* of private information discussed by Child et al. (2009). I would argue that individuals with a collectivistic orientation tend to believe their more power in controlling the private information co-owned by themselves and the complaint target (e.g., in-laws). Alternatively, someone with an individualist orientation may perceive the co-ownership in a separate mode, which leads to her increasing concern about violating the other party's privacy if she discloses the co-owned information. This partially explains why American mothers were more conservative in sharing their negative emotions about grandparents with others, especially with people online.

However, from this perspective, one may wonder about the similar online complaining behaviors of American and Chinese mothers' about their husbands/significant others. I would argue that the intimacy level with the significant other is different from other types of family relationships. In general, an individual is more likely to consider the significant other as a part of one than other family members (e.g., parents). If the complaining is about the husband, mothers usually believe they have more control over the sharing of this private information.

The second explanation is about impression management, including self-face and collective face. Complaining, in essence, is a face-threatening behavior that potentially damages the mother's self-image (e.g., being perceived as a downer, a person with too much negativity), the complaining target's face (e.g., irresponsible husband, unsupportive family), as well as the collective face of the family (e.g., problematic marital relationship). Face Negotiation Theory suggests cultures differ in people's face concerns and strategies for managing face (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). According to the theory, collectivists emphasize the *we-identity* while individualists focus on the *I-identity*. Interviews from this study do support this conclusion as most Chinese participants and some American mothers with a collective cultural background (e.g., Asian, Hispanic) mentioned the possible detrimental effects on collective face if they complain in public channels, whereas few American mothers (Caucasians, African Americans) talked about this in the interviews. The latter focused more on protecting the *I-identity*. When explaining why they did not complain in a particular channel, their common responses related to impression management are "I don't want others to think *I'm* a downer.", "I don't want them (the audience) to think *I'm* an ungrateful person.", "I want to show *my* respect to my in-laws." American mothers perceived themselves and other family members (sometimes excluding husbands) as separate entities. They may consider protecting the target's face due to respect, but not because of trying to protect self-image at the same time – as mothers from a collective culture would do. The different mindsets influenced their disclosure intentions and behaviors. Chinese mothers would consider channels where they were able to express negative emotions without threatening their own faces, and maybe the collective face as well if possible.

High-context vs. Low context. The second cultural dimension is high context versus low context. Literature suggests the US is a low-context culture, meaning that people prefer to

express thoughts straightforwardly, whereas Chinese culture is a high-context culture and people are willing to express themselves indirectly. Results in this study show a slight difference between the two cultural groups in this regard. 58% (11 out of 19) of Chinese participants used to complain at level 1 and most of them posted level 1 complaints on WeChat moments. Only 12.5% (2 out of 16) of American mothers said they had posted level 1 complaints and the two posted this type of complaint on their personal Facebook page (equivalent to WeChat moments). Level 1 is an indirect complaining message in which mothers subtly express their negative feelings by sharing some articles, links, or memes, without providing a clear complaining message.

More incident details are included in mothers' complaints from level 2 through level 5. However, we cannot tell if these messages are direct or indirect complaints from this study unless we conduct another study analyzing the texts of mothers' complaints. One Chinese mother did mention that she never needed to explain too much before her close friends got her points. Friends could quickly understand her pain through a few words because they were very familiar with each other and could "read each other's mind." ("好朋友之间有那种心有灵犀") This may happen to Americans as well between strong relationships even though no American mother mentioned this in the interviews. High-context complaining behaviors may occur more in communication between close relationships, including both American and Chinese mothers (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1986). For public CMC channels, Chinese mothers tend to be more indirect.

High vs. Low Power Distance. The third cultural orientation is high and low power distance. The US culture is in general considered as having a low power distance as opposed to China's high power distance cultural orientation. Based on the literature, I presumed that

Chinese mothers, compared to American mothers, would show more concern and behave more conservatively when they complain about the elder family members or other professional authorities (e.g., doctors) on CMC channels. However, the presumption was unsupported based on the results. Both groups expressed their considerations when they wanted to complain about higher-status family members, and their typical examples were grandparents. In other words, when it comes to complaining about grandparents and in-laws, American mothers were also conscientious because they did not want to show any disrespect to elder family members, at least in public. One American mother did mention she would talk to her in-laws in person directly when she had some disagreements with them. Her in-laws took it well and this private complaining did not seem to affect their relationships.

Based on my personal experience and conversation with and observation from Chinese participants/friends who live in the US, very few of them would choose to confront their in-laws (sometimes mothers' own parents) about disagreements on living and parenting styles, whereas American mothers have much less mental burden of doing so. One possible explanation is that American mothers usually do not live with in-laws for a long time (e.g., over a month), and American culture is a low-context culture in which people feel comfortable sharing their different opinions, even with elder family members. Even if the confrontation does not end well, American mothers do not need to worry too much about the tension between them and their in-laws.

