

Platform Power And User Resistance: Navigating Agency In China's Data-Driven Economy

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This study examines user behavior within China's state-aligned digital platforms, including Weibo, Zhihu, and WeChat, highlighting the dynamic negotiation of agency under surveillance and algorithmic control. Using digital ethnography with 40 participants, findings show resistance as subtle and adaptive rather than overt. Over 75% practiced self-censorship to retain access, 65% used memes and coded language to critique authority, and 60% adopted redeployment strategies such as platform switching or restricted sharing. Results reveal platform control as both constraint and necessity, with user agency expressed through tactical, context-aware, and emotionally driven everyday digital practices.

Keywords: Platform Governance, User Resistance, Algorithmic Governance, Digital Surveillance, User Agency

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1. Introduction

China's digital landscape is among the world's most complex platform economies [1]. Social digital platforms shape communication, commerce, entertainment, and political discourse [2]. These platforms are not for presentation but embedded in surveillance systems [3]. Immense social power of Chinese platforms operates through algorithmic governance (automated control of content visibility), real-name registration systems (mandatory identity verification), Censorship mechanisms keep analysts questioning control in China's digital space [4]. Evolving data governance frameworks in China, including regulations on data security, platform accountability, and algorithmic governance, shape platform operations and user interaction dynamics in digital environments. Control mechanisms denote structural and algorithmic platform influence on users (subtle design influences on user behavior). Platform power refers to governance-driven mechanisms such as moderation, algorithmic filtering, and surveillance that shape user behavior, whereas routine platform function-

ality denotes neutral technical operations enabling basic user interaction, representing a distinction between regulatory influence and system-level operations. User resistance appears through coded language like homophones, nicknames, and memes [5]. Chinese users navigate corporate and state control through localized resistance [6]. Chinese users actively contest algorithms, adapting to preserve expression autonomy [7]. Actions are situational, covert, and shaped by political cultural contexts [8]. Limited scholarship examines users' internal conceptions of Chinese governance reactions [9].

Study explores user agency, power, and resistance across Weibo, Zhihu, WeChat using qualitative interviews with 40 users in controlled digital environments.

- Chinese platforms (Weibo, Zhihu, WeChat) enforce control through algorithmic censorship, keyword filtering, surveillance, and moderation, shaping user behavior and content boundaries differently across platforms.
- Users respond through adaptive resistance-self-

sistance strategies across different governance and communication environments.

Purposeful sample enables rich qualitative analysis and thematic saturation. Participants reveal coping strategies under platform governance through informed, expert-referred recruitment. Sensitive topics limited sampling; the snowball method reached hesitant participants, avoiding open or monitored discussions in China. Snowball sampling involves sequential referral chains, with participant nomination guided by inclusion criteria and shaped by recruitment flow and network connections. Initial participants were purposively identified based on prior experience with platform governance, and recruitment chains expanded through participant referrals within trusted digital networks. Snowball sampling via trusted networks reveals discreet resistance, coded communication, and self-censorship among users negotiating agency under platform surveillance.

The inclusion criteria for the sample shall be as follows:

- Be resident Chinese citizens who actively use any one of the platforms selected for this study.
- Have been subjected to or witnessed some forms of platform control (e.g., a case of content being flagged for removal, or a post that was removed by the platform).
- Be willing to provide their perspectives or actions implicated in resistance, negotiation, or adaptation to platform control be aged 18 or over.

Table 1 presents demographics of 40 participants, including platform assignment, gender, age, occupation, supporting analysis of diversity and representation. The demographic diversity represented across age groups and occupational categories contributes to a broader understanding of user experiences under platform governance. Variations in age and professional background may influence perceptions of surveillance, self-censorship practices, and resistance strategies, thereby providing richer insights into how different user groups negotiate platform restrictions.

Chinese Internet resistance emerges within social, political, and technological forces. Users balance norms while state and platforms enforce control. Triangulated qualitative methods capture nuanced resistance. Triangulation integrates findings from interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic observations through systematic comparison across data sources, reflecting convergence and consistency of analytical patterns.

Semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and digital ethnography explore resistance through 30 interviews on governance, censorship, and emotions. Users report deletions, shadowbanning, keyword filtering, fear, frustration, and adaptive communication strategies like modifying posts to avoid detection.

Key themes to be explored in interviews will be:

- Awareness and understanding of platform governance mechanisms
- Limitations perceived on freedom of speech or content reach
- Methods of resistance, circumvention, or adaptation
- Psychological and emotional effects of perpetual monitoring.

Patterns surfaced by focus groups might include:

- Popular coded language is used to avoid bans.
- Collective migration from one platform to another
- Use of private groups or channels to distribute censored content.
- Support each other, share advice on what may get flagged.

Moderation will be done sensitively to make participants feel safe, given the political sensitivity of the subject matter.

Direct user interactions, shall be carried out on public and semi-public content across these three platforms. They include:

- Public posts and comments that carry traces or signs of resistance shall be monitored and documented, as should public hashtags that are trending
- Observe user resistance to censorship (misspellings, image-based text, slang, emojis, metaphors)
- Moments when content disappears or gets flagged
- Platform reaction to controversial posts

Digital ethnography was conducted across Weibo, Zhihu, and WeChat through regular observation of user interactions and platform activities. Public and semi-public content was examined to understand communication practices and resistance strategies. Findings were interpreted through contextual analysis of interaction patterns across platforms.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Variable	Category	Number of Participants
Platform	Weibo / Zhihu / WeChat	13 / 14 / 13
Gender	Male / Female / Other	20 / 19 / 1
Age Range	18-24 / 25-34 / 35+	12 / 18 / 10
Occupation	Student / Professional	22 / 18

Ethnographic notes and screenshots (where ethically permitted) will be collected over a period of time to report back on changes in user behavior or platform policies. Digital ethnographic observation followed a defined temporal structure with regular monitoring intervals across the observation period, reflecting consistent longitudinal tracking of user behavior. For example, Zhihu posts on state policies may be shifting away from being text-based to being image-based so that they avoid automated deletion-this will be noted.

Table 2 presents qualitative methods including interviews focus groups and digital ethnography enabling triangulated context rich insights on platform power and user resistance.

Ethical precautions in data collection

Ethical safeguards include informed consent, respecting privacy through pseudonyms and secure storage. Digital ethnography uses only public or semi-public content, avoiding private messages. Sensitive topics like censorship and surveillance follow strict protocols ensuring voluntary participation, anonymity, careful questioning, data protection, transparency, and fair, non-harmful representation of findings.

Prior to accepting participation in the study, every single person will be given clarity about the purpose of the study, its methods, and the voluntary nature of their involvement. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Scope of questions: mainly about their experience with the platform, not about political ideology.
- The right to refuse to answer any particular question.
- The right to withdraw from the study at any time without any adverse consequences.
- To get written, verbal, and digital consent-giving options for participants to choose from, depending on their level of comfort.

The general and signed consent will be recorded and stored separate from the interview transcripts to maintain anonymity.

To further protect the participant's identities, any personally identifying information (PII) including name, username, email ID, and platform ID will be anonymized fully. User identity under real-name systems is characterized by dual identity practices, with public profiles coexisting alongside private or pseudonymous expressions, privacy concerns, and adaptive behavioral strategies. Pseudonyms and anonymization protect identities in transcripts, analysis, and publication. Confidentiality is ensured through encryption, secure storage, deletion of recordings, and restricted access. The study explores Weibo, Zhihu, and WeChat users, focusing on censorship, algorithms, platform power, and resistance practices.

Table 3 shows ethical measures safeguarding participants and research integrity in China addressing consent risk mitigation confidentiality voluntary participation and data security.

