

Analysis of WeChat by walk through method

Abstract

Purpose: This paper attempts to analyze the largest messaging app in the world in terms of its active monthly users through walk through method. The aim of the study is to find out the reasons due to which this app has become the world’s most liked service.

Design/Methodology/Approach: This study has used the walk through method to critically analyze the app by a combining the technical aspects with cultural impacts. The methodology involved analyzing the app’s environment of expected use by describing its vision, operating model and governance. Furthermore, this study deployed a walkthrough technique to analytically determine the various stages of app registration and entry, everyday use, Semiotic Technology used, its software design, business strategy and revenue generation techniques in comparison with other competitors.

Finding: results of the analysis reveal that WeChat has become the largest app in the world because it has combined various features of different app like face book, WhatsApp, twitter at one place in addition to the wallet service which is widely accepted and liked by the people.

Research limitation/Implications: One of the limitations of the study is the limited availability of the data with regards to WeChat. The Company website doesn’t elaborate the technical aspects and details. Moreover, due to internet firewall of China, very few of inside details were available.

Practical implication: This study can help future researchers to find out the reason why this app has gained so much fame in very short time. Moreover, the study will also help the Pakistani market to propose a similar solution in the local market especially with regards to mobile wallet.

Originality/value: Review of the literature reveals that very little work has been done on the app through walk through method.

Keywords: WeChat, walk through analysis, literature, social media, hospitals, sports, banking transactions, ticketing

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Introduction

With the technological revolution in the 21st century, there are few things which have become part and parcel of the daily lives of the people. Among this mobile app are the few. Nowadays there are app for every single daily activity starting from the banking transactions, ticketing, social media, hospitals, sports and etc. In some cases, there are so many different options for the users that app designers face a fierce competition. If we take the example of navigation app, there are so many options that app designers always try to find different ways to sell their own product.

This study will analyze an app through the walk through method. The app which shall be analyzed is ‘We Chat’. This word literally means micro-message. It’s a Chinese alternate to Face book, what’s app, twitter, mobile banking and many others things including instant messaging, commerce and payment services). This app has been developed by Ten cent. The reason we have chosen this app for analysis is the fact that it’s the largest messaging app in the world with its active monthly users with over 963 million in 2017.¹ It was launched in 2011 and Figure 1 shows its growth in the last few years.²

¹Source: <http://www.businessofapps.com/wechat-reaches-963-million-monthly-active-users-prepares-to-pass-a-billion-in-2017/>

²Figure 1 source: tech in Asia, data from Ten cent. <http://www.businessofapps.com>



Figure 1 Monthly active user WeChat.

In China although there are many social media apps, still We Chat is the most famous Smartphone app which has seen a very steep rise in their user’s base in few years. The variety and the versatility

that this app has provided with its different functions have attracted many mobile users, organizations and companies. We Chat's fame has certainly brought down the user base of other apps specially Sina Weibo. We Chat began its journey in January 2011. Initially it was a simple app with features and functionality similar to WhatsApp. Only 8 developers of Ten cent Corporation created this superb app in Guangzhou. In just a small span of 5 years, it has become the most important app in China.³

We Chat is often related to a Swiss knife, which has different functions to do. It has the functions of ordering cabs, booking film tickets on spot, play games, pay bills, music, news, check in for flights, shopping, follow any favorite thing, transfer money to their friends, go shopping online or meet random people nearby. Its primary function is for communication with friends and family. With these varieties of functions, still its core function is messaging. Due to this single app, China has moved way ahead in social media technology. Messaging apps are now part of people lives, and while some have been more successful than others, one app that stands out in the crowded marketplace in the Mainland is We Chat, which is far more than just a messaging app. Now users can link their credit cards or bank accounts to We Chat, subscribe to magazines, shop online, and even pay their public utility bills. Companies are also using We Chat to attract their customers to buy their products and engage them to become prospective customers.