However, for Chinese new mothers who live in the US, a typical length of parents/in-laws staying for help is 3-6 months, sometimes even longer if parents from both sides of the young couple come to visit and help. 3 months is common because that is when the baby turns 100 days, which is considered a milestone, and new mothers are believed to be on track of taking

care of the newborn. 6 months is even more common as this is longest time that a foreigner is allowed to stay in the US, according to the US government's visa policy. Many grandparents from China want to provide the best support to the young couple and they choose to stay as long as they can.

Considering the length of living together with the grandparents, many Chinese new mothers chose not to confront the grandparents face-to-face because it was believed to significantly impact the family relationship negatively. In addition, Chinese culture is a high-context culture in which young people have to show absolute respect to an elder, an authority, or someone who is in power. It is considered disrespectful, ungrateful, and rude when a daughter/daughter-in-law accuses parents/parents-in-law, no matter how they deliver the message. This culture has been changing with the younger generation of Chinese, let alone the mothers who live here, and have been influenced by the US culture. They have shown more courage to express themselves and let their voices be heard. However, Chinese mothers tend to endure much higher mental stress, compared to their US peers, when they decide to confront elder family members. Interviews demonstrated that most Chinese mothers choose not to complain face-to-face with their elders, and they either talk to their husbands for solutions or more commonly, find a CMC channel to complain. For most of them, 3-6 months is a period of time they were still able to tolerate and handle the issues without face-to-face confrontations. Some mothers acknowledged that they might choose to have an open talk with the grandparents if they stayed for a longer time (e.g., over a year).

A few American mothers did talk about it also bothered them when they had conflicts with their parents who lived together with them to help with the kids for a relatively long time

(e.g., a couple of months). The confrontation became much harder in that case. The tension between family members may lead to more negative feelings and consequences.

With all these being said, culture (high and low power distance) does play a role in impacting American and Chinese mothers' different online complaining behaviors. But we should not neglect the fact that time (i.e., how long the new mother has to live together with the elder family members) is also a critical moderation here between the relationship of power distance and online complaining behavior (e.g., whether to complain online, in public or in private, how many details to share).

Uncertainty Avoidance. The fourth is uncertainty avoidance, the tolerance for ambiguity. Literature suggests the US scores below average on the uncertainty avoidance dimension, meaning that there is a fair degree of acceptance to embrace an event of something unexpected and unknown (Hofstede, 2020). China scores lower on this dimension and they make great efforts to avert such events and try to maintain the status quo. This cultural orientation is relevant to the topic regarding the possibility of facing an ill-defined audience group and the uncertainty of its consequences when mothers disclose on CMC channels. Generally speaking, there is a positive association between the openness of a channel and the uncertainty level. A more public CMC channel usually means the information boundary is expanded so that the mothers face an ill-defined audience group, which leads to a higher uncertainty level of the potential outcome. The participants in the study did not show an evident tendency of uncertainty avoidance level based on their cultural backgrounds. In other words, it is a case-by-case situation as every mother has their own perceptions of uncertainty and channel selection.

From the interviews, it was common to see that uncertainty was perceived as a barrier for both American and Chinese mothers to select a particular CMC channel to complain. For

example, they were afraid to receive harsh comments if they (accidentally) complained about something that offended others due to different beliefs, or they had concerns about damaging the collective face if they were unsure if there was an overlap of networks in that channel, or they worried their messages would leave a record online which cause any backfire in the future. All these uncertainties about a channel hindered them use that channel to express themselves. This aligns with the Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT, Babrow, A. S. & Kline, K. N., 2000) which uncertainty is believed to be harmful, and it is better to avoid uncertainty during communication, and people strive to reduce uncertainty while seeking information.

However, uncertainty can also be considered an advantage, from some participants' perspectives. They knew what kinds of responses they would get from their parents or close friends, which may not be helpful. If they disclose problems in a large channel, they are likely to receive advice and thoughts which never occur to them. A couple of mothers echoed this by talking about their positive experiences complaining and getting support from channels that were full of strangers. This is consistent with Brasher's new theory of uncertainty management which proposes that individuals may appreciate uncertainty for its potential benefit (Brashers, D., 2001; Rintamaki, L. & Hsieh, E. 2010).

In summary, people engage in variety of thinking and actions to manage their uncertainty toward various CMC channels. Their perceptions of uncertainty have an impact on their appraisals of the channel and their decisions to complain in that channel. Among the American and Chinese participants in this study, their uncertainty avoidance tendency has little to do with their cultural background. Instead, it appears to be more influenced by their personality (e.g., willing to take risks or not), experience using a channel, and how helpful their close social network.

