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DIGITALISATION OF FAMILY LIFE IN CHINA

In the popular 2016 Chinese television drama *Xiao BieLi*, one of the most formidable tiger mothers portrayed in the series buys her daughter an electric globe that lights up and explains key facts about different countries as you touch them. The young girl, already an academic overachiever, is visibly crushed as she regards the gift as yet another apparatus in her mother's oppressive arsenal of gadgets meant to enslave her to her academic pursuits.

As this depiction of childhood in China reveals, there is strong enthusiasm for any technological aid that can help children thrive in their studies and boost their chances of a glorious academic career. It is in this sociocultural context that digital devices like the Dali lamp we introduced in Chapter 1, apps like DingTalk, and social media like WeChat have been firmly incorporated into family routines and parenting practices, especially those that can support their children's educational endeavours. Indeed, it has been astutely observed that in China, 'parents willingly adopt any technological innovation that could help their children, and schools as well, since they are judged on their pupils' success' (Feijóo et al., 2021, p. 2). Given the waves of technological innovation that China has witnessed in the last couple of decades, research from multiple disciplinary perspectives has sought to capture and reflect on how family life in China has been digitalised in significant ways, especially those with school going children. In this chapter, we present a broad picture of the varied digital technologies urban Chinese families are adopting in their everyday lives to meet different needs. Following which, we delve into those they deploy specifically for parenting, from parent communication platforms over social media, to online discussion forums and class management apps and edtech platforms. We also discuss how online education intensified during the extraordinary COVID-19 pandemic period when schools were closed.

After putting this background in place, we articulate our research questions and explain our research process. In Chapters 3 and 4, we explain our research findings.

DEVICES, SUPER APPS, AND MINI-PROGRAMMES

As ‘factory to the world’, China manufactures scores of electrical and electronic devices for top global technology companies and hence boasts a vibrant domestic consumer market for such gadgets. Consequently, urban Chinese homes are littered with a rich panoply of devices to cater to various needs and creature comforts, be they for cooking, cleaning, recreation, or education. Indeed, the diffusion of appliances such as washing machines and televisions and devices such as computers and mobile phones in urban China has been swift in recent decades with the rise in household incomes and the declining cost of consumer goods (Han et al., 2022).

The corresponding improvements in household digital connectivity have been especially transformative for daily household routines. The widespread popularity of smartphones, coupled with their growing affordability, have led to their ubiquity. As the main conduits for online access, smartphones and tablets have become an integral part of daily life in urban China, and even people with limited prior internet experience can easily utilise the internet to fulfil both work-related and leisure activities (Loo & Wang, 2018). Before 2005, variations in the adoption of mobile phones among consumers in various income brackets were still notable, but post-2010, these differences have diminished significantly (Han et al., 2022).

Consequently, time spent online has risen significantly over time, with social media use dominating. According to the *52nd Statistical Report on China's Internet Development* published by the China Internet Network Information Centre (CNNIC), as of June 2023, China had 1.079 billion netizens, up 11.09 million over December 2022, and its internet penetration has reached 76.4%. The average weekly online time per capita for Chinese internet users increased by 2.4 hours compared to December 2022, reaching a total of 29.1 hours (CNNIC, 2023). As of June 2023, there were 1.047 billion users of instant messaging (97.1%), 1.044 billion users of online videos (96.8%), 943 million users of online payment (87.5%), 841 million users of search engines (78.0%), and 765 million users of livestreaming (71.0%) (CNNIC, 2023). Social media use is avid, and the number of social media users has reached 989 billion (CNNIC, 2023). As of the third quarter of 2022, the top five social media platforms by percentage of Chinese internet users are WeChat (81.6%),

Douyin (72.3%), *QQ* (61.6%), *Baidu Tieba* (57.6%), and *Xiaohongshu* (49.5%) (Thomala, 2023b). Far from merely serving social or recreational needs, social media use is in fact critical to daily functioning in China.

