



# Multiple Online Identities

Emily Carr University of Art + Design

Master of Design - Interaction Design

Supervisor: Haig Armen

2021~2023

# CONTENTS



Keywords                      ...    ...                      Page 1



Glossary Of  
Terms                      ...    ...                      Page 2



Abstract                      ...    ...                      Page 3



Introduction                      ...    ...                      Page 4



Context                      ...    ...                      Page 5                      till                      Page 12



Precedents                      ...    ...                      Page 13                      till                      Page 14

# 07

Research  
Methods &  
Analysis

... ..

Page 15

till

Page 23

# 08

Reflections

... ..

Page 24

# 09

References

... ..

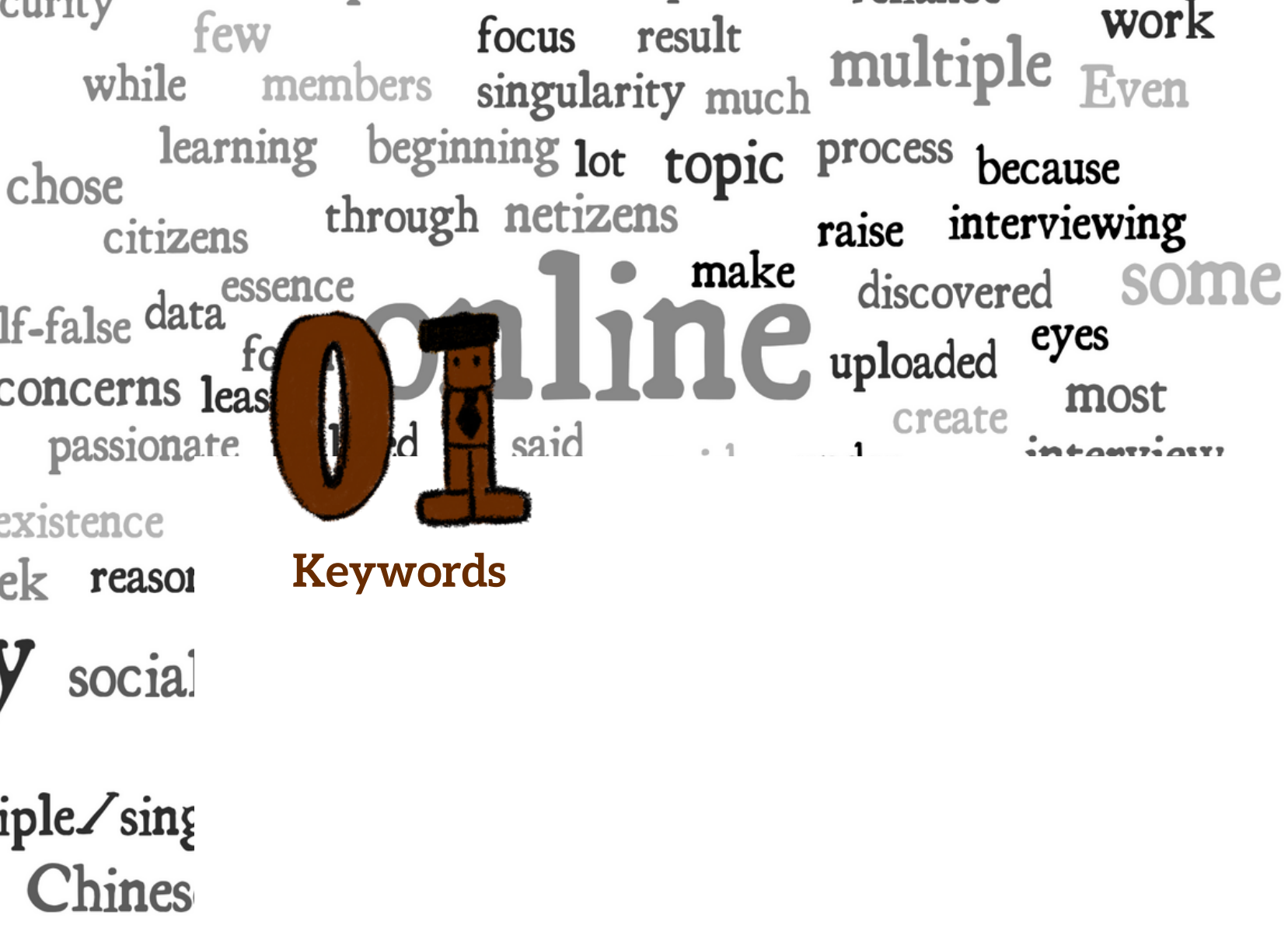
Page 25

# 10

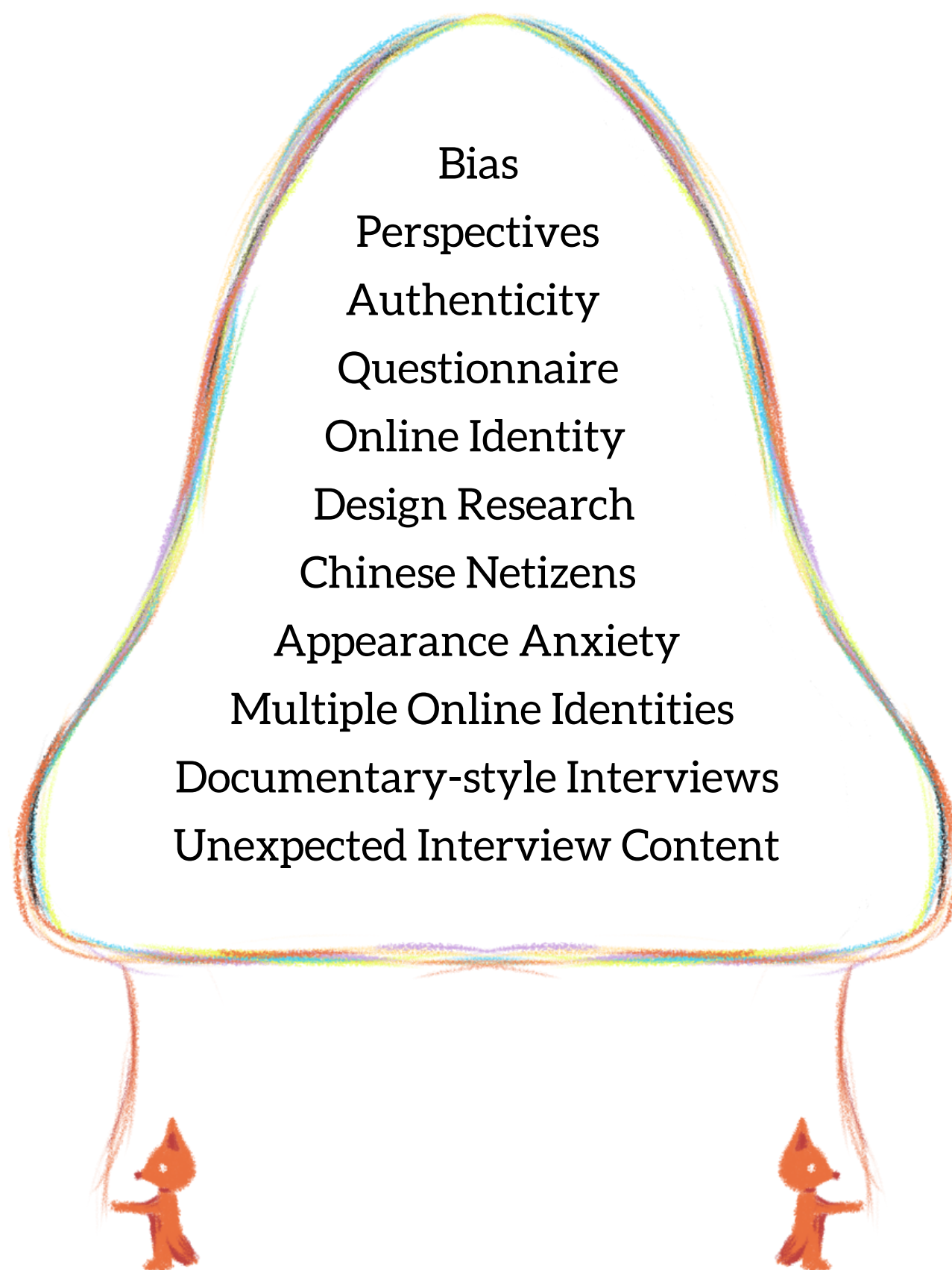
Acknowledgment

... ..

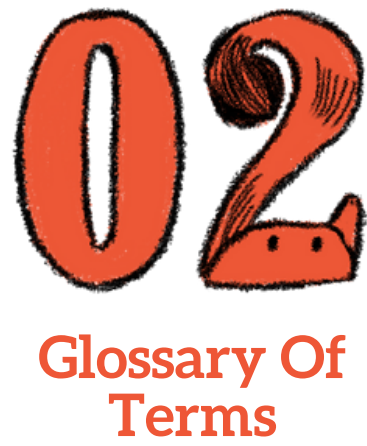
END



## Keywords







<i>Term</i>	<i>Definition</i>
<b>Online Identity</b>	Online identity is a manifestation of one's self-identity that is shaped and influenced by the digital environment in which it exists.
<b>péiwán 陪玩</b>	It means someone who plays video games with another person, either in person or online, to keep them company or help them improve their gaming skills. This can be a paid professional or a friend who enjoys playing games together.
<b>Multiple Online Identities</b>	The existence of more than one online identity associated with an individual.
<b>Enforced Isolation</b>	The mandatory restriction of individuals' movement, typically to prevent the spread of a contagious disease.
<b>The Circle of Friends</b>	WeChat users can post and view posts from WeChat friends, creating an intimate and private circle of communication among friends of the user's choosing.
<b>Appearance anxiety</b>	Anxiety or stress related to one's physical appearance, which may be exacerbated by social media and online culture.
<b>Social Discourse</b>	The discussion and representation of a particular topic or issue within a society or culture.
<b>Objective immersion</b>	The ability of a documentary to bring the truth to viewers and enable them to immerse themselves in the interviewee's experience.



## Abstract

Identity is a multifaceted and intricate concept, and there is no precise standard or definition for the relatively recent phenomenon of "multiple online identities." This article will present my research on "multiple online identities" and highlight my concerns.

Initially, I explored various types of "online identities" that exist. Then, I delved into the definition and differentiation between "online identities" and "multiple online identities." To accomplish this, I employed several research methods, including an online questionnaire, an online group discussion method, and an interview research method.

Conducting "online interviews" was the most suitable option for me, as most participants were geographically distant from my location. The project was time-consuming, but the use of online interviews proved to be highly beneficial.

The most significant breakthrough in my research was presenting the online interviews on "multiple online identities" in a documentary format. This article outlines the reasons, process, and summary of my decision to utilize the documentary format in this research.

The post-interview summaries uncovered various ongoing issues that can be the subject of future projects. These issues include, but are not limited to, sensitive words, Virtual Reality (VR) social identities, and other topics related to "multiple online identities."