Indulgence vs. Restrain. The last dimension is about indulgence/restrain orientation. Baruh et al. (2017b) claimed in their meta-analysis that this dimension has a “conceptual relevance to CPM theory’s argument that privacy management entails a cost-benefit calculus within which individuals tolerate exposure in return for benefits derived from sharing” (p. 47). Specifically in this context, this dimension involves the influence of culture on how people balance between the satisfaction of needs (e.g., self-expression) and social norms (e.g., privacy). The US is an indulgent culture, meaning that Americans have a tendency toward relatively weak control over their desires and needs (Hofstede, 2020). China, on the contrary, is a restrained culture and Chinese tend to perceive that their actions are restrained by social norms and that it is wrong to indulge themselves (Hofstede, 2020). The difference in this dimension suggests that American mothers are more willing to bear the risks of self-disclosure online for the key benefits, in comparison with Chinese mothers. However, the results do not provide sufficient support for this presumption. In both groups, there were cases for each type. Some Chinese participants were expressive and showed a tendency toward indulgence, and they were willing to take the risks of a privacy violation to satisfy their need to vent their negative emotions. Some American mothers tended to be restrained and preferred more private channels (both online and offline) to complain about family-related issues. If no such appropriate channel exists, a few American mothers even choose to suppress their need to share.

One possible explanation for this result is due to the small sample size in this qualitative research. Another reason might be that all Chinese participants in this study have been living in the US for years, and their cultural orientation has changed and becomes different from other Chinese who have always been living in the US.

Summary. In summary, the results reveal a limited influence of cultural differences on new mothers' disclosure behaviors on CMC channels. However, considering that there were still a number of Chinese participants and American participants who have other cultural backgrounds (e.g., Hispanic) mentioned "culture" and its impact on their decision-making process, this factor should receive continuing attention from future researchers when studying privacy and self-disclosure.

One plausible explanation for the smaller cultural differences between American and Chinese participants' online complaining behaviors is that all Chinese participants have been living in the US for years. Their mindsets and behaviors may have been influenced by the American culture. These Chinese immigrants, no matter if they are stay-at-home mothers or working mothers, all have interactions with the dominant culture. During their adaption to the American culture, they encounter different worldviews, and the differences force them to rethink their own culture, and whether to make any changes for adaptation (Hsieh & Kramer, 2021). The interviews with these Chinese participants reflected their *cultural fusion* – a process of acculturation that a newcomer to a culture acculturates to the dominant culture while maintaining aspects of their minority culture (Kramer, 2019). They have shown appreciation and borrowed some worldviews from the American culture (Kramer, 2017). For example, most of them did not feel "shameful" to express themselves or complain about an unhelpful husband. They believed that caring for the children should be the responsibility of both mother and father. This is different from the traditional Chinese value that women should take more responsibility for taking care of the family and it is "a shame" to complain about the husband who was not involved in this. This is still a widespread social norm in modern China, although it has been challenged increasingly in the last decade by the younger generation of Chinese. Nonetheless,

the Chinese participants in this study have demonstrated that many of their worldviews have been influenced by the host culture.

However, complete assimilation is not happening to them. They still maintain many aspects of Chinese culture despite the fact that they have lived in the US for years. For example, they are still not used to American social media, no matter how popular these channels are in the US. They still prefer to use the mother language – Chinese – to express feelings and discuss daily matters, no matter how fluent their English is when speaking in work settings. They are willing to engage in any community that includes more ethnic minorities, specifically Chinese immigrants. They still prefer Chinese food to American food. Many examples can be retrieved from their interviews demonstrating their willingness to maintain some aspects of Chinese culture.

Cultural fusion may impact their channel selection and self-disclosure behavior. If we are able to compare American mothers with Chinese mothers who have never lived abroad in the future, maybe we are able to see some different results.

A Model of Negative Self-Disclosure via CMC

The goal of this section is to provide a model for the processes that determine the specific dimension of individuals' negative self-disclosure. The model is built upon the CPM theory (Petronio, 2002), Disclosure Decision Model (DDM; Omarzu, 2000), Disclosure Decision-Making Model (DD-MM; Greene, 2009, 2015), and most importantly, the findings from this study. The underlying idea of the model is that individuals' decision-making on selecting CMC channels for negative self-disclosure is an ongoing process; or in Omarzu's words, is a "flexible behavior":

We can tell very little about ourselves to others or we can tell a great deal.

We can disclose indiscriminately or very selectively.

We can speak from the heart or from cynical self-interest.

We can infuse our disclosures with emotions or confine them to objective facts.

-- Omarzu, 2000

Then the question is, what affects individuals' choices? The proposed model demonstrates in the course of an individual's ongoing self-disclosure, how subsequent changes in the situation influence individual's adjustment of concerns, intentions, and behaviors.