CHINA'S TOP FIVE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

WeChat is the most intensively used due to its multifunctionality and has the largest number of users at about 1 billion monthly as of 2022 (Thomala, 2023b). Widely seen as the archetypal 'super app' (Lim, 2024), WeChat is, for many Chinese consumers, indispensable for daily chores, helping them perform tasks such as paying bills, ordering food, and hailing taxis, thus making it close to indispensable and 'super sticky' (Chen et al., 2018). WeChat also hosts a thriving ecosystem of mini-programmes or 'sub-applications' that offer enhanced functionalities including e-commerce, virtual store tours, task management, coupon services, and various other capabilities. Besides these transactional uses, WeChat is also a lively venue for social interaction and network building. Its Moments feature allows users to post social updates for sharing with WeChat contacts and its visual design steers users towards sharing photos rather than plain text (Chen et al., 2018). WeChat Groups allow groups of people to form closed 'friend circles' (*pengyouquan*) although this is used for both social interaction and work-related communication. Numerous government agencies and organisations also maintain official WeChat accounts for disseminating information to citizens relating to government policies, state decisions, and information relevant to daily life and welfare (Zhang et al., 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the platform played an especially vital role in sharing details about lockdowns and quarantine regulations and even grocery deliveries and welfare services.

Douyin is a short-form video app that was specifically tailored and initially released to the Chinese market in 2016 by its parent company, Chinese tech giant ByteDance which also owns TikTok, its global counterpart. As of March 2022, Douyin and Kuaishou, China's two largest short video platforms, controlled about 54.4% of the short-form video market (Thomala, 2023a). The platform uses sophisticated AI algorithms to personalise the user experience by curating a feed of videos that aligns with individual preferences and viewing behaviours (Zhao, 2021). This technology is key to the app's addictive nature, as it keeps users engaged by continuously presenting them with content tailored to their interests (Chu, 2022); 65% of its users are under 35 years old although Douyin's user base

is expanding into other age groups (GMA, 2023). The platform is known for various trending topics, including dance, comedy, babies, life hacks, food, pets, pranks, and stunts. Douyin has become a leading platform for brands selling to Chinese consumers, revolutionising the way users spend time on social media platforms, interact with each other, and shop.

QQ is an instant messaging software service and web portal developed by the Chinese technology company Tencent and was originally known as Tencent QQ. In the third quarter of 2023, QQ had about 558 million monthly active users, decreasing from around 574 million in the same quarter of 2022 (Thomala, 2023c). QQ offers services that provide online social games, music, shopping, microblogging, movies, and group and voice chat software (Tencent Cloud, 2023). One of QQ's unique features is its integration function, where customers can combine other services and platforms such as social networks, emails, and other entertainment websites under one user ID, making it the country's most popular instant messenger (Pang, 2022). Topics discussed on QQ resemble those on other major social media platforms, reflecting popular culture, current events, and user interests.

Baidu Tieba, a Chinese online forum like Reddit, was established on 3 December 2003, by Chinese web services company and search engine giant Baidu. Over the years, Baidu Tieba has seen significant growth – accumulating 45 million monthly active users and 1.5 billion total registered users as of December 2021 – and is one of the most popular platforms in China (GMA, 2023). Baidu Tieba offers a range of services, including the ability for users to participate in discussions and share information on a variety of topics. One of its distinctive features is its focus on user-generated content, which means that the vast majority of content on the platform is created by the Chinese online community rather than official sources or brands; consequently, many Tiebas revolve around popular culture phenomena such as gaming, TV shows, and celebrities (GMA, 2023).

Xiaohongshu, often referred to as China's version of Instagram, stands out as one of the most widely embraced 'Content + E-commerce' social media platforms in the country. It was originally established in 2013 as a Hong Kong shopping guide for affluent female travellers but has since matured into a platform with 200 million users who use the app to share tips on health, fitness, and relationships. As of July 2020, it boasted a substantial user base of 100 million monthly active users globally (*Xiaohongshu*, 2023). It emphasises images and short video clips as the primary modes of content sharing. Like other social media platforms,

Xiaohongshu thrives on social interaction, offering ‘Like’ and ‘Favourites’ buttons with a recommendation system based on those metrics (Guo, 2022). It features user-generated content primarily targeted at the younger demographic who use it to share shopping-related information with their online community. It aims to facilitate users in both discovering and acquiring products while fostering the exchange of recommendations, advice, and tips. *Xiaohongshu* is frequently employed for product research, offering in-depth evaluations and tutorials contributed by its user base. Users can save posts they find appealing, engage with other users and their content, generate their own posts, connect with brand pages, and more. Other distinctive features of *Xiaohongshu* include its in-app purchase functions, the availability of longer, more comprehensive blog-style content, and a stronger sense of community.