# 04

## Introduction

The article explores the complex topic of online identity and the challenges arising from privacy, authenticity, and security concerns. While many consider the negative effects of the fraudulent use of identities online, others embrace it as a means to create or reinvent their identities. This study focuses on Chinese netizens who experienced enforced isolation during the pandemic, leading to their increased reliance on online social networking. Specifically, the study investigates the existence of multiple online identities and the challenges they pose. To gain a nuanced and dynamic understanding of the experiences of individuals with multiple online identities, a long-form documentary-style interviewing method was used. Through this approach emotional nuances and complexities were discovered, revealing rich portraits of their personalities and inner feelings. The interviews also delve into the misinterpretation of multiple online identities and the biases that individuals may have toward them. Even with hours and hours of interview footage, while the topic of online identity is enormous and inconclusive, this project shows the value of using documentary-style interviews as a rarely used design research method, highlighting its ability to uncover unexpected details and themes that emerge only after revisiting topics over a longer period of time.



## Context

Online identity is a social construct whereby individuals create an identity on the internet, and it is a topic that every internet user is exposed to. However, many people still view online identity as a negative topic and associate it with online fraud. The privacy, authenticity, and security concerns of the internet have led many internet users to distrust social networks, making online identity a controversial topic.

According to a 2021 survey conducted by Edelman, only 27 percent of respondents believed that social media platforms were fair and impartial, while 56 percent believed that social media companies had excessive power and influence. The survey also found that 56 percent of respondents were more concerned about their online privacy than they were five years ago, indicating increasing concerns about privacy and security. Similarly, a 2021 survey by China's internet regulator, the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC), found that over 80 percent of respondents were concerned about the privacy and security of their personal information on social media platforms. These surveys demonstrate that internet users in both the Western and Chinese contexts share concerns about privacy, authenticity, and security, resulting in online identity becoming a controversial topic for many individuals.

Based on my research, a subset of individuals hold the perspective of "absolute authenticity," whereby they perceive the fundamental nature of their online identity to be indistinguishable from that of their physical identity. Others aim to "reinvent/create" and shape new identities online with different intentions, some of which are good, while others are malicious. Some people are also half-truths and half-false in their online identities.

When I learned about "online identity," I realized that many people have multiple online identities and that we engage in various online activities using different identities. "Having multiple online identities is more normal than you think" (Nicole Lee, 2016). The research confirmed this notion, but it also raised additional questions. "The definition of multiple online identities," "the switching of multiple online identities," and "the singularity of information display of online identity" are all challenging issues that affect how people define themselves online and these problems also give rise to potential problems and even anxiety.

For this study, I decided to create a short documentary about the



multiple/single online identities of a group of Chinese netizens, interviewing them over a few months and documenting their multiple/single online identities through online interviews. The reason for selecting Chinese netizens for this research is that most Chinese citizens were in enforced isolation for at least one year in 2022, which has led to their much higher reliance on online social networking compared to people who have not experienced enforced isolation. Thus, the experiences of Chinese netizens have led them to have more questions about their "online identity."