Rationale of Creating a New Model

As shown above, there are at least two models (i.e., DDM and DD-MM) closely relevant to people's disclosure behavior. Both models were founded based on the CPM theory, which is also the theoretical foundation of the dissertation. However, there are limitations of the two models in explaining individuals' negative self-disclosure behavior through CMC in this digital age.

First of all, both models focused on interpersonal interactions *offline*. DD-MM specifically explicates the disclosure behavior of individuals with health issues in terms of their assessment of risks and rewards during the decision-making process of sharing private health information with others (Greene, 2009, 2015). DD-MM explores three categories of assessment: assessment of disease information (i.e., stigma, preparation, prognosis, symptoms, and relevance to others), assessment of receivers (i.e., relationship quality, anticipated action, confidence in response), and assessment of efficacy (i.e., necessary confidence and skills to disclose health information). Granted that part of the variables in DD-MM can be applied to the new model considering their critical roles in individuals' disclosure process, DD-MM has limitations to be generalized to CMC context especially Greene et al. (2012) claimed that CMC is only an

alternative method for people who perceived to have low efficacy to disclose health information offline. Therefore, for instance, DD-MM lacks a discussion on individuals' assessment of communication channels (either offline or online), which is an important component in the new model.

Second, DDM, compared to DD-MM, is more generalizable considering that it is not only focusing on health information disclosure. But the same as DD-MM, DDM demonstrates the decision-making process of individuals' offline disclosure behavior. It can be partially applied to explore people's disclosure decision-making process when using CMC channels since the model points out the fact that people keep changing communication strategies based on their specific social goals as well as perceptions of utility and risk (Omarzu, 2000). However, since the model was proposed by a psychologist who emphasized people's inner needs, DDM mainly explained how motivations decide the selection of a target audience as well as how subjective utility and risk affect the three disclosure dimensions (i.e., breadth, depth, and duration) proposed in the Social Penetration Theory (Altman, 1973).

Therefore, the new model extends the literature by theorizing factors affecting the disclosure process via CMC channels. Moreover, as discussed before, complaining behaviors and privacy management intentions differ between online and offline environments. Therefore, a critical contribution of the new model is considering individuals' decision-making while selecting an appropriate online channel for disclosure.

Third, the new model focuses on negative disclosure specifically. Negative self-disclosure (e.g., complaining) differs from positive and neutral ones as it tends to result in unfavorable consequences such as personal image damage, stigma, destroyed (intimate) relationships, etc. In other words, the potential risk level of negative self-disclosure is more

significant than a general one. That being said, there are more factors that may have an impact on people's decision to reveal or withhold private information, which will be demonstrated in the new model.

To sum up, the major contribution of the new model is extending current literature by examining individuals' self-disclosure – negative ones particularly - and privacy management behaviors in computer-mediated space.

Integrated Model of Negative Self-Disclosure via CMC

There are many factors that can potentially influence people's CMC channel selection and privacy management during the process of negative self-disclosure online. The proposed model, NSD-CMC, systematically presents them all and demonstrates the intertwined relationships between these factors and outcomes. The key question that can be answered from the model is: what factors prompt or discourage individuals' negative self-disclosure while selecting from a luxury choice of CMC channels? To be noted, although negative self-disclosure is an interpersonal behavior, the model primarily focuses on the complainer's intentions and behaviors.

There are three stages in the NSD-CMC (see Figure 1). The first stage concerns situational cues that may affect individuals' decisions about whether to disclose on CMC channels. The second stage concerns factors that influence people's channel and audience selection. The third stage concerns individuals' privacy management strategies in framing complaining messages.

Figure 1 inserts here

Stage 1: Entering the situation. In the first stage of the NSD-CMC, an individual enters a situation in which he/she needs to decide whether to express himself online or offline. Based on

literature and interviews, three contextual factors become salient during this process: a) online and offline social circles, b) perceptions of complaining online, and c) goals of complaining.

In the digital age, almost every individual has these two types of social circles: offline and online. Offline circle generally includes an individual's family (close ones and regular relatives), friends, classmates, co-workers, and casual acquaintances (e.g., mailman, clergy, physicians).

Online social circles may not only include an individual's offline connections, but also other people one barely knows in real life and complete strangers. Usually, an individual's offline and online social circles can be overlapped; the degree of overlap can be varied from person to person. As shown in the figure below, there are three degrees regarding the overlap between offline and online circles. Some people's offline and online networks largely overlap (Type 1); some individual's offline and online circles only overlap a bit (Type 2), meaning that they do not prefer adding real-life connections to their online network; there is an extreme scenario that there is no overlap at all between an individual's offline and online social circles (Type 3). Type 3 is an extreme case if we examine a person's social network in general; however, it could be common in a specific platform or channel. For instance, one may create an SNS account without adding any real-life connections to it.