This study shall identify the details and functions of the app through walkthrough analysis. In this regard Semiotic Technology of the app shall be analyzed in the beginning including the software design, image creation and image sharing with other user). Its environment of expected use shall be also be analyzed including the vision of We Chat, its operating model and modes of governance. In order to analyze an app in detail, it's very important to identify the app registration and entry, everyday use and discontinuation of use. The vision of the app shall also be discussed through which it aims to target the customer. Operating model of the app including its business strategy and revenue generation techniques are also important to be compared with others. The technical walkthrough of We Chat shall also be done followed by mediator characteristics.

Analysis

The basic function of WeChat are similar to any other app like messages, pictures, videos, chat with a group of friends, voice and video calls, photos, links, text and ability to 'like' or comment on other user's updates, finding people in the vicinity to chat, send stickers or gifts.

Semiotic technology

WeChat has been developed by 5 R&D experts. The design team uses CSS framework called WeUI. This framework has been made open source. After being open sourced, this framework contains styles for buttons, dialogs, forms, toasts, and everything which is required to build a rich UI using web technologies.⁴ In addition to the technical details, its design is very user friendly and the interface is very simple yet interactive. Users find it easy to share and use with their friends.

Environment of expected use

Mission and vision

The parent company of WeChat, Tencent has elaborated the mission of WeChat as "to enhance the quality of human life through Internet services". By creating WeChat, they have actually done that

people are actually using WeChat for even giving money to beggars in the streets. WeChat long term vision is "To become the most respected Internet app". They also focus on the CSR and try to promote relations with the local people. We Chat has played a vital role in the public charity programs.⁵

Operating model

The operating model of WeChat is multidimensional. They do not put all eggs in one basket. Their main sources of money generation are as follows:

We chat pay

The wallet service of We Chat daily carries out volumes of transactions in the form of money transfer. Not just brick and mortar but basically any online service too.¹ WeChat charges an amount or fee when a certain amount is taken out of its wallet. In addition to this, when ever transaction takes place there is always money generation for WeChat. It's also used for online shopping. Similarly people store money in their wallets, one can imagine how much interest can be earned if all 963million users put at least 1RMB in their wallet.

Add Ons

There are various add ons that are used by users. They are also called third party service providers. These services provided are found inside the WeChat Wallet like phone top-up, savings accounts, tickets, etc. They also do charge money for their services.⁶ People uses them as third party apps and WeChat charges for it.

Sponsored ads

WeChat has a special feature which is known as moments. Its just like the Face book home page. There are many sponsored ads in the moments feed. These ads are charged by Face book and are seen by a lot of users. In fact every user of Face book uses the moment's page regularly. This is a good source of money generation for We Chat.

Assumptions

In order to analyze the app in detail, an account was made on WeChat. With regards to gender it clearly asks about male or female. It shows an icon which is visible with app when someone searches it. Moreover, it does not go in detail about the ethnic background or class. It does not even ask for the nationality of the user. It only asks for the region in which the user is present. So in that case the identity of the user is not very obvious. One cannot find the location of the user or the nationality of the user.

Technical walkthrough

The technical walkthrough is the way of analyzing an app through data-gathering procedure. It involves engaging with the app, exploring it, working through screens, tapping buttons and checking menus. In case of WeChat we shall be discussing the following three areas:

Key dimensions

The first tab Chat contains your messages only. Its similar to some other apps but its simpler than weibo, WhatsApp and all other apps. It has only one option of sign at the top right. The Plus sign or the marker sign at the top right corner has four options of new chat, add contacts, and scan QR code and money.⁷ The most innovative and different thing in WeChat is its third tab which is the discover tab. This tab has the feature of moments which is not there in WhatsApp, twitter or weibo. Although WhatsApp and wiebo have updated their

status sharing options but that is very limited. In WeChats discover tab, users can scan the QR codes for adding friend, paying cash or accessing any account (Figure 2 & Figure 3).