During the interviews, I came to the realization that the existence of multiple online identities is increasingly problematic. In this study, I interviewed several individuals who represented different aspects of online identity, including those who shifted their focus from offline to online, those who are enthusiastic about online dating, and those who have always worked online. Through these interviews, I followed their stories from the inception of their online lives and the creation of their first online identities to their online identities today.

### ***Forced Online Identity Anxiety***

In recent years, the development of the Internet has revolutionized the working conditions of individuals. Due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, various countries implemented lockdown measures, and the vast majority of people transitioned their work and social lives to the Internet. This period led to unprecedented growth in the cyber world. In China, the government enforced a mandatory quarantine policy in January 2020, resulting in a boom of "universal internet access" among the Chinese population.

róng mào jiāo lǜ

In February 2021, the Internet buzzword “ 容貌焦虑<sup>(1)</sup> ” (Appearance Anxiety) appeared in the context of Chinese social media and online culture. That reminds me of an article by Johnson, N. F., & Selwyn, N. (2014). The authors argue that people can feel anxious under the pressure to present a certain image or maintain a certain reputation online, this also is one of the challenges of managing online identities in a digital world.

róng mào jiāo lǜ

(1) 容貌焦虑 means those who are not confident in their appearance. It can also be translated as Appearance Anxiety

One of the participants in my study, Lily, was compelled to move the focus of her life to the online realm and present herself strategically in order to attract more followers and increase her online presence. This process of packaging<sup>(2)</sup> her online identity triggered feelings of anxiety about how she was being perceived and represented in the digital space. She was a model before the outbreak, but she lost her job after the outbreak, while China's mandatory quarantine policy exacerbated her financial crisis. She was forced to look for opportunities to work on the Internet. She eventually chose to become an anchor.

(2) "Packaging" implies taking a thoughtful and strategic approach to present oneself in order to generate interest and gain more followers or online traffic.

She told me that she felt more pressure and anxiety than ever before, under the guise of self-packaging and pretending. She sees photos and content posted by other bloggers on social media, is confused and even more anxious about why other people's lives are so different from hers, and have to "copy" similar content from them and post it in order to attract more followers to watch her live. Her preference-based feeds led to her receiving more and more content about "other people's good lives", which led to increased anxiety. One of her most frequent comments to me was "I don't even know who I am anymore". She became a "victim" and a "victimizer" of others.

Exploring new ways to express online identities can help reduce the overwhelming focus on appearance, and allow individuals to shift their focus to other aspects of their identity such as hobbies, talents, personality, and experiences, which may alleviate some individuals' appearance anxiety. However, it is important to recognize that this approach may not be effective for everyone, as the underlying causes of appearance anxiety can be complex and multifaceted.

Just as an article headline reads, "You are so much more than what you look like" (Jessica Jensen, 2014). I believe that we are all multifaceted and complex, and online identities should have more diverse ways of expression.

### ***The Misinterpretation Of Multiple Online Identities***

The biggest challenge I encountered in my research on "various presentations of online identities/multiple online identities" was the prevalent bias against having multiple online identities. Due to various influences, people interpret multiple identities online differently. For example, in the survey I conducted, I found that many participants had multiple online identities. However, despite enjoying the benefits that having multiple identities online can bring, some individuals still refused to acknowledge that they had multiple identities for various reasons. This led me to explore in depth what influences so many participants to have negative biases toward multiple online identities.

Having multiple identities can be misunderstood or negatively perceived due to the influence of social discourse. In some cases, having multiple online identities may be viewed as deception or insincerity. For instance, *the 2018 Wang Sicong WeChat fraud case and the 2012 Manti Te'o fake girlfriend case*, as well as *the 2019 Anna Sorokin New York scam socialite case*<sup>(3)</sup>, which was made into a documentary and released on February 11, 2022, on Netflix. These are all famous and sensationalized examples of using multiple identities for deception or disguise, and social discourse reinforces negative events or cases associated with multiple online

(3) The 2018 Wang Sicong WeChat fraud case, the 2012 Manti Te'o fake girlfriend case and the 2019 Anna Sorokin New York scam socialite case. These authentic cases pertain to the malevolent exploitation of multiple digital identities.

identities, further strengthening negative perceptions. This negative impact may lead to mistrust or aversion towards multiple online identities, and even deter individuals from creating multiple online identities.

Personal experiences and beliefs can shape people's perceptions of multiple online identities. Some individuals believe in presenting a consistent self across all social media platforms and refrain from exhibiting different identities. During my research, I came across participants who shared this perspective, but I don't agree with this idea. In the article "*Online Identity and the Paradox of Choice*" (Serge P. da Motta Veiga, Mauro S. Siqueira, 2019) suggests that individuals should aim for a coherent, rather than a consistent, online identity that allows for flexibility and adaptation to different online contexts. I also think that online identity should help individuals adapt to different online environments and present different aspects of their personalities.

It is imperative for individuals to set aside their biases and adopt a receptive attitude towards the notion of having diverse online identities, given that each person harbors unique aspects of their personality that can be expressed through various virtual personas. As long as these identities are not employed with malicious intentions, there is no valid reason for individuals not to explore different dimensions of their personalities in the online realm.

### ***Documentary Style Interviews***

As a medium, documentary films possess an exceptional ability to share and disseminate information due to their potential for distribution across various platforms. Documentary films offer viewers a glimpse into different cultures, societies, and historical contexts, expanding their perspectives and ways of thinking. Moreover, utilizing documentary films as a research method can aid individuals in gaining a better understanding of societal phenomena and historical events, making it highly valuable for scholars and researchers. For designers, watching documentary films can also serve as a source of inspiration and revelation, expanding their design thinking and perspectives.

Although the documentary film is rarely used as a design method, there have been a number of references to using this approach in design which have proven to be valuable and inspiring. Such as "*Home Matters*" (Stanford Longevity Center, Olderhood Group, 2016), the film shows us older adults living independently in their homes and their challenges and aspirations. The film provided interdisciplinary designers with inspiration and a much deeper understanding of their users through the immersive medium of film.

There is an article that mentioned, "Design documentaries can help designers and researchers to stay up-to-date with the latest trends and developments in their field, as well as to learn from the experiences and insights of others" (Bas Rajimakers, William W. Gacer, Jon Bishay, 2006). Before I made the documentary, I had conducted an extensive survey on Chinese netizens and observed contradictions and conflicts surrounding the use of multiple identities online, but failed to comprehend the underlying reasons for such behavior. It was only after conducting the documentary interviews that I was able to identify some of the causes for these contradictions.

I used a long-term, continuous online interview and filmed and recorded it as a documentary. Through the documentary interview research approach, I have discovered more benefits of this long-term, continuous online documentary, which not only helps to build more trust between the interviewer and the interviewee but also to tell a more authentic story. It also allows me to witness the change and growth of the interviewees. The online interview format also provides a more convenient, comfortable, and secure environment for the interviewee.