A review of the literature has proven that people will seek help and support from social networks when they have negative emotions. Granted that it may not happen every single time

(e.g., an argument over trivial matters), it is still a common type of social interaction. In the interviews, every participant was asked about whether their social circle had changed after becoming a new mother, and all participants claimed that there was a shift in social circles. It is suggested from their following answers that the shift of social circles also impacted their choices of seeking help and support.

In general, new mothers who have a robust offline support system are less likely to seek help from online networks, and vice versa. However, other factors could interfere with this decision-making process. For instance, many mothers mentioned that their top choice is to complain to their parents via video chatting. However, they learned from experience that some subjects are inappropriate in this channel because it may induce additional stress. For example, they could get more support from parents when they complain about non-human subjects (e.g., daycare) than human subjects (e.g., husband). Any facilitators and barriers discussed previously may affect mothers' decisions. For others who had a relatively weaker offline support system, they would have to rely on CMC channels to seek support.

In terms of the shift of social circles, many participants pointed out that there was a decrease in the interactions with specific groups of people from their real-life social network (e.g., casual friends from college or previous workplace, friends who are single or have no kid) and an increase of connections with others who share similar experience being a (new) parent. New mothers who are often restrained in terms of time and location due to the newborn and their own health conditions, tend to expand their social circle in the online community.

If we generalize the situation to a regular individual's intention for negative self-disclosure, the constitution of his/her social circle may decide whether he/she uses CMC channels. When one has a reliable offline network and the target audience is physically

accessible, then CMC channels may not be his/her top choice for expressing negative emotions. Alternatively, if an individual's offline support system is weak or the target audience is physically beyond accessible, online communication will be preferred.

In addition to social circles, an individual's perception of sharing personal information (especially negative ones) online will also influence their decision to use CMC channels. For example, a couple of participants felt "it is embarrassing" to talk about family conflicts online. Others claimed that either "it is unsafe" or "useless/meaningless" to complain online. For this group of people who perceive more risks over benefits of disclosing online, they tend to put more effort into seeking help and support offline or from private CMC channels.

Individuals' perceptions of sharing negative issues online can be formed and changed by cultural beliefs (e.g., face-saving culture), education (family and school), and personal and/or others' experiences – both positive and negative ones. It is also highly relevant to people's mental calculation of the risk-benefit ratio when selecting between offline and online communication channels.

The last influencing factor is people's goals of negative self-disclosure. In the DDM model, Omarzu (2000) discussed the motivations of disclosure based on Derlega and Grzelak's (1979) functional theory and Baumeister's self-presentation theory (1982), and Omarzu claimed that "disclosure decision-making process is increased by accessibility of any of the following social rewards: social approval, intimacy, relief of distress, social control, and identity clarification" (p. 178). The most relevant motivations in the context of this study are social approval and relief of distress. The latter one is straightforward. People talk about problems and issues to reduce negative emotions. Oftentimes individuals expect others' understanding and acceptance of their negative disclosure while not looking down upon them, which is a motivation

for social approval. People will consider whether CMC channels are better than offline channels in terms of achieving these goals. For example, when an individual believes that an online community is full of peers who share similar experiences and beliefs, then he/she tends to disclose via CMC for social approval. Similarly, if an individual thinks complaining to a neighbor would help him solve the problem that caused his stress and frustration, the negative emotions can be relieved from offline communication.

In reality, as Omarzu (2000) pointed out, situations are often complex and sometimes individuals may not be clear about their motivations, or their goals can be combined or overlap or even conflict. Some may try to balance the risks and rewards through careful mental calculation while others may select a channel (offline or online) out of intuition and communication habits. Their choices may change based on specific situations.

Stage 2: Selecting a Channel and Audience Group. Once an individual decides to use CMC for negative self-disclosure, he/she enters the second stage of selecting a specific CMC platform and channel and searching for an appropriate audience group.

Which is selected first, the channel or the target audience? It may vary depending on the situation and individual's habits and preferences. The findings in this study reveal both possibilities. Some mothers thought about selecting a familiar channel first, then choosing who had access to their complaints. Others first considered whom they wanted to complain to and then selected a convenient channel for their target audience groups.

No matter which was selected first, here are the crucial mediators – by using a statistical term – the perception of the effectiveness of the channel to be used and the trust on the potential audience. Again, this could be influenced by an individual's consideration in their emotion

management, impression management, information control, and problem-solving, as illustrated in previous discussions.

