

Research on the Influencing Mechanism of Social Reading on User Reading Behavior: Taking WeRead as an Example

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Abstract. With the rapid development and popularization of mobile internet technology, social reading mode is gradually becoming an important way for people to obtain information and broaden their knowledge horizons. It breaks the limitations of traditional reading methods and perfectly integrates the reading experience with social interaction. In the digital age, reading behavior is no longer limited to personal and private spaces but gradually extends to social interaction networks. WeRead utilizes WeChat's huge user base and promotes the socialization of reading through social interaction functions. This kind of social reading not only changes users' reading habits but also influences their reading choices and reading depth. WeRead, with its unique social interaction functions, has led a new trend in the reading field and has become an important channel for people to obtain information and knowledge. Taking WeRead as an example, this study explores the positive and negative impacts of WeRead's social reading on user reading behavior through its social interaction functions, network effects, and analysis of user data and behavior patterns, and proposes suggestions for improvement on this basis. It helps to understand user behavior characteristics on social reading platforms and provides a reference for the development trend of the digital reading market, promoting the healthy development of the market.

Keywords: Social reading; user behavior; WeRead; influencing mechanism.

1. Introduction

The rapid development of digital reading platforms is the result of the joint functioning of digital technology advancement and changes in user reading habits. The accelerated pace of life in modern society and the surge in fragmented reading requirements have been effectively met by digital reading platforms with flexible reading forms. According to the 2023 China Digital Reading Report released at the 3rd National Reading Conference·Digital Reading Forum and the 10th Digital Reading Annual Conference, the scale of digital reading users in China reached 570 million in 2023[1]. Under this large environment, a social reading APP launched by Tencent in August 2015—WeRead—has become particularly popular. Different from other mobile reading software, WeRead is an online reading platform based on WeChat's relationship chain, positioned as a "reading + social interaction" mobile reading platform with the characteristics of social reading. This innovative model not only deepens users' reading experience and greatly enhances user reading experience and platform user stickiness, but also further expands the user base of the platform and promotes its rapid development in the digital reading market.

This study will examine the social interaction functions provided by WeRead, including but not limited to friend following and reading dynamics within the WeChat ecosystem, reading duration rankings, reading teams, etc. It will explore how these functions affect users' reading habits and whether they prompt users to engage in reading activities more frequently. Simultaneously, this study will also analyze how these social interaction functions influence users' reading choices and whether they make users tend to read books recommended by friends. In addition, it will study the impact of these functions on users' reading depth and whether they help users understand and think more deeply about the content they read. Based on an in-depth analysis of the impact of WeRead's social interaction functions on user reading behavior, it further explores the positive effects of reading socialization on users. Also, it will focus on the potential negative impacts. Based on the above analysis, a series of improvement suggestions are proposed to optimize WeRead's social reading functions and enhance user experience.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Influencing Mechanism of Social Reading on User Behavior

Social reading takes readers as the core, advocates joint creation and multi-directional interaction, and maximizes the realization of reading value. An analysis of social interaction factors in the willingness of users to continuously use social reading platforms shows that social interaction factors have a significant impact on users' willingness to use continuously [2]. Through forms such as sharing, interaction, and user-generated content (UGC), social reading emphasizes user participation, sharing, communication, dissemination, and other personalized requirements, which have an important impact on user behavior.

2.2. The Development Status and Trends of the Digital Reading Market

The 2023 China Digital Reading Report shows that the scale of digital reading users in China reached 570 million and the total market revenue was RMB 56.702 billion, with a year-on-year increase of 22.33%. The total number of digital reading works reached 59.3313 million, with a year-on-year increase of 12.54%. These data indicate that the digital reading market continues to enrich and optimize content supply, meeting readers' increasingly diverse reading requirements. It is predicted that by 2024, the scale of the digital reading industry is estimated to exceed RMB 67.1 billion, with a year-on-year increase of 18%.

2.3. The Educational Significance and Economic Potential of Social Reading

Social reading not only improves the quality of life for young people but also witnesses the growth of the youth of the times. It stimulates young people's enthusiasm for participating in social interactions through the characteristics of multimedia integration. In the field of education, digital technology and resource construction provide new paths and trends for youth reading education. Simultaneously, the economic potential of social reading platforms cannot be ignored, and they create enormous business value for the industry through multiple profit models such as user payment income, advertising income, and copyright income.