First, a long interview time helps build trust and comfort between Interviewers and interviewees. At the beginning of the interview, the interviewees felt unfamiliar and distrustful towards the interviewer, and were reluctant to share their true feelings and thoughts, however, as time went on, I, as the interviewer, interacted more with the interviewees and made them drop their guard and share their stories and opinions more sincerely.

At the same time, the longer interview time record helps the audience to "Objective immersion". Documentaries, in my view, are more adept at bringing the truth to viewers and enabling them to immerse themselves in the interviewee's experience, thereby better understanding the interviewee's attitude and emotions. As I progressed through the interviews, it felt as though I was exploring the birth, growth, constant reshaping, and even "death" of each Avatar. I witnessed interviewees switching back and forth between the virtual and real worlds and observed respondents being "saved" or pulled deeper into the abyss by the identities they had created online. I anticipate that viewers of the documentary would immerse themselves in the interviewees' stories and explore what interests them.

Secondly, a long-term interview/continuous interview/ cyclical interview gives the interviewer and the interviewee sufficient time to think independently. The ample time between each interview helped me to adjust the content and communication style of the next interview to help the interviewees express their true thoughts, and during the gap between interviews, the interviewees were consciously aware of the multiple



online identities they were using and reflected on their use of multiple identities. Simultaneously, this ongoing recording of the same interviewee can enable both myself and the audience to witness the changes in the interviewee's online identity over time.

Finally, online interviews are a convenient, comfortable, and secure form of remote research. Firstly, even if the interviewee and interviewer are in different regions or countries, they can easily meet online. Secondly, both parties can choose a comfortable environment for the online interview. Lastly, the security and privacy of online interviews can help interviewees feel more willing to share their true feelings. Josh Lamar (2020) said "Computer-mediated communication creates a distance between us, but in the case of remote research, this distance can be used to our advantage: we can use it to make users feel more comfortable about opening up to sharing what they really feel." The online interview format additionally facilitates the establishment of a "no-lose" environment in which interviewees feel comfortable expressing their genuine emotions. I have found it crucial to foster such an environment, as interviewees may occasionally engage in behaviors that they themselves do not endorse.

Nan is one of the interviewees I spent the most time building trust. During the first interview, Nan, described one of her experiences using multiple online identities as a single twenty-year-old female college student who had developed a relationship with a male online friend. While she generously shared her story and emotions regarding her use of multiple identities online, she became evasive when I asked about the relationship between her online and real-life identities. Consequently, I spent a significant amount of time building trust with Nan until the second interview, when she began to share her genuine emotions and stories. In reality, Nan is thirty-two years old and has a boyfriend. She is dating one person online and one person in real life. In traditional Chinese culture, women are expected to marry in their twenties, and unmarried women over the age of thirty may face pressure and discrimination. Although she disagrees with this belief, her parents continuously pressure her to marry due to the influence of this traditional Chinese view, leading her to maintain this relationship in real life. She said, "I'm anxious. Due to my age, getting married and having children as soon as possible seems to be the most important thing for me. But I'm confused. Although I don't hate my boyfriend in real life. But if I marry him, I can almost see my entire life in front of me, and that's not what I want. I'm aware that establishing a relationship online is difficult to have in the future, but this emotional relationship online can temporarily allow me to escape reality and feel the freedom of love without age restrictions." By the time we conducted our third interview, Nan was still in a relationship with both her online and real boyfriends, but she was slowly focusing her life and work online, even starting a business with the boyfriend she was dating online.

Through the lengthy and repeated online interviews with Nan, I became aware of the pressure and anxiety that Chinese women face due to the traditional views of aging and parental pressure to marry, and how Nan used multiple online personas to alleviate the pressure of escaping reality. While I do not endorse this approach, I understand the reasoning behind her actions after hearing her story. I believe that without enough time to build trust and repeated interviews, I would not have been able to learn the truth and understand the reality of how this anxiety affects online identity-building.

As a film director, I am aware that surprises are always bound to happen during filming, and sometimes these "Surprises/Accidents"<sup>(4)</sup> can actually make a film even better, we also call it "The Accidents of Film Creation". This is one of the reasons why I chose to use the method of creating a documentary of the interviews carried out in this research, as you never know what kind of story you're going to hear, and I wanted to discover and document issues that I may not have been aware of before.

In this project, I did indeed encounter several surprises during the interviews. For example, one of my interviewees initially only mentioned having multiple online identities and switching genders for socializing online when applying to be part of the documentary. However, during the actual online interview, her story of having "multiple identities online" turned out to be much more complex and compelling. She shared her experiences of being bullied in school and how this led her to focus her social life online, only to later be deceived by an online date and subsequently become an internet user who frequently switches gender personas. She also highlighted lesser-known areas of knowledge such as "online game actors" (a group of actors who use different game models to act with a script), "cyber violence", and "Voice Changer & Change Voice" in her interview.

I had originally planned to conduct all the interviews within two months, with each interviewee being interviewed three times. However, as China's lockdown policy continued to change in 2022, I discovered that the interviewees' status without a lockdown in place differed from their interview status when they were forced into isolation, and their attitudes toward their virtual online identities continued to evolve over time. Thus, I extended the two-month interview period to five months or more. One of my interviewees has experienced China's COVID-19 quarantine policy, witnessed the "2022 Urumqi Fire," and participated in protests against China's "zero tariffs" prevention policy. These are all significant events that occurred in China during this unique period. These "surprises" of the documentary not only inspire researchers to go deeper into the subject matter but can also give them inspiration for other topics. These events could serve as the basis for a documentary film on "China's COVID-19 Quarantine." The documentary could cover the period from February 2020

(4) The notion of "accidents" in the realm of film creation was first introduced by the French film theorist André Bazin. According to Bazin's belief, these unexpected occurrences during the process of film creation have the potential to infuse the finished product with vitality and novelty, thereby rendering the storyline more dynamic and engrossing for the audience.

to the present day, highlighting the personal experiences and perspectives of individuals affected by these events.

While documentary-style interviews are not typically employed in design research, I found this approach to be the most optimal choice given the research focus on online multiple identities.

Through this documentary, my goal is to highlight the advantages of utilizing in-depth, repeated interviews, and documentary filmmaking as a research method for designers, especially those exploring controversial topics in society. As designers, it is crucial to maintain a neutral and open-minded attitude, recognizing the significance of comprehending the participants' psychology. Additionally, it's essential to have the courage to question the answers received and consistently experiment with new approaches.

Simultaneously, I hope to not only inspire more designers but also to help viewers better understand the concept and use of online multiple identities. Online multiple identities are not a negative concept and the purpose of this documentary is not to actively promote the benefits of having online multiple identities. It's like Romain Rolland (1904) said "It is not science that is at fault, but man himself." we should understand that online multiple identities are tools that each person uses to achieve different purposes in online socializing, and it is the person who uses the tools that determines how good or bad the online multiple identities they create is.