Usefulness is closely related to individuals' motivations (e.g., social approval, physical help, relief of stress) and expectations (e.g., comfort, commiseration, advice) for negative self-disclosure. In the DDM model, Omarzu (2000) proposed that as situations change, individuals' different motivations and expectations may become more salient. When this happens, disclosure behavior may change. This also applies to the new model. For instance, things that trigger people's negative emotions are different and the seriousness of the issues also vary, thus individuals' motivations and expectations of complaining online should be expected to change as well, which further affects their channel selection. This study suggests a positive relationship between individuals' perceived usefulness and channel preference.

Stage 3: Framing the Message. Once a channel and audience group are selected, one will consider framing the message. This part reflects the research question on mothers' self-disclosure levels in different CMC channels. How many details do they feel comfortable sharing to receive the support and help they expect? Does the sacrifice of privacy worth it? Due to the varied functionalities in each CMC channel, mothers may need to adjust their strategy when choosing different channels to complain. As discussed in the previous section, the relationship with the audience, nature of the complaining subject, expected type of support, online privacy literacy, and culture may altogether have an impact on an individual's decision-making.

Individuals consider their relationship with the audience from three aspects: a) whether the audience on a particular channel shares similar experiences, b) whether the audience is within the same network as the complaining target, and c) whether the audience has a close relationship with the complainer. Findings suggest individuals prefer a channel that consists of people who

share a common experience, belief, cultural background, etc. Unless an individual discloses on a private channel, the majority of CMC channels include a comparatively large size of audience, meaning that one cannot guarantee that all audience members have a similar experience.

Therefore, individuals still have to frame their message wisely. It can be indicated from the study that more commonality between the discloser and the audience may lead to a higher likelihood of negative self-disclosure, less concern for a privacy violation, and a higher willingness to disclose detailed private information.

Findings also suggest that individuals consider the possible network overlap between the complaining target and the audience. If a channel and its audience have a possibility of including someone who is within the same network as the target, then the discloser may avoid sharing on that channel or with the audience group. Even if an individual is still willing to use that channel due to other considerations, he/she tends to share less information or create a more closed boundary to limit information accessibility.

The relational closeness between the complainer and the message recipient is a key factor in self-disclosure, and thus has been discussed in a large amount of literature (e.g., social penetration theory). In terms of channel selection, findings in this study revealed individuals' contrary choices. A possible curvilinear relationship exists between relational closeness and use preference. Specifically, individuals are more willing to use a CMC channel where they are able to disclose to super strong ties (e.g., parents) or to super weak ties (e.g., strangers). Individuals tend to avoid sharing private information on a channel that mainly consists of casual acquaintances (e.g., personal SNS page). In terms of message framing, the findings suggest mixed disclosure intentions and behaviors. Some disclose more details while complaining to a

person whom they are close to whereas others are more willing to provide more details to strangers.

Rethinking CPM Theory

The study results and the model can be reflected back to CPM, and add new insights to the theory. As argued in CPM, privacy management is an ongoing and ever-changing process. This study has proven that new mothers' online negative self-disclosure behavior can change every time they need to complain. There are many influential factors affecting their channel selection and disclosure behavior, which are reflected in the new integrated model I developed based on the study results.

The bottom line is that new mothers have the desire to control their privacy when complaining online, and they develop their own rules of self-disclosure to decide to either reveal or conceal private information, as well as where to share the information. This aligns with CPM which provides further guidelines for me to investigate mothers' online self-disclosure behavior.

Two of the principles from CPM concern information ownership and control, claiming that people own their personal information and should have the power to decide what to disclose to others. Some of the facilitators and barriers found in the results show mothers' consideration of private information ownership and control. For instance, when speaking of protecting collect-face, mothers talked about the information of what happened within the family may be co-owned by the whole family. Mothers' have different opinions on their ownership of the information. Some feel less concerned about sharing this information with family outsiders because they believe that they own the information, and they do not think too much about the possibility of a privacy violation to other family members who are involved. In contrast, other mothers believed that the information was co-owned by the family member and that it was unethical to disclose it

to the public without family members' permission. Mothers' varied opinions in this regard partially determined their online complaining behaviors.

Four principles in CPM are closely related to the critical concept of *boundary*. People create boundaries that vary in the degree of information accessibility and permeability, ranging from completely open to fully closed. Mothers talked about anonymity. Some preferred a channel that allows for partial or full anonymity. It is like a warrior wearing armor. People can see all the warrior's movements, but they have no clue who is underneath the armor. To a group of mothers, it is not a privacy violation as long as they are not identified by the audience. This group of mothers is more willing to complain in public CMC channels. Whereas to other mothers, the "armor" is not 100% safe for safeguarding their privacy. There is still a risk of privacy turbulence of disclosing in public. They would feel safer complaining in a relatively private CMC channel (i.e., one-on-one instant messaging, small and stable online support groups).