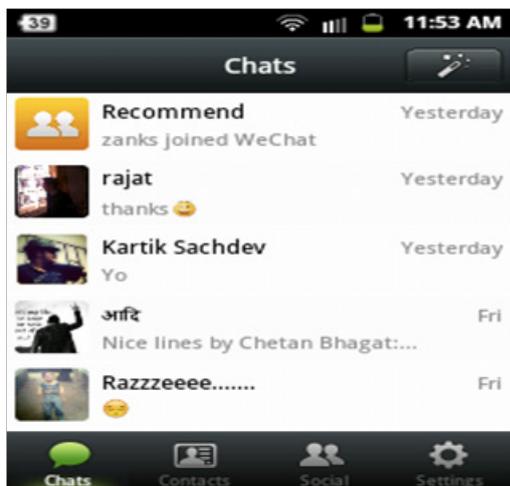


Figure 2 Chat screen of WeChat.

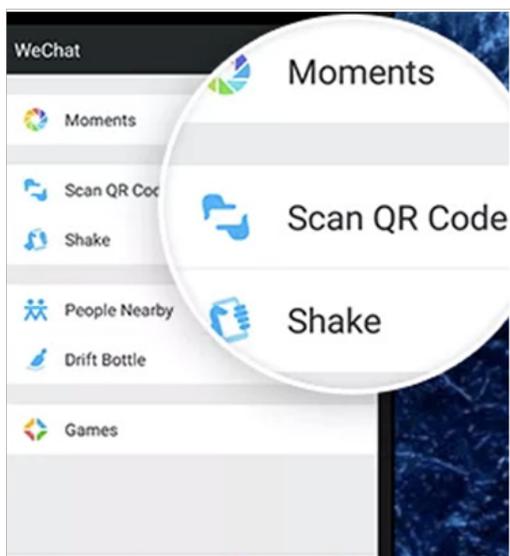


Figure 3 Discover tab.

The shake option of WeChat is also very different and innovative. This option allows users to find the people who are shaking their phones, can find discounts in nearby restaurants, can find features in the reality shows when asked to shake and many more. Similarly users can find people nearby to the exact distance of KMs in your vicinity. Last but not the least the games option is also a complete new world in the app.

Affordances and constraints

When we talk about the affordability of this app, it allows us to carryout chats, send messages, send pictures, send videos, share multimedia, transfer money , pay cash, withdraw cash, cash repay to the bank , buy tickets, find friends, find discounts, carryout group chats and the list goes on. When we talk about the constraints then there are some limitations as well. The users cannot see the online offline status of others. Also users don't know about the readability status of the messages.

How to register an official WeChat account

Registering to WeChat account is quite similar to other app. Firstly; we download the WeChat application in Android. The welcome screen will be like given in Figure 4, when first start the application after downloading. The main idea of WeChat is to show the world from a satellite image. This is also depicted from the welcome page as well.² then user's cell phone number will be required to process the application. This is similar to WhatsApp, Line, viber and other apps. But its different from Twitter and Face book. In case of Fb, Twitter and sina weibo, we are required to register through our email addresses. But in case of WeChat security verification is required to be done. The app will text you a security code on the mobile number you put in.⁸ Now you have registered your number with the app (Figure 5).

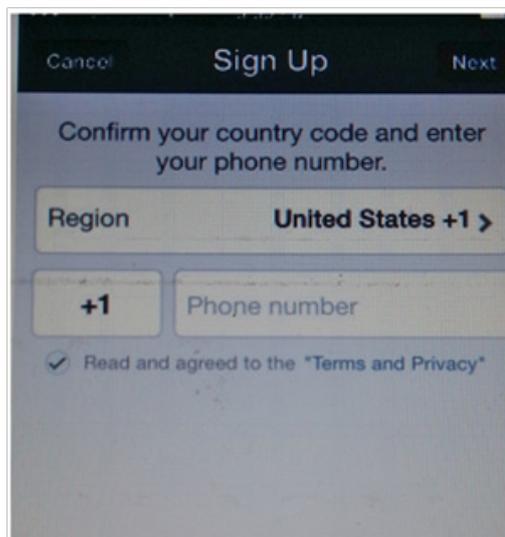


Figure 4 Security verification through number.