# 06

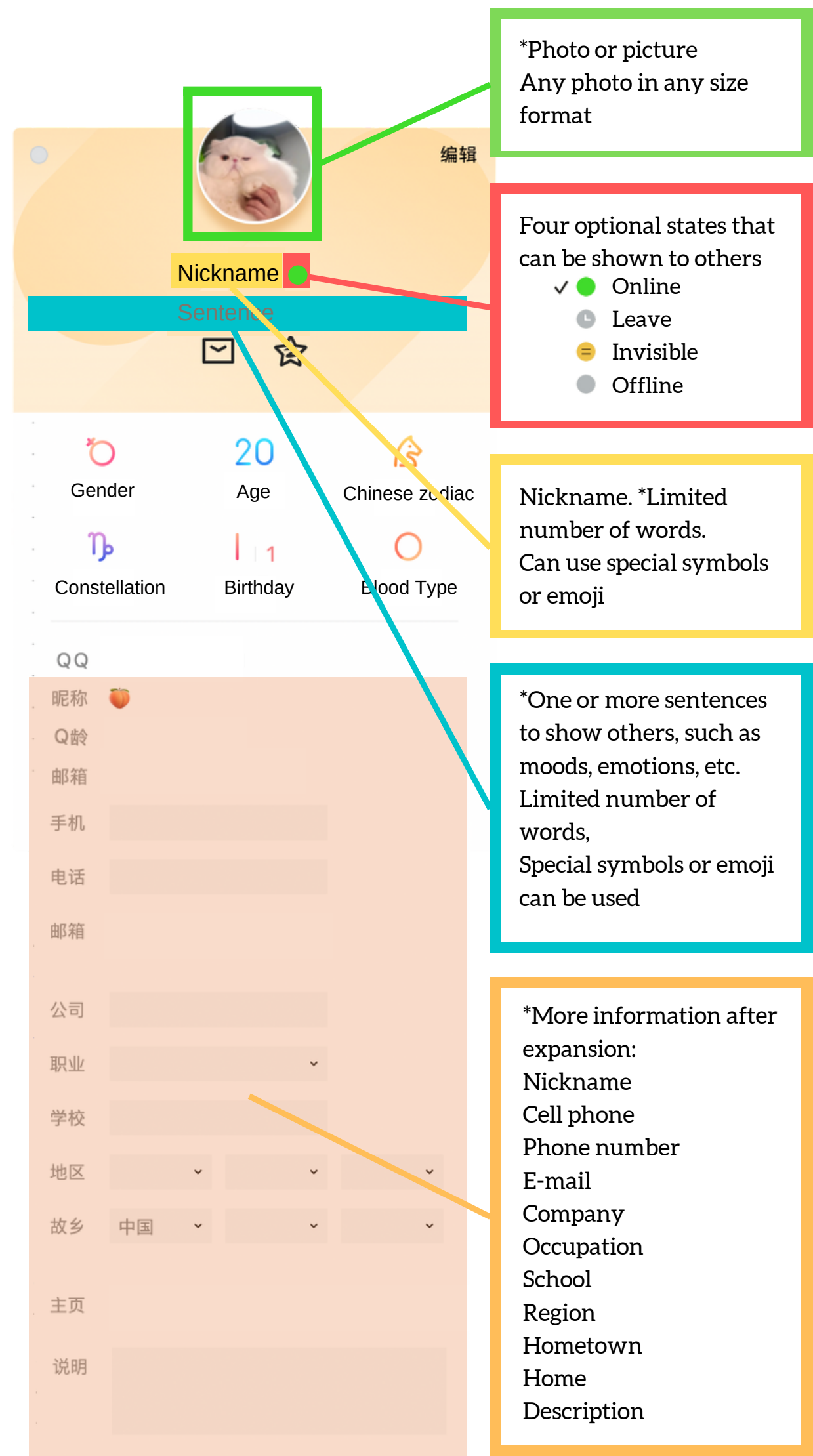
Precedents

My analysis of social media users' online logins/profiles has revealed that there are several prevalent design trends for displaying personal identities. These design trends are intended to enable users to represent themselves in the most authentic and expressive way possible, while also making it easier for other users to establish relationships and communicate with them.

One notable example of social networking software that has undergone significant changes in terms of its design trends is Tencent QQ . While Tencent QQ was once the most widely used social networking software in China, it has now been surpassed by WeChat <sup>(5)</sup>, which is known for its simplified functions. <sup>(6)</sup>

<sup>(5)</sup> **Tencent QQ**, also known as QQ, an instant messaging software developed by Tencent, a Chinese technology company.

<sup>(6)</sup> **WeChat** is an instant messaging software launched by Tencent in 2011.



<sup>(7)</sup> This is the profile display of "China 2023 Tencent QQ MAC version", an instant messaging software developed by Tencent, a Chinese technology company.

(7)



According to official data released by Tencent, WeChat's user base surpassed that of Tencent QQ at the end of 2012, representing a significant milestone for the platform. Since then, WeChat has experienced rapid growth, and as of March 2021, boasts more than 1.2 billion monthly active accounts. Although one person may have multiple accounts, this data still shows that WeChat is one of the most popular social platforms in China. In contrast, Tencent QQ's user base has been gradually declining, although it still maintains a considerable presence in China and other parts of Asia. Through my analysis, I have identified a range of options for displaying online identity types for both Tencent QQ and WeChat. These options include an avatar, nickname, gender, QR code, video, and ringtone. Of these options, customization of a personal QR code and setting a ringtone that represents the user's identity are frequently utilized.

Tencent and WeChat offer unique ringtones that differ from the default ringtones for incoming calls on mobile phones. This feature enables users to express their online identity beyond voice, text, picture, and video. Users can set a ringtone that represents their personality, tastes, and interests, providing another avenue for self-expression.

Furthermore, my research has revealed that enriching the variety of online identities displayed does not necessarily require adding more options for displaying online identities. For instance, Tencent provides more options than WeChat for displaying "online identities" categories, such as school information, horoscope, cubes zodiac, and blood type. On the other hand, WeChat's "circle of friends" feature allows users to share images and short videos along with their profile content, providing a platform for self-expression.

In addition to exploring online identities, I have also examined the ability to switch between multiple online identities. Many social media platforms, such as WeChat, Tencent, Google, and Instagram, allow users to switch between multiple accounts by distinguishing them via avatar, nickname, email address, or account ID. This feature is particularly useful for individuals who wish to separate their personal and professional identities, or for those who have multiple identities in different social contexts.

Overall, my research has demonstrated that variety, convenience, and practicality are essential factors for users when it comes to online identities. While there are various options for displaying online identities, the ability to switch between multiple identities remains limited to a few options. However, as social media platforms continue to evolve and users' needs change, it is likely that the options for displaying and switching between multiple online identities will become more diverse and nuanced.

# 07

## Research Methods & Analysis

February. 2022

In the earliest phase of my research, I chose to research by creating a series of experiments to explore how people might express their identities using music, emojis, or color sequences. The outcomes of these early experiments were interesting and showed how subjective the topic can be.

**Questionnaire "Post Card":** This questionnaire card required the subject to answer questions for eight consecutive days. The purpose of this card was for the subject to use music, emojis, or colors to represent their feeling of the moment as a new way of displaying their online identity.