Another facilitator mentioned by the participants is that the channel is easy for creating a block list. This relates to manipulating information accessibility. Some channels are more user-friendly in terms of creating blocklists. Mothers believe some people are inappropriate to access their complaining messages because it may cause detrimental effects on their self-image, collective face, or family relationships, for instance. A blocklist allows them to separate in-group and out-group members.

Once again, the study proves CPM in terms of that online negative self-disclosure is a highly contextual behavior and a dynamic process. Individuals shift their channel selection strategies back and forth depending on their expectations, complaining target, online privacy literacy, general Internet literacy, and cultural backgrounds. The study extends the CPM theory

by identifying the influential factors in people's decision-making progress and how they together affect people's online complaining behavior.

Conclusion

This dissertation aims to investigate new mothers' complaining behaviors using CMC channels. By closely observing the several online mother support groups that I was in and the posts occurred in my personal social network for over two years, as well as conducting face-to-face interviews with 35 new mothers about their experiences complaining new motherhood-related issues online, I have explored mothers' four major areas of considerations when selecting an appropriate CMC channel to complain, and also their self-disclosure privacy management in different channels.

The study identified that emotion management, impression management, information control, and problem-solving are the four areas of consideration when new mothers choose CMC channels to express negative emotions. Under each category, there are facilitators and barriers being found to affect mothers' choices. In this digital age, mothers are facing a luxury of choices in terms of CMC channels to express themselves, and most of the participants showed their thinking on balancing the benefits and risks when picking the best option. Their choices may change due to changes in their expectations, different complaining subjects in each incident, past using experience, and improved online privacy literacy. This is a developing practice, but the main areas of consideration remain the same for a relatively long period of time.

Limitations

The biggest limitation of the study is the limited number of participants included. The data collection method (i.e., in-depth interviews) makes it impractical to include a large number of participants as often seen in quantitative research. However, the diversity of the mothers (i.e., mothers with different cultural backgrounds, mothers who had 1 or multiple children) involved

in this study provides good external validity about new mothers' online complaining behaviors in general.

The second limitation is that the participants were mainly recruited from Facebook and WeChat, which is convenient sampling. There are mothers who are often using other types of social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, TikTok, RedBook^{CH}) for online complaining. They may provide different responses explaining their choices. However, in my interviews, I asked all participants if they used any other online platforms to complain, and they were welcome to talk about their experiences using these channels. Some of my participants mentioned they were also active users of Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, Quora, and Reddit, and they shared their perspectives on these channels as well. TikTok and RedBook^{CH} were not as popular in 2019 as they are now, thus none participants mentioned them in the interview.

The third limitation is the lack of data from the observation, which provided a critical foundation for me to develop the research questions and provide support to explain some mothers' complaining behaviors. As I explained in the method section, it is almost impractical to receive informed consent from online mother support groups as they often consist of a large number of members (e.g., from 500 to over 10K). Most of these groups are private groups which, according to IRB, the data from there cannot be used in this study. The results will be more convincing if the part of observation data can be included in the study. For future research, the researchers may consider conducting experiments to receive some observation data.

Future Directions

I will consider the following research directions in the future. First, this study only focused on new mothers and it is a gender-specific research. Nowadays, there are more and more new fathers engaging in taking care of newborns. According to the most recent from Pew

Research Center, there are about 2 million U.S. fathers with children under 18 still at home not working outside the home (Livingston, 2014). The 2019 U.S Census Bureau reported 1.91 million stay-at-home dads, and the number was believed to be undercounted based on research from the National At-home Dad Network (2022). The large group of new fathers and stay-at-home dads should not be neglected. They may face different challenges than mothers. The model developed in the study can be further tested on new fathers.

In addition, we may also think of the growing size of the LGBTQIA+ community. In the U.S., 37 out of 50 states have legalized same-sex marriage as of 2022. Many couples have kids with the help of assisted reproductive technology (e.g., IVF, egg/sperm donation, surrogacy) and adoption. This population may face different challenges as new parents compared to the traditional type of parents. It also needs further investigation if their negative self-disclosure behavior is similar to the new mothers in this study. We need more studies in the future to see if the new model can be generalized to other gender groups.

Second, in future research, I will include the newly emerged social platforms which are different from Facebook and WeChat. For example, in the past few years, TikTok has grown rapidly in the U.S. Among Chinese immigrants in the U.S., a new social mobile application named RED (xiaohongshu, 小红书) became widely used and popular. The structure and functionalities of these trendy social media are different from Facebook and WeChat, and people may have new insights regarding their choices of using or not using these channels to complain.

Third, NSD-CMC is a conceptualized model developed based on qualitative data collected in the study. The model can be quantitatively tested in the future. I will further operationalize each factor and develop hypotheses on the potential relationships between the

variables. Survey and experiments are potential methods to be utilized to investigate and test the relationships.