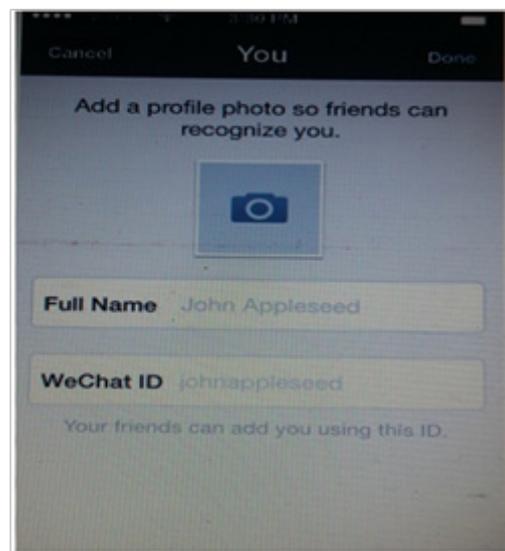


Figure 5 WeChat ID and name screen.

Next Step is to put a good pictures of your and create a good profile. WeChat Id is a different and unique setup in this app. Your id is a sort of your WeChat number. It's not called your name. its known as ID. So it's a sort of WeChat number that one needs to make. This

is different from on screen name. Then one needs to put in his or her important data for his or her personal profile (Figure 6 & Figure 7). For each and every profile specific location is necessary. This is very important aspect of this app. WeChat has feature where one can search people are him or her. People nearby options allow the user to look for potential and interesting candidates.^{9,10}

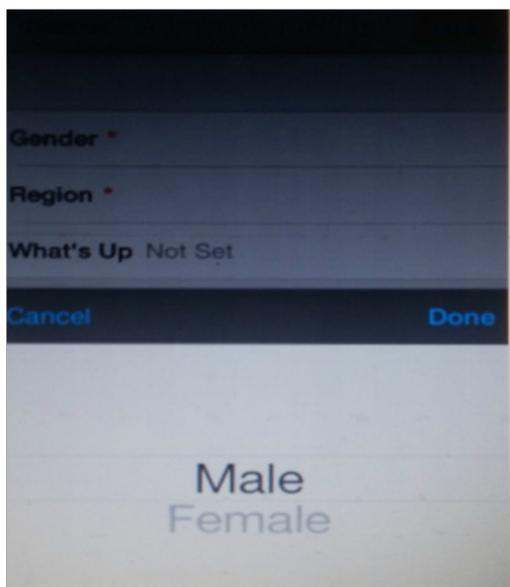


Figure 6 One needs to put in his or her important data for his or her personal profile.



Figure 7 Locations.

This is how the final profile looks like (Figure 8) one can start talking with friends by clicking the very left button Chats. Once you

hold, talk and release, the message will be sent out. It will not translate for you.