April. 2022

Through **secondary source research** and **analytical studies**, I selected four popular and widely used online social networking platforms in the Chinese market to study and understand their creation, presentation, and the variety of "online identities" on these platforms. This research method helped me quickly understand the current state of creation, presentation, and variety of "online identities" on popular social networking sites in China.

I used an **online questionnaire** to determine what the research participants thought and created in terms of their "online identity." This approach was ideal for my project as the questionnaires could be widely distributed on the Internet, making it convenient for data collection.

May. 2022

In May 2022, I used an **online group discussion method** to understand the definition of "online identity" and "online multiple identities" of the study participants. The advantage of this approach was that I could quickly find research subjects online who I could ask questions, and more accurately understand their perspectives.

June. 2022

In June 2022, I created a second **online questionnaire** to observe the perceptions and attitudes of the research participants toward "multiple online identities."

July. 2022

In July 2022, I utilized an **interview research method** and conducted three interviews lasting more than one and a half hours each over a four-month period. This long-format interview was a new experience for me where I discovered new questions about "online multiple identities." Getting to know the research subjects better in this stage of the research was crucial to the future direction of the project.

November. 2022

In November 2022, I interviewed professional psychologists about the relationship between "online multiple identities" and psychology.

### Questionnaire "PostCard "

I explored a new way of displaying online identity through "Postcards" of daily questionnaires sent to the survey participants. Each "Postcard" had a different hand-drawn illustration and date, and was designed to be placed on the subject's desktop for decoration and to serve as a "short-term calendar."

I used this questionnaire as it required handwritten responses for eight consecutive days and I designed the presentation to make it more interesting for participants to persist in completing it. This type of questionnaire helped find commonalities and differences through the subjects' daily content. It was more intuitive and simpler for participants to complete.

The card contained the following questions:

- Write down how you feel right now? Your Mood
- Write down your name here but not your signature!
- Circle the emoji that you feel right now
- Circle the color that you feel today
- Choose 3-4 notes that you feel like today!

The final question required participants to visit a website and choose a note or accompaniment that represents their state and send it to me. Initially, I was concerned about the complexity of completing this question and whether it would affect the results, but all responses received had complete and interesting answers.

I found that most people changed their favorite colors, emojis, and melodies or notes depending on their mood. In addition, many people take a long time to choose notes as they are not familiar with all the notes, so they do not know how to choose or because they enjoy the process of choosing music.

One user responded, "I sometimes change the color of my phone's desktop wallpaper or post an emoji on my social media account according to my mood. It's fun to show my mood or status with melodies."

### ***Online Questionnaire***

In this study, an online questionnaire was utilized to inquire about the participants' perceptions and manifestations of "online identity". The questionnaire consisted of inquiries that aimed to define online identity, describe how the participants define their online identity, explore the participants' preferred methods for presenting their online personality or character, determine the participants' opinions regarding the variety of online identities available, explore additional elements that could be added to their online identity profile to accurately represent them, to inquire about the participants' preferences for alternative methods of presenting their online identity or personality, to determine the participants' awareness and feelings towards the "account switching" feature, and to explore the presence of multiple identities online and how they are distinguished and utilized.

The results of the survey demonstrated that many participants were inclined towards creating and utilizing "avatars" to represent their online identity. For instance, a participant noted that their avatar was an emoji that conveyed their personality while also providing additional privacy. Additionally, numerous participants proposed alternative methods for representing their online identities, such as using a voice, an environment, an animal, an anime character, or a game character.

However, some participants expressed disinterest in the concept of creating an online identity, with one participant stating that they believed socializing on the internet was not true to them and that the internet was merely a tool for living.

Some participants had multiple accounts and used the "account switching" feature on social platforms, but denied having multiple identities online.



This led me to reflect on how having multiple social media accounts does not necessarily mean having multiple online identities. Multiple online identities mean that a person has multiple different identities online, each with their own unique characteristics, interests, and social circles that can be used in different contexts.

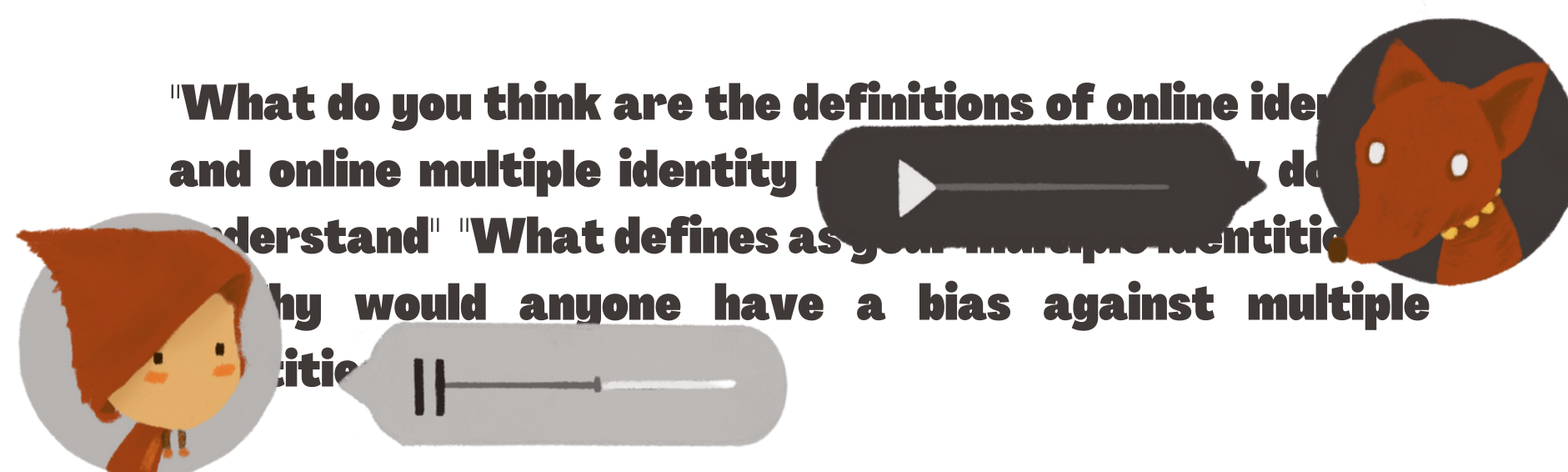
Although some social media platforms allow users to create multiple accounts, these accounts are usually on the same platform, and the user's identity information and social circles overlap. Therefore, these accounts do not represent true multiple online identities.

However, at the same time, it is worth noting that some participants are typical examples of having multiple online identities but still denied having multiple online identities in the questionnaire. Through my knowledge of some of the participants, past and present, they had at least two or more online identities.

I began to wonder if this was due to a problem with the questionnaire design, or if it was due to a misunderstanding of the questionnaire by the participants.

### *Online Group Discussion Method*

This study aimed to understand the definitions of "online identity" and "online multiple identities" by utilizing the online group discussion method. This method has both advantages and disadvantages. On one hand, it is more efficient compared to traditional methods of communication, such as questionnaires. On the other hand, the number of questions that can be prepared is limited, and there is a risk of deviation from the original research question, particularly when dealing with large groups.