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Appendix

Table 1

Communication Privacy Management Theory Principles (as cited in Lankton et al., 2017; Petronio, 2002)

Principle #	Description
1	People believe they own their private information.
2	Because people believe that they own their private information, they also believe that they have the right to control the flow of that information.
3	To control their private information, people develop and use privacy rules based on criteria important to them (culture, motivation, individual differences, situations, gender, and risks/benefits).
4	When individuals grant access to their private information through disclosure or other means, that information enters into collective ownership.
5	Once the information becomes co-owned and collectively held, the parties negotiate privacy rules for third-party dissemination including: (i) Boundary permeability rules that determine how much and what type of private information can be shared with others. (ii) Boundary ownership rules that guide the co-owners in determining how much control they can assert over the shared private information. (iii) Boundary linkage rules that consider who else besides the co-owners can access or know the information.
6	Given that people do not consistently, effectively, or actively negotiate privacy rules for collectively held private information, there is a possibility of boundary turbulence or violations, disruptions, or mistakes in the way that co-owners control and regulate the flow of private information to third parties.

Table 2*Demographics of Participants*

Nationality	<i>n</i>	Ethnicity	<i>n</i>	No. of Kids	<i>n</i>
American	16	Caucasian	9	One	6
		Asian	4	Two	8
		Hispanic	2	Three	2
		African American	1		
Chinese	19	Han	19	One	13
				Two	6

Table 3*Five Levels of Information Disclosure*

Levels	Examples
Level 1 Implicit	Sharing posts without comments
Level 2 Short but clear	My husband is not helpful with the kid. / He never helps! That daycare/nanny is not professional.
Level 3 Clear with an example	My husband is not helpful. He is almost always busy and not at home. The nanny I hired was not professional. She showed little respect for our family's time.
Level 4 Clear with several examples or a detailed example	My husband is not helpful. He is almost always busy and not at home. He works from 10-8, ... (1-3 sentences describing more details). The nanny I hired was not professional at all. She showed little respect for our family's time. We scheduled a meeting with her. She then last minute had to change it... (1-3 sentences describing more details)
Level 5 Very detailed (with one or multiple incidents)	This is going to be long...I lay here in my bed sad as I write this. SO (significant other) didn't join me in our childbirth/new parent prep class today. Instead, he drank last night and went to the casino this early morning. He knew we had a class. I am extremely hurt by this, and as we live together, I came back home after the class and I lost my cool. I think this is about it. I am 34w pregnant w his daughter. We haven't had the best relationship these almost 6yrs of being together. But I always believed I got pregnant w him for a reason, as if something was going to change. I have yet to see what that is tho. He is a heavy drinker. Compulsive gambler. Lost monies and possessions on multiple occasions. As I stated, we have a baby coming in weeks, and he left to blow his entire paycheck at the casino. He has yet to buy our child a sock. He has not been invested or supportive financially or emotionally. He tells me letting us live in his house is contribution... Also I should add, he had let his older brother move in yrs ago and the guy won't leave! He's in our basement and smokes in our house - weed and cigs.

I've made many statements and put my foot down that he needs to be out of our house before our baby is born or she and I will not be returning home after delivery. My SO (significant other) hasn't made an effort to let big brother know and instead lets him do his thing. (There are two more graphs after).

Note: The example of level 5 was retrieved from a real Facebook post written by one of the participants. She gave her content for me to use it in my dissertation.

Table 4*New Mothers' Level of Self-Disclosure in Different CMC Channels*

Groups	CMC Channels	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
		<i>n</i>				
American Mothers	Instant messaging with peers		1	2	5	1
	Instant messaging with parents/elderly family			1	3	
	Facebook personal page	2	2			1
	Facebook mom groups		3	5	3	2
	Online forums		1	1	2	
	Other social channels (YouTube)			1	1	1
Chinese Mothers	Instant messaging with peers			4	12	1
	Instant messaging with Parents/Elder family	1		2	5	1
	WeChat Moments	9	3	1		
	WeChat mom groups	1	5	2	1	
	Online forums		1			
	Other social media (Weibo)		1	1		

Table 5*Facilitators and Barriers in Mothers' Areas of Consideration for CMC Channel Selection*

Functions	Facilitators	Barriers
Emotion Management	Reciprocal complaining	Revisiting traumatic memory
	Perspective-shifting	Inducing additional stress
	Therapeutic writing	Violating expectancy
	Channel appropriateness	
Impression Management	Anonymity features	Detrimental effects on self-image
	Humorous complaining messages	Damaging collective-face
Information Control	Stable and private group	Leaving a record or trace
	Allowing for restricted access	Risk of unauthorized sharing
Problem-solving	Credible sources	Inaccurate interpretation
	Support giving	Not helpful
	Efficient communication	

Figure 1

Integrated Model of Online Negative Self-Disclosure