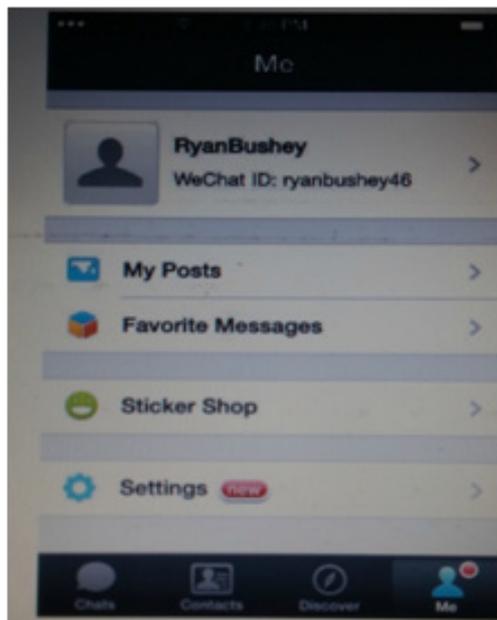


Figure 8 Profile page

Ways to add friends

- a) Tab on the very right +, tab Add Contacts. You would be able to add friends from your mobile contacts or QQ contacts (Figure 9).
- b) Every user in WeChat gets a unique QR code. This can be used to add friends or used for payment. How to find your QR code? Tab Me (the very right tab), and tab your profile pic, go to My QR code (Figure 10).



Figure 9 It shows the how to go to Group Chat.

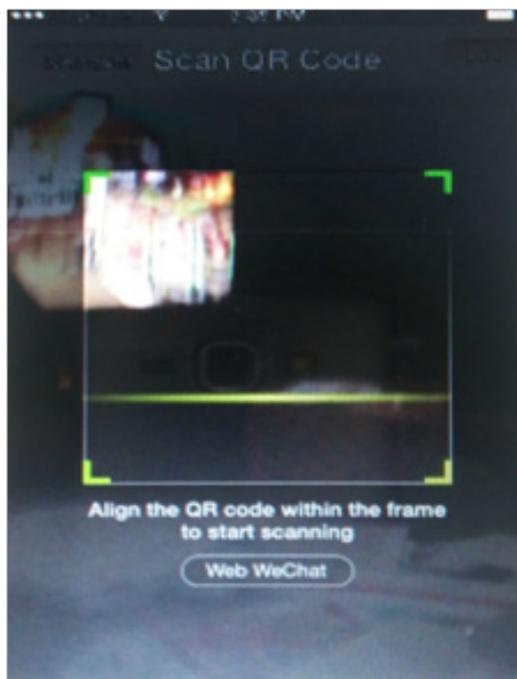


Figure 10 It shows the align QR code.

Group chat: Tab +, go to Group Chat. Select the group you want to add to. You could change the group name, interact with friends.

App suspension, closure and leaving

While analyzing any app, it is important that temporary or permanent closure of accounts is checked and verified. Light¹⁰ have identified that closure of or suspension of accounts is an important part in the analysis of any app through walkthrough method. In WeChat one cannot suspend the account. If desired, the account is to be closed permanently. Once deleted, it cannot be restored and activated again. Closure of account is to pass through a rigorous process after which it is allowed to close the account. Some of the important verifications are as follows:

- The account which is being deleted is through a frequently used device.
- The Password has not been reset in last 24 hours.
- There shouldn't be any failed attempts for password when the account is being deleted.
- The service of pay should be de activated.

If the above mentioned conditions are met then account can be deleted. It may be noted that without WeChat pay, one cannot even change the name of the account. So WeChat pay is to be deactivated at first. So closure of account will delete all the tickets, discount coupons, profiles, QR codes and other things permanently.

Findings and analysis

The analysis of this app reveals that this app has gained popularity due to the rich and vast range of features that it provides. This app has combined the features of Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram

and sinaweibo. Moreover the feature which has really made the difference is the WeChat wallet which is widely accepted in China and other parts of the world as well. Now, WeChat has allowed all visa cards to be added in the wallet anywhere in the world. Due to its wide range of features, this app has really made the difference.

Conclusion

This study has compared different social media app with WeChat. Along with many similarities we find that there are many differences and unique things in WeChat as well. Although initially this app was launched as a communication app with messaging and calling service. But with the availability of limitless options, ad ons and value added services; this app has become the part and parcel of the daily life of people. Its multimedia sharing options and the availability of mobile wallet has amazingly transformed the lives of people. This is the reason that its users are growing daily. Our analysis concludes that it's a very comprehensive, user friendly and all in one app for use. Its users will definitely grow further.

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Conflicts of interest

Author declares that there are no conflicts of interest.

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