Ethical data management ensures reliable qualitative findings from Weibo, Zhihu, and WeChat through secure recording, transcription, anonymization, encryption, consent, and accuracy checks. PII is removed, data is stored securely with restricted access. NVivo supports thematic and discourse analysis via coding, memoing, and pattern identification within platform governance contexts. Hierarchical coding in NVivo comprises primary codes derived from raw interaction data, organized into sub-codes and aggregated into broader thematic categories, ensuring traceability between data and thematic constructs. Coding validation in NVivo comprises iterative review, consistency checks across coded segments, and cross-verification of themes, demonstrating methodological transparency, consistency, and robustness of qualitative findings. It enabled organizing, comparing, retrieving data without losing analytical insights. Thematic and discourse analyses were used as complementary analytical approaches. Thematic analysis identified recurring patterns and organized participant responses into broader themes, while discourse analysis examined the linguistic and symbolic meanings embedded within these themes.

Interview, focus group, and digital ethnography data were systematically coded using NVivo. The generated codes were organized into broader themes through thematic analysis. Subsequently, discourse analysis was ap-

Table 2. Overview of Data Collection Methods

Method	Participants	Tools	Goal
Interviews	30 users	Video call, chat	Personal experiences and resistance strategies
Focus Groups	2 groups × 5 users	Group chat/call	Collective discussion and theme validation
Digital Ethnography	Public content	Screenshot/logging	Real-time examples of platform power/resistance

Table 3. Ethical Safeguards in Research Design

Ethical Concern	Action Taken
Informed Consent	Multiple formats (written, verbal, digital)
Anonymity	Use of pseudonyms, no personal data stored
Data Security	Encrypted storage, password protection
Risk Mitigation	Neutral question wording, optional responses, secure platforms

plied to examine the linguistic and symbolic expressions embedded within these themes.

Step 1: Verbatim Transcription

All interviews and focus groups were recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, capturing paralinguistic features revealing emotions, hesitations, and subtle resistance expressions.

Step 2: Immersive Reading and Familiarization

Repeated transcript readings enabled immersion, memoing emotions, contradictions, and user coping strategies, informing initial coding of responses to platform power.

Stage Purpose and Significance

This phase of transcription and familiarization is not just a preparation: indeed, it comprises part of the actual analytical process. It enables the researcher to begin asking interpretive questions such as:

- How do users describe the circumstances of censorship?
- What emotions go with their acts of self-censorship or resistance?
- In what tone or language do users discuss their own agency?

Deep immersion ensures grounded analysis, strengthening thematic depth and interpretive credibility. Thematic analysis will be used following Braun and Clarke's six-step method to identify patterns and key themes across interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic data. Thematic sufficiency is reflected through the absence of new codes or themes across iterative analysis, with recurring patterns and data redundancy indicating analytical saturation. Coding segments transcripts into units then categories and themes refined continuously to reflect individual and collective platform experiences. Theme validation follows iterative review and refinement, with themes compared across data segments, reflecting consistency, coherence, and

stability of the analytical patterns. Finally, analytical narratives are written under each theme with participant quotes juxtaposed to research questions.

This study examines linguistic and symbolic strategies used by users to subtly resist digital control through discourse analysis of online opposition. Discourse categorisation applies predefined coding rules based on linguistic form, symbolic representation, and contextual usage, with patterns identified across metaphor, coded language, and indirect expression.

Under restrictive conditions where political expressions are penalized, analysis examines what and how people say it through discursive workarounds using euphemisms and renaming, symbolic communication via memes and images, tone and irony with satire and humor, and identity construction.

This study shows digital agency is built linguistically and semiotically where resistance is encoded in tone, format, and intention under surveillance, while understanding user resistance and platform power requires comparing behaviors across Weibo, Zhihu, and WeChat, where socio-technical logics shape resistance.

- Weibo: In fast-paced Weibo microblogging, resistance uses hashtags, memes, sarcasm, and coded language, but high visibility invites strict policing, increasing risks while rapid circulation enables symbolic protests that fade quickly.
- Zhihu: It is known for intellectual discussions and long-form question answering, where users express resistance through well-reasoned arguments, often using technical or academic language to disguise criticism.
- WeChat: WeChat shows high self-censorship, cautious communication, subtle relational resistance, limited topic sharing, controlled visibility, inside jokes, reflecting real-name integration and perceived surveillance

risks among users.