3. Social Interaction Functions

The value of books begins from being spread. In the process of bringing value through wide dissemination and communication, "relationships" play a bonding role, as shown in fig 1[3]. Domestic scholars' definition of social reading emphasizes the central position of readers in this process and meets individuals' requirements for personalized reading content. Social reading particularly emphasizes the importance of sharing, interaction, and dissemination, focuses on social interaction connections in reading activities, and encourages users to generate content, and jointly promote and share interests, thereby maximizing the value of reading [4]. WeRead has many characteristics such as mobility, convenience, and rich content, but fundamentally, the emphasis on the "social interactivity" of reading is its most prominent feature, which is different from mobile reading software such as iReader and JDRead [5]. First of all, WeRead enhances user stickiness and conversion rates through friend following and reading dynamics within the WeChat ecosystem, allowing users to share their insights and thoughts generated during reading with other users, thereby creating emotional resonance and a sense of identity. This makes reading behavior no longer isolated but a social interaction behavior.

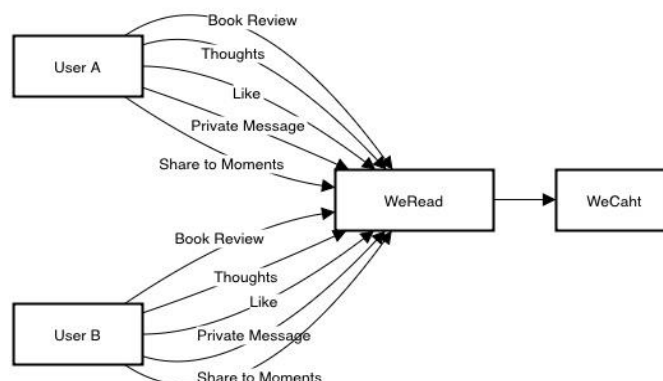


Fig 1. Social Interaction Functions

Some scholars emphasize that the power of strong relationships should not be ignored because they can better share resources and provide support [6]. This deep-level social interaction improves users' stickiness to the product, making users regard WeRead as a friend or even a confidant. In addition, users can interact with others by posting thoughts, commenting, and liking, which not only promotes user communication and discussion but also attracts new users through the method of social contagion. Simultaneously, users may choose to read a book due to friend recommendations or books being read by friends, which to a certain extent influences users' reading preferences and choices. WeRead increases competition and collaboration among users through social interaction functions such as a badge system, reading duration rankings, reading teams, etc., thereby enhancing users' reading motivation and participation. This social interaction-based incentive mechanism makes users more willing to invest time and energy in reading. However, research [7] also shows that although WeRead's social interaction functions can increase the fun of reading, for some users, excessive social interaction elements may interfere with reading focus. Furthermore, research points out that social interaction functions are not favored by all users. Some users may feel disturbed by social interaction attributes, thus affecting their reading experience.

4. Network Effects

The production of digital platforms relies on "network effects". The more users use the platform, the more valuable the platform becomes to others [8]. WeRead has formed a certain social interaction network through a series of well-designed interaction functions, significantly enhancing user engagement and platform attraction. Utilizing WeChat's huge user base, WeRead rapidly increases new users through the method of social contagion. This invitation mechanism based on acquaintance relationships makes users generate emotional connections, thus using the platform more frequently. WeRead also realizes content recommendation and filtering based on social interaction relationships through friend bookshelf and thought interaction functions. Users can choose books based on friends' reading history and recommendations, increasing the credibility and attractiveness of books. Richard Dawkins once proposed the concept of "meme", believing that memes are the smallest unit of cultural evolution and dissemination. People carry out interpersonal communication practices through copying and imitation. The essential characteristic is to successfully achieve replication and dissemination [9]. Each additional user may bring more value to other users, making the content of the entire ecosystem system richer, helping the platform optimize recommendation algorithms and personalized services, and thus enhancing user experience. Readers constantly repeat common symbols within the group to gain group identity and bring the acquired group identity into new interaction rituals [10].

WeRead, as a reading platform, aggregates content resources from multiple sources, including traditional publishers, independent creators, and knowledge payment providers. These content resources include e-books, audiobooks, audio courses, etc., which can be accessed by users within the platform in the form of membership, paid single books, or free. Through content aggregation,

WeRead has achieved centralized distribution of information and can offer display channels to different content providers. Moreover, it also allows some creators to settle in and publish content, forming an interaction model among content providers, users, and the platform. WeRead assumes the role of content aggregation and becomes a bridge between users and content providers. Simultaneously, it provides value-added services such as membership, single book payment, and knowledge payment courses, while opening up monetization channels for different content copyrights and content creators, allowing multiple participants to benefit from this business model in fig 2.