### **“Tell me what you think about Online Identity & Multiple Online Identities”**

The research question posed to the study participants was: "Tell me what you think about Online Identity & Multiple Online Identities." This question was posted in four interest groups across various social media platforms following consultation. However, the group discussion revealed that the question was not adequate to meet the research objectives.

Participants had different definitions of multiple online identities, with the term "deception" being the most frequently used term to describe it.

It became evident that the research question was not comprehensive, and participants had misconceptions about the term. Some even believed that multiple online identities referred to groups of online fraudsters. Therefore, to confirm the participants' understanding of multiple online identities as defined in this study, several questions were formulated to explore their views on the topic.

### ***Online Questionnaire II***

To further investigate the perceptions and attitudes of research participants towards "multiple online identities," a second online questionnaire was developed. The initial set of questions was designed to confirm whether the subjects had multiple online identities as defined in this study. However, the results of these questions were not indicative of whether the study participants had multiple online identities. Thus, additional questions were formulated to explore the topic further. These questions are as follows:

- Do you have more than one social media account, including social media accounts on different platforms?
- Is the information on the social media accounts you currently use on different platforms unified?
- Have you ever had multiple social media accounts on the same platform simultaneously?
- Do you have the same "online friends" on your social media accounts on each platform?

With the inclusion of these questions, the second online research questionnaire was completed. The following are the results:

- The majority of study participants had four or more social accounts on different social media platforms.
- Most of the study participants have used or are currently using two social media accounts on the same platform.
- The majority of study participants had non-duplicate online friends on different social media platforms.
- Most of the study participants changed the content of their personal information when they used social media for different purposes.

These findings provide insight into the behaviors of research participants regarding their multiple online identities. The findings suggest that having multiple social media accounts on different platforms is a common practice and that most participants do not have the same online friends on each social media platform. In addition, participants tend to modify their

personal information on social media when using it for different purposes. In this way, it was found that the majority of participants would use switch accounts to convert their multiple online identities. At the same time, I found that different social accounts represent different social networks, so my participants used account switching to switch their multiple online identities, which demonstrates the singularity of how users switch their identities online.

Overall, these results may help to inform future research into the online identity and multiple online identities.

### ***Documentary Interview***

The interview research method was employed to investigate the creation of online identities and the reasons for having multiple online identities among study participants. Over a four-month period, from July to October 2022, five research participants were interviewed online and recorded, with three interviews lasting more than one and a half hours each. The primary focus of these interviews was to gain insight into participants' feelings and thoughts about having multiple online identities when switching between them.

To conduct the interviews, 50 questions were prepared in advance, with a distinction made between "must-ask questions" and "other questions to ask." After the first interview, questions tailored to each participant's story were formulated for subsequent interviews.

Through an analysis of the keywords mentioned by the five research subjects, the word "depression" emerged as a common theme. The in-depth interviews with the five participants confirmed that they had all experienced or were currently experiencing varying degrees of depression. As a result, the next step was to conduct interviews with professional psychologists to further explore this matter.

### ***Chinese Psychologist Interview***

This research is aimed at comprehensively exploring the various psychological aspects associated with the creation of online identity and its effects on individuals. The study examines the psychological effects of adults who primarily socialize online, as well as the potential changes that arise from utilizing "multiple online identities". It also investigates the phenomenon of changing social gender online, including those who maintain their altered social identity versus those who occasionally switch. Additionally, the study provides a professional definition of multiple identities and online multiple identities and distinguishes between the two. The research delves into the psychological basis underlying the increased acceptance of multiple genders, such as the

acceptance of oneself, which has been facilitated by the Internet. Furthermore, it explores the psychological implications of the growing popularity of virtual reality (VR) in the online world and considers the potential impact on individuals' psychology as they become increasingly dependent on technology and online socialization.

I conducted interviews with two Chinese psychology experts, both of whom had contrasting opinions on the psychological effects of multiple online identities. One psychology teacher, who held relatively conservative views, believed that multiple online identities could be easily influenced by other internet information and have a negative impact on users. On the other hand, the other psychology teacher believed that constructing multiple identities online would become an important topic for studying the psychology of online identities.

However, despite their professional expertise, I encountered a noticeable difference in perception which prevented me from fully adopting their opinions.

There is a conflict between the traditional Chinese concepts and the modern concepts. Traditional Chinese concepts emphasizes authenticity and honesty, whereby an individual's true identity is recognized and respected. In contrast, the modern era places greater value on individuality and diversity, with people aspiring to showcase their different traits and personalities in varied social contexts. Having multiple identities online enables them to fulfill this desire, facilitating the presentation of diverse facets of their persona.

As a result, I believe that it is essential to strike a balance and compromise between the traditional Chinese concept and the modern concept of multiple identities online in practical application. Individuals must weigh their personal needs and values thoughtfully while also respecting and appreciating the significance of traditional culture. This approach allows for the appropriate utilization of online multiple identities, catering to personal needs while also adhering to ethical guidelines inherent in traditional Chinese culture.

### ***Production of Documentary***

The initial phase of any documentary project is critical, as it sets the stage for the entire production. Therefore, as a filmmaker, I believe that it is essential to develop and implement a comprehensive plan prior to filming. To this end, I have organized and planned a range of essential tasks that must be completed before filming can commence.

The first crucial task is to establish a clear and concise creative concept, which forms the foundation for the entire documentary. In this instance,



the creative concept centers on exploring the concept of online identity and its relationship with a person's true identity. To bring this theme to life, the film will follow a group of "Chinese netizens " exploring their stories and experiences surrounding their online identities. The interviews will be conducted utilizing the Tencent Meetings online video conferencing platform, which is similar to Zoom and supports video and voice calls on various devices. Due to the fact that the interviewees are dispersed throughout different regions of China, this approach was deemed the most efficient means of conducting and recording the interviews.

Once the creative concept has been established, the next task is to carefully select interviewees based on their applications and conduct online interviews to gather information and insights. Conducting a thorough series of interviews is critical, as it helps the filmmaker to understand the nuances of each interviewee's online identity, their experiences, and the changes they have undergone over time.

With the story and characters established, the next step is to execute the plan, which will be divided into three distinct phases: pre-production, interview, and post-production. Pre-production will involve confirming the interviewee's schedule, organizing the interview questions, and sending them to the interviewee before the shoot. During the interview phase, audio recording is required, and regular monitoring is necessary to ensure that all dialogue is captured without any issues. Additionally, other team members will be present during the shoot to help ensure a smooth process.

Once filming is complete, post-production activities will commence, including editing, screen production, mixing, and recording any necessary voiceovers. Due to confidentiality agreements with interviewees, they will not appear in the film. However, I had developed several plans to address this issue, such as using direct screen recording from online interview sessions, creating an animation, or drawing a portrait/cartoon of each interviewee.