Cross-platform comparison shows resistance varies by platform, shaped by affordances, policies, audiences, and expectations, with users adapting behavior across Weibo, Zhihu, and WeChat contexts.

Table 4 shows cross platform resistance varies by platform features policies audiences, expectations, and users adjust tactics, expressing outcry on Weibo critique on Zhihu networking on WeChat. The cross-platform resistance patterns presented in Table 4 align with the visual evidence and participant narratives. Differences in platform visibility, moderation intensity, and communication structures contribute to the distinct resistance strategies observed across Weibo, Zhihu, and WeChat.

Participants exhibited distinct forms of resistance across platforms, reflecting differences in platform governance and communication structures. Weibo was associated with covert resistance through memes and coded language, Zhihu with adaptive negotiation through indirect intellectual critique, and WeChat with selective sharing and self-censorship within trusted networks.

Table 5 presents a classification framework of user resistance strategies across Weibo, Zhihu, and WeChat. The framework categorizes resistance into symbolic, linguistic, behavioral, and community-based forms, providing a clearer understanding of how users adapt to platform governance and censorship.

User motivations underlying resistance strategies reflect social, emotional, and practical considerations, including community belonging, concerns about surveillance, self-expression, and minimizing moderation risks within digital platforms.

Qualitative analysis of interviews, focus groups, and ethnography shows users on Weibo, Zhihu, and WeChat experience surveillance-oriented platform control through censorship, algorithmic filtering, and shadow banning, shaping discourse and limiting expression, while enabling subtle resistance via coded language, humor, and alternative content, reflecting ongoing negotiation of agency within technological and regulatory governance structures that influence behavior, perception, and interaction across China's digital ecosystem.

Censorship: Frequent blocking, deletion, and shadow banning occurred via automated or human censorship triggered by politically sensitive keywords, making content invisible without warning or explanation.

Algorithmic Bias: Participants reported algorithms prioritize state-approved or profitable content, promoting official narratives while demoting dissent, silencing independent voices and discouraging open debate. Algorithmic

bias shapes content visibility by prioritizing state-aligned narratives while suppressing dissenting perspectives. Recommendation systems further reinforce ideological amplification by filtering and ranking content based on platform governance logic, thereby limiting information diversity and accessibility.

Surveillance and Data Tracking: Pervasive surveillance across platforms makes users cautious, avoiding topics or sharing, as data collection enforces social and political conformity.

Fig. 2 shows a Canada-China chat on "709 Mass Arrest" report, where missed image receipt causes miscommunication, with flags indicating participants' cultural and geographic identities.

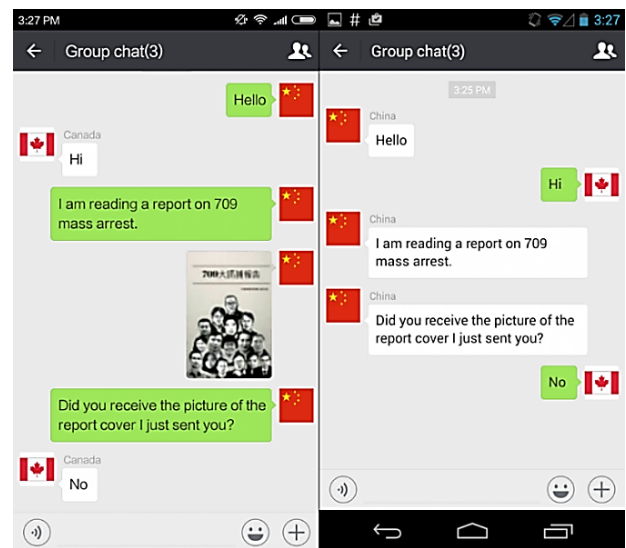


Fig. 2. Example of Image Filtering on WeChat Source. Adapted from (Image Filtering on WeChat)