PARENT CHAT GROUPS

With social media claiming such a critical role in daily life in China, these very same platforms are also heavily leveraged for parenting-related tasks and are appropriated as parent communication platforms. Parents use the likes of WeChat and QQ to communicate with their children, their children’s teachers, and other children’s parents, or to seek information and advice about parenting. In these platforms, the ability to forge groups facilitates community building and knowledge sharing.

Studying mainly expectant mothers or those with infants and toddlers, Zhao and Ju (2022) found that online communities such as WeChat groups offered these women a critical support structure especially during the pandemic period. They bonded and commiserated over pregnancy woes, uncertainties about COVID-19 including vaccinations, and shared knowledge and tips about parenting practices: ‘In various WeChat groups and parenting apps, parenting knowledge is fragmented across the network; this information is enriched, supplemented, borrowed, used, questioned, and absorbed in the exchange among mothers’ (Zhao & Ju, 2022, p. 7). These WeChat groups also went beyond offering know-how and building community to mobilising for action, such as when some mothers would band together to lobby schools on issues such as teacher reassignment, curricular design, or safety standards. With social interaction constrained during the pandemic, these online platforms offered a valuable lifeline for meaningful exchange despite their isolation, allowing these young mothers to offer and enjoy solidarity during a significant stage of their lives.

In another study of WeChat and QQ parent–teacher chat groups, parents observed that the informal and user-friendly nature of parent chat groups made it easier to initiate communication compared to phone calls and expressed a higher level of comfort in asking questions within these chats (Gong et al., 2021). However, both parents and teachers raised concerns about the openness of this channel, allowing parents to freely voice their opinions. Teachers pointed out the disparity in the number of parents and teachers in the group, with a typical group chat comprising around 10 teachers and 50–60 parents. It was common for parents and teachers to feel overwhelmed by the volume of communication. Additionally, the text-based nature of communication in such chats made parents and teachers more cautious about how they phrased their messages, as they feared that imprecise language could lead to misunderstandings and potentially undesirable consequences.

Indeed, as with all communities, social interaction is not without its friction, and WeChat parent groups manifest facets of pressure and performativity by both parents and teachers. Lyu and Zhong (2023) studied the home-school interaction experience of rural-to-urban migrants in Yongkang, a city in Zhejiang province. They found that these migrant parents who tended to be far less educated than their urban counterparts would attempt to involve themselves in these chats, such as when teachers solicited suggestions for school-related matters. However, they consequently found their efforts disparaged by teachers:

A teacher shared a classroom decoration plan in the WeChat group and requested suggestions. I shared some ideas. Surprisingly, the teacher privately messaged me and advised me to tell her my thoughts privately instead of posting them in the public group next time (Lyu & Zhong, 2023, p. 5)

Indeed, the teachers interviewed for the study admitted that they had severe doubts about these rural-to-urban parents' ability to contribute in productive or meaningful ways and tended to rope in urban parents for voluntary activities and the Parent Association. Apparently, social stratification extends to or replicates within these chat groups.

Despite such challenges and tensions, participation in such chat groups is part and parcel of parenting in China. Parents are motivated to participate actively in these WeChat groups because the stakes can be high. Parents actually compete for the teachers' attention and vie to be the first to respond to the teachers' requests. As Chu (2017, p. 38) observed of the WeChat group for her son's primary school:

It all began to the feel like a race, as if we were playing endless rounds of musical chairs, and the last parent to respond would

*have her supports immediately kicked out from underneath her
The teachers' own messages came at all hours, and on some days I
counted north of three hundred messages buzzing around the group.*

ONLINE DISCUSSION FORUMS AND SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

Apart from parent chat groups that tend to be closed to groups of parents affiliated to a particular school and class, more public online forums are also popular as venues for consultation and commiseration with parents who are beyond one's immediate social networks. Across the world, a variety of media spaces serving such purposes, such as discussion forums (Mackenzie, 2018), films (Schweller, 2014), Facebook (Anderson & Grace, 2015), Instagram (Germic et al., 2021), and WhatsApp (Lyons, 2020) have been explored. Such research has shed light on how different media platforms are utilised for the execution, negotiation, and assessment of parenting, delving into themes like identity formation, sense of belonging, knowledge sharing, and community building (Archer, 2019; Orton-Johnson, 2017).