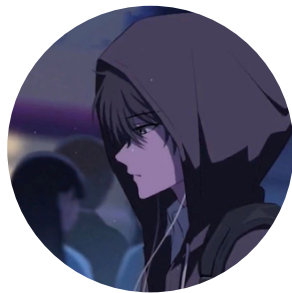
In order to ensure the timely and cost-effective completion of the project, I developed a comprehensive timeline based on the project plan, estimating the required time for each step and validating the timeline with the interviewees. The timeline was developed in July 2022, and according to its projections, I anticipate having a trailer for the first draft of the documentary ready by April-May 2023. The full documentary, including all interviews and additional content, is expected to be completed in the fall of 2023. In summary, through a thorough and organized approach, the goal is to create a successful and captivating documentary that explores the complex and intriguing world of online identities.

Top cast <sup>(8)</sup>

(8) The above are the nicknames of the interviewers, due to the privacy requirements of some of the Interviewees, some of the avatars are represented by hand-drawn.



jiào jiào  
觉 觉



nán shēng  
楠 笙



xǐ zi  
玺 子



gàn fàn  
干 饭



nán  
楠

*Name Of The Documentary*

During the early stages of documentary production, selecting an appropriate name is crucial for the film's success and impact. For this reason, I have chosen the Chinese idiom "Fox borrowing the tiger's might" or "Fox in tiger's clothing" (Chinese: <sup>hújiǎhǔwēi</sup>狐假虎威 ) as the title for my documentary. This idiom features a fable that illustrates the complexities of power and privilege, providing inspiration for my chosen theme.

The fable follows a fox who cleverly escapes the tiger's grasp and then uses the tiger's power to intimidate and threaten other animals. While this story is often used to criticize those who use their power to bully and dominate others, my interpretation is different. I see the fox's behavior as an example of strategic thinking and resourcefulness, using its own tools to navigate a competitive environment and achieve its goals. This is relevant to my documentary theme, which explores the ways in which individuals can use their online identities to achieve their goals.

To identify suitable interviewees, I will post casting information on relevant online communities and platforms. I am interested in individuals who have used their online identities to create a space for themselves and achieve their desired outcomes. By showcasing these individuals in my documentary, I hope to demonstrate the power of online identity as a tool for achieving one's goals.

In the fable, the tiger represents power and privilege. In my documentary, it serves as a metaphor for the armor that some individuals use to face external challenges more bravely in order to achieve their desired outcomes. This idiom is closely related to my documentary theme, as it emphasizes the importance of using one's own resources to confront any obstacle and achieve one's goals.

Overall, "Fox Borrowing the Tiger's Might" is an appropriate and meaningful title for my documentary. By exploring the perspectives of individuals who have successfully leveraged their online identities to achieve their desired outcomes, I hope to provide a fresh perspective on the power of online identity and its role in goal attainment.



## Reflections

This study delved into the intricate issue of online identity, encompassing its diverse forms of expression, privacy, authenticity, and the accompanying anxiety. The societal discourse, at times, misconstrued the notion of multiple online identities. Importantly, this study emphasizes the significance of listening attentively and adopting a tolerant approach.

In order to gain a profound comprehension of individuals possessing multiple online identities, a documentary-style online interview method was employed to capture subtle emotional nuances and complexities. However, it is pertinent to acknowledge that this approach has certain limitations regarding the consumption of resources and time. Nevertheless, with the constant advancements in technology and the internet, the quality of such documentaries is expected to improve.

The filming of the documentary interviews presented two major issues. Firstly, the visual presentation in post-production posed a significant challenge due to the confidentiality agreement, which restricted access to any visual footage for the film. As a result, it was necessary to consider the most appropriate visual presentation that could engage the audience.

Various options, including conducting interviews within a game or filming an online conference interface, were evaluated, but all presented challenges due to copyright concerns.

Secondly, translating the interviews, which were conducted in Chinese, was a time-consuming task. The interviewees frequently used popular online slang, necessitating the search for meanings in Chinese. The process of translating sentence by sentence was also challenging. An alternative approach, using a translation plugin synchronized with the video playback, was considered, but it was discovered that instant translation can sometimes be inaccurate.

Future research endeavors include exploring interactive videos and transforming this documentary into an interactive documentary. Additionally, investigating innovative methods to express multiple online identities, such as scent, is an area of interest.

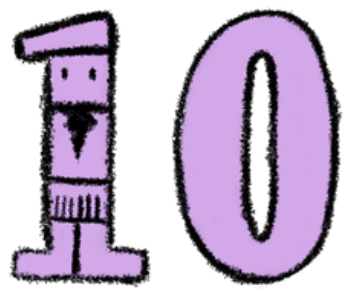




## References

- Cyberspace Administration of China. (2021). Statistical report on internet development in China. Retrieved September 23, 2022, from [http://www.cac.gov.cn/2021-08/20/c\\_1624999326568221.htm](http://www.cac.gov.cn/2021-08/20/c_1624999326568221.htm)
- da Motta Veiga, S. P., & Siqueira, M. S. (2019). Online identity and the paradox of choice. In *Proceedings of the 2019 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (p. 513). ACM.
- Edelman. (2021). Edelman Trust Barometer 2021: Trust in crisis. Retrieved September 23, 2022, from <https://www.edelman.com/trust/2021-trust-barometer>
- Johnson, N. F., & Selwyn, N. (2014). The anxiety of online identity: Personalities, policies, and pedagogies for ethical engagement. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 39(3), 327-345.
- Jensen, J. (2015). "You are so much more than what you look like." TEDx Talks. Retrieved September 23, 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Pq-S557XQU>
- Lamar, J. (2020). Advantages of remote research and why you should incorporate this powerful tool. *UserTesting Blog*. Retrieved September 23, 2022, from <https://www.usertesting.com/blog/advantages-of-remote-research>
- Lee, N. (2021, May 13). Having multiple online identities is more normal than you think. *Engadget*. Retrieved September 23, 2022, from <https://www.engadget.com/2016-03-04-multiple-online-identities.html>
- Rajimakers, B., & Gacer, W. W. (2017). Design documentaries: inspiring design research through documentary film. In *Proceedings of the 2017 Conference on Designing Interactive Systems* (pp. 639-650). ACM.
- Rajimakers, B., Gacer, W. W., & Bishay, J. (2006). Design documentaries: inspiring design research through documentary film. In *Proceedings of the 4th Nordic conference on Human-computer interaction: changing roles* (pp. 291-300). ACM.
- Rolland, R. (1912). *Jean-Christophe*. Retrieved September 23, 2022, from [https://books.google.com/books?id=yukrAAAYAAJ&dq=It+is+not+science+that+is+at+fault%2C+but+man+himself&source=gbv\\_navlinks\\_s](https://books.google.com/books?id=yukrAAAYAAJ&dq=It+is+not+science+that+is+at+fault%2C+but+man+himself&source=gbv_navlinks_s)
- Stanford Longevity Center, Olderhood Group. (2016). Home Matters. Stanford University. Retrieved September 23, 2022, from <https://longevity.stanford.edu/home-matters/>





Acknowledgment

"恭敬在心,不在虛文"

"True respect is in the heart, and does not require such empty forms"

Shen, F. (1983). *Six Records of a Floating Life*. Translated by Lin Yutang, Penguin Classics.  
(Chinese: 浮生六記, Fu sheng liu ji)