Fig. 3 shows Weibo censorship notices posts are removed for guideline or state restrictions, uncertainty and acting as technical and psychological deterrents encouraging real-time self-censorship. Despite algorithmic surveillance, users creatively adapt resistance strategies to maintain agency and participate meaningfully online. Weibo's censorship interface, where content removal and guideline enforcement create uncertainty and encourage real-time self-censorship. This reinforces participants' accounts of algorithmic control while highlighting adaptive resistance strategies used to maintain user agency.

Coded Language: Users resist censorship using metaphors, homophones, euphemisms, emojis, and misspellings, such as "grass mud horse", enabling expression of sensitive content without algorithmic detection while remaining understandable. Participants frequently em-

Table 4. Cross-Platform Resistance Patterns

Platform	Dominant Resistance Tactics	Notes
Weibo	Memes, humor, code words	More public, fast-paced, but heavily censored
Zhihu	Intellectual language, indirect critique	Professional tone masks dissent
WeChat	Private groups, limited sharing, silence	More self-censorship, fear of exposure

Table 5. Classification Framework of User Resistance Strategies Across China's Digital Platforms

Resistance Category	Description	Representative Strategies
Symbolic Resistance	Indirect expression through symbols and cultural references	Memes, satire, irony, historical references
Linguistic Resistance	Language modification to avoid automated detection	Coded language, euphemisms, homophones, misspellings
Behavioral Resistance	Adaptive actions responding to platform constraints	Self-censorship, platform switching, selective sharing, timing of posts
Community-Based Resistance	Collective support and collaborative adaptation	Private groups, knowledge sharing, emotional support, collaborative evasion

ployed linguistic subversion through coded expressions, metaphors, abbreviations, and symbolic statements to communicate sensitive viewpoints without triggering automated censorship. As one participant stated, "We use alternative words and symbolic expressions because direct references are often removed or flagged."

Anonymity and Nicknames: Participants used anonymity through pseudonyms, changing usernames, and dual accounts to avoid platform or state sanctions while expressing risky views privately.

Evasion Tactics: Users reduce risk through timing posts and private moves while negotiating agency, adapting, resisting, and rethinking participation within constrained digital infrastructures.

Self-Censorship as Internalized Governance: Self-censorship emerged as internalized discipline, with users double-thinking before posting politically sensitive messages, expecting algorithm detection or netizen doxxing ("human flesh search"). One participant explained, "Before posting sensitive content, I usually think carefully about whether it could attract moderation or unwanted attention."

Symbolic communication

Another participant noted, "Symbols, emojis, and jokes help us communicate ideas that cannot always be expressed directly."

Euphemisms

Euphemisms were frequently used to replace sensitive terms. A participant mentioned, "We replace sensitive words with softer expressions so that the meaning is still understood but not detected."

Adaptive resistance

A participant reported, "When restrictions become stronger, we adjust our communication methods rather than stop participating altogether."

Community-Based Assistance and Collective Tactics: Users relied on online communities for emotional and tactical support sharing censorship evasion strategies informal knowledge fostering belonging empowerment under censorship. Participants reported that continuous monitoring of online expression created emotional strain, anxiety, and uncertainty when discussing sensitive topics. Community networks provided emotional support and practical guidance through the sharing of censorship-avoidance strategies and collective experiences. As noted by a participant, "People in our groups regularly share advice about safer ways to discuss sensitive topics online."

Adaptive and Creative Expressions: User agency appeared as creative subversion using humor, irony, memes, symbolism, and historical references to mask criticism while remaining within platform rules.

Fig. 4 shows WeChat Moments UI, a semi-public space for sharing with approved contacts; unlike open Weibo, it is private yet still algorithmically monitored and censored, prompting self-censorship, while across Weibo, Zhihu, and WeChat, platform design and norms shape control mechanisms and user resistance strategies. The qualitative findings by illustrating the semi-private communication environment of WeChat. Participants reported relying on trusted networks, selective sharing, and restricted visibility, which are reflected in the platform structure shown in the interface.