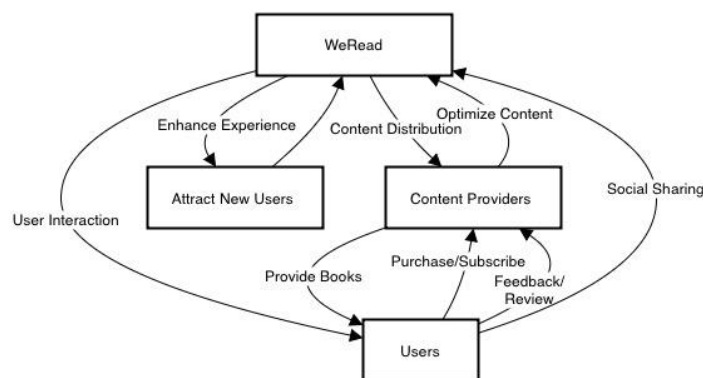


Fig 2. The Profit Model Brought by WeRead

WeRead mainly relies on membership cards, book currency recharge, and advertising as profit models, which have limitations due to the single profit channel. A large number of reading software with the selling point of "free reading" has emerged in the market, increasing the difficulty for WeRead to improve conversion rates. The social interaction features of WeRead have attracted high-knowledge user groups who pursue personal growth and skill improvement, but the payment willingness of these user groups may not be as strong as that of online literature readers. This leads to a mismatch between the platform's paying customer groups and content promotion, affecting the effectiveness of the profit model.

Therefore, in addition to the core profit model of paid reading, WeRead has also explored other relatively stable profit points based on its own operation characteristics and current situation, mainly including three types: First, advertising. In October 2019, WeRead attempted commercial advertising for the first time, attracting advertisers to settle in the platform with a large user base. Simultaneously, it actively collaborates with brands such as the joint brand promotion between WeRead and VIVO, achieving a strategic win-win situation. Second, paper book sales. The platform provides online purchase channels and attracts users to buy through discounts such as discount and free shipping. Third, hardware sales. WeRead launched the ink bottle e-reader in 2021, adopting a customized system to improve users' reading experience and deeply explore consumer potential.

5. User Behavior

According to statistics, the total number of active users on WeRead is about 16 million, with an average daily usage time of about half an hour per person, an average daily launch frequency of 6.59 times per person, and an average monthly usage of about 7 days per person. The user age is mostly concentrated between 24 and 35 years old. WeRead users are mostly distributed in economically developed first- and second-tier cities, accounting for 63.68%. 67.21% of users exchange unlimited cards through reading duration, and 34.43% of users exchange unlimited cards through daily questions. 67.21% of users exchange book currency through reading duration. 27.87% of users choose the method of commenting, 40.98% of users choose the method of forwarding, and 47.54% of users choose the method of liking [11]. It can be seen that WeRead users pay more attention to the books themselves rather than social interaction, compared to socialization. Also, even though more users are distributed in first- and second-tier cities, the difficulty of resistance to paid reading cannot be ignored.

6. Conclusion

As an innovative platform in the field of digital reading, WeRead's social interaction feature plays a key role in attracting and maintaining user groups. Through social interaction functions, WeRead not only provides a rich library of reading resources but also successfully enhances user reading experience and platform stickiness, forming a powerful network effect. However, this model also brings a series of challenges and drawbacks.

First, social interaction functions may interfere with users' reading focus, affecting the experience of deep reading. Second, the social interaction recommendation system may lead to information cocoon effects, limiting users' exposure to a wider range of books and opinions, and thus reducing the diversity of reading. In addition, users' concerns about privacy are also an important issue. They may be reluctant to disclose their reading habits, fearing that personal information will be misused or leaked. Besides, social interaction pressure is also a problem that cannot be ignored. Users may feel pressure due to friends' reading rankings and progress, which may affect their natural rhythm and enjoyment of reading. Simultaneously, social reading platforms may reduce the quality of book reviews and discussions, affecting the depth and quality of platform content. In terms of profit models, although WeRead has attracted users through its social interaction feature, the user group that is willing to invest money and time in reading is relatively limited. WeRead faces the challenge of finding a balance between social interaction functions and commercial interests while maintaining users' reading experience. What's more, how to improve user retention and loyalty is also a key issue, which requires WeRead to provide higher-quality content and services.

To achieve sustainable development, WeRead needs to find a balance between social interaction functions and user reading experience. The platform should consider how to optimize recommendation algorithms, reduce information cocoon effects, protect user privacy, alleviate social interaction pressure, improve content quality, and explore more diversified profit models. Simultaneously, WeRead should focus on improving user retention and enhance user loyalty by providing high-quality content and services.

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