Weibo: Weibo's visible, real-time platform enables censorship, while users resist through humor, satire, coded



Fig. 3. Weibo Censorship Interface. Source. Adapted from (Weibo Censorship Interface)

language, and memes to evade restrictions creatively.

Zhihu: Zhihu enables intellectual discourse through reasoned debate, where censorship is subtler, and sensitive topics are discussed via academic or theoretical framing.

WeChat: WeChat offers private chats groups and Moments where users cautiously discuss sensitive topics more openly within trusted networks using encrypted and closed spaces. WeChat communication is characterised by structured interaction patterns within trust-based networks, where controlled sharing and selective audience segmentation shape the circulation of sensitive information in semi-private digital environments. Moderation structures and interaction environments significantly influence user adaptation across platforms. Weibo encourages coded and symbolic resistance due to its highly visible moderation system,

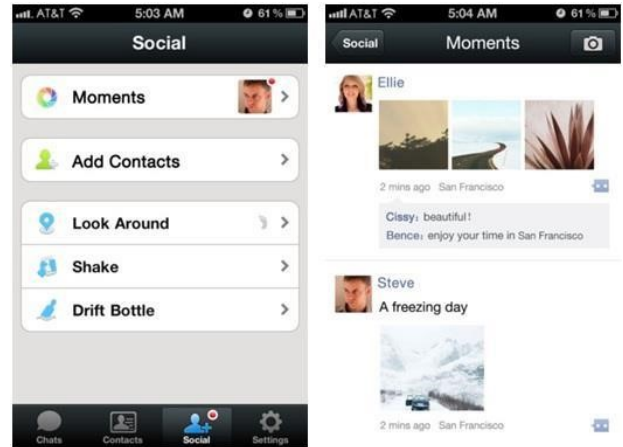


Fig. 4. WeChat Moments Interface Source. Adapted from (WeChat Moments Interface)

while Zhihu facilitates indirect critique through intellectual discussion. In contrast, WeChat promotes selective sharing and self-censorship within trusted semi-private networks.

4. Result discussions

China's platform governance intertwines digital infrastructure, political authority, and economic interests, where platforms enable interaction but impose control, prompting users to adopt coded, adaptive resistance strategies within constrained discourse. Surveillance-oriented mechanisms such as algorithmic filtering, censorship, and data monitoring are associated with adaptive user behaviors, including self-censorship, coded communication, and selective content sharing within digitally mediated environments. Digital platforms increasingly function as quasi-sovereign entities by regulating communication spaces and establishing rules for online participation. Through content moderation and enforcement mechanisms, they exercise significant influence over user behaviour and content visibility. These governance practices increasingly resemble forms of political regulatory power within digital environments. In Western contexts, resistance takes forms like market backlash or policy lobbying, whereas in China dissent carries legal risks, yet users circumvent censorship through cultural ingenuity, networked solidarity, and coded resistance aligned with Domination and the Arts of Resistance, while platform practices reflect negotiation between control and resistance where users comply or subtly oppose norms, with self-censorship maintaining visibility and embedding critique, highlighting implications for digital governance as platforms like Weibo, Zhihu, and WeChat shape discourse through opaque censorship environments. Resistance practices reflect identity performance where users negotiate

self-expression in regulated digital spaces. Pseudonyms, coded language, humor, selective participation, and audience management help users conceal or modify identities under platform constraints. These practices show agency in constructing socially situated identities shaped by norms, surveillance, and varying demographic experiences like age and occupation. Chinese digital platforms can be understood as sociotechnical systems in which technological architectures and social interaction dynamics continuously interact. Algorithmic infrastructures influence content visibility and participation, while collective user behaviours shape communication practices and adaptive resistance.

Platform architecture significantly influences users' emotional experiences within surveillance environments. Features such as public visibility, algorithmic moderation, and privacy settings shape feelings of caution, anxiety, and confidence when engaging online. The practical significance of examining Chinese platform governance extends beyond China, offering lessons for policymakers, platform designers, and digital governance practitioners on balancing content moderation and user autonomy. Insights from user adaptive behaviors under algorithmic control inform the development of more transparent moderation systems, fair appeal mechanisms, and user-centered governance frameworks.

5. Conclusion

China's regulated digital ecosystem shows fluid interaction between platform power and user resistance, as platforms enforce control through censorship, filtering, and surveillance, while users adopt subtle everyday resistance including self-censorship, coded language, irony, and anonymity to avoid penalties while maintaining expression, reflecting strategic adaptation that redefines digital agency as negotiation within ambiguous boundaries between compliance and resistance, preserving voice through contextual actions in daily interactions, emphasizing transparency, fair appeal processes, balanced regulation, public awareness, and comparative and longitudinal studies across platforms like Douyin and Zhihu. The dynamics of Chinese digital platforms are shaped by the intersection of state influence and commercial interests. While state regulations enforce censorship, surveillance, and content control, commercial incentives drive algorithmic promotion, engagement maximization, and monetization strategies. This intersection produces a governance environment where platform rules simultaneously satisfy regulatory compliance and business objectives, influencing what users see, share, and resist. Digital platforms rely on extensive data extraction practices that serve both economic and political interests. User

data and behavioural patterns become valuable resources for algorithmic governance, enabling institutions to influence digital communication, regulate user activities, and reinforce platform control. These dynamics strengthen the relationship between surveillance, platform power, and user regulation.

Declarations

Data Availability: The data supporting the findings of this study, including interview transcripts and thematic coding frameworks, are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Sensitive information and personally identifiable data are withheld to protect participant confidentiality.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this research.

Funding Statement: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Author Contributions: Yanjun Fang contributed to the study conceptualization, literature review, and manuscript drafting. Xiaomin Yin conducted data collection, thematic analysis, and manuscript revision. Both authors approved the final manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Ethical Approval: This study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards and approved by the Institutional Review Board of Shandong Normal University. Participants were fully informed about the study aims, methods, and potential risks.

Consent to Participate: Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to interviews. Participants were assured of voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Consent to Publication: All authors consent to the publication of this manuscript in its current form. Participant quotes used in the study are anonymized to protect privacy.

Competing Interests: The authors declare no competing interests that could influence the research outcomes or interpretations.

9. appendices

Appendix A: interview guide (semi-structured questions)

Platform Power

- Could you maybe tell me about a sort of general experience you had on [Weibo/Zhihu/WeChat]?

- Have you ever come across content being removed or censored?
- What do you think triggers this kind of moderation?

User Resistance

- Have you or anyone you know ever changed the language or content so as not to violate the platform's rules?
- What sort of strategies, like code words, memes, or private groups, do you use to share sensitive content?

Agency and Emotional Impact

- How do these restrictions affect your agency when expressing yourself online?
- Do you feel safe, or do you feel surveilled on these platforms?

Appendix B: focus group prompts

- In what ways do you believe the platform shapes what people can say and what can't be said?
- How are people working around those controls?
- Is there an understanding shared among the users about what is "safe" to be posted?

Appendix C: thematic codebook (sample)

Code	Description	Example Quote (Anonymized)
Censorship awareness	Awareness of moderation rules	"I avoid certain words because my posts vanish."
Coded Language	Use of euphemisms to bypass filters	"We use vegetables to represent sensitive people."
Platform Switching	Moving to other apps to avoid scrutiny	"I say risky things only on private WeChat groups."

Appendix D: ethics consent form (summary)

Purpose of Study: Explore user experiences under platform regulation.

- Voluntary Participation: You can withdraw from the research at any point, and there will be no adverse consequences.
- Anonymity: All responses will be treated confidentially, and pseudonyms will be used.
- Storage: Data will be kept on encrypted drives with password protection.

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