Parents have also been observed to imbibe some degree of social validation or affirmation from their peers through interactions on these forums. They lurk or participate in these forums to solicit or exchange information and forge a sense of community. While the information gleaned and community bonds nurtured can be helpful and empowering, they can also induce negative feelings. In particular, exposure to posts about 'ideal parents' or 'perfect parenting' on social media can cause parents to make social comparisons and experience frustration (Henderson et al., 2016) and even inadequacy (Coyne et al., 2017) with implications for individual wellbeing and spousal relationships (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). Similar trends have also been uncovered in Chinese online communities relating to parenting.

In her analysis of parenting advice offered by WeChat Public Accounts and in-depth interviews with middle- and working-class mothers in Shanghai, Meng (2020) found interesting class disparities. Due to the limited access that working-class mothers have to social media content and fewer resources to engage with parenting advice typically aimed at users of higher socioeconomic status, they exhibit lower levels of anxiety compared to their middle-class counterparts. Additionally, working-class mothers tend to hold more realistic expectations about what constitutes a good life for their children. Her study showed that urban middle-class lifestyles, while enviable, come with their own pressures that are captured in and exerted by dominant social media discourse.

Studies of newer platforms such as *Douyin* and *Xiaohongshu* have found that digital media supports the enactment of motherhood practices, introducing complexities in the interplay between virtual and physical spaces. As has been observed of mothers in other countries, social media is a crucial space where narratives, identities, and actions of mothers undergo scrutiny and redefinition (Orton-Johnson, 2017). *Douyin* has evolved in the same way. He et al. (2022) studied how Chinese stay-at-home mothers document their everyday experiences on *Douyin*, specifically in the form of vlogs, establishing an online arena for the daily performance of their motherhood roles. Similar to *Douyin*, *Xiaohongshu* also features mom vloggers who record and share their daily lives (Shen et al., 2022). *Xiaohongshu* has also been appropriated as a channel for constructing and sharing knowledge about postpartum recovery, as well as for representations of the responsibilities and burdens of motherhood (Liu & Wang, 2023). The content shared by mothers reveals the imperceptible, unpaid work carried out by women within the confines of the private domestic realm, thrusting it into public conversation and converting it into discernible digital labour. This process creates novel avenues for the ongoing digital expression of motherhood through social media. It also underscores the performative nature of motherhood (Butler, 1997). *Xiaohongshu* is especially popular with Gen Z mothers who share news of their pregnancies and infant children and less so with Millennial parents of schoolgoing kids (Na, 2023).

Similarly, Sina Weibo, another popular social media platform in China, has also been the venue for fraught conversations about parenting. Wu et al. (2021) analysed Sina Weibo postings by users on China's two-child policy that was imposed in 2016, marking a significant shift from its long-standing one-child policy which had been in effect for the past 35 years. Social media platforms such as Sina Weibo perform a pivotal role in shaping public responses to this transformative reproductive policy including playing host to crucial discussions on the roles, identities, rights, and responsibilities of contemporary Chinese women. The platform has served as a veritable discursive space where ordinary women can share, document, and capture their daily interactions with societal structures and cultural norms related to childbirth. Although less salient, various perspectives rooted in male roles and interests have also emerged, contributing to the delineation and definition of family ideals.

PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION AND EDTECH PLATFORMS

Besides generic social media and communication platforms that are appropriated for educational needs, there are also those designed expressly for academic settings, providing a wide range of education-related functions including

parent–teacher communication, children’s curricular schedules, homework management tools, online courses, and shared drives for downloading learning resources. Prime examples of popular parent–teacher conferencing and class management apps include DingTalk, *Yiqixue*, and *Banji Youhua Dashi*.

Of this proliferation of edtech services, DingTalk has been one of the most prominent and successful, providing an all-encompassing online learning platform with tools and functions to streamline collaborative learning, real-time communication, and access to educational materials. Originally created by Alibaba as a channel for collaborative office communication, DingTalk quickly gained favour for educational purposes during the pandemic. It enables educators and employers to assign tasks, monitor the progress of students and employees, and can even mandate users to post a daily ‘check-in’ photo within a designated group (Cuthbertson, 2020). For schools, it offers virtual classrooms to facilitate livestreamed lessons, allowing teachers to engage directly with students through video or text communication. Teachers can create class groups and issue students important notifications through sound alerts (Hou & Yu, 2023). Students can attend virtual classes from any mobile device and communicate with the teacher through text or microphone features. All livestream sessions conducted during the course are permanently stored as video recordings, accessible for students to replay and review. Learner data are captured, and teachers have access to comprehensive information on students’ participation throughout the course, including the duration of their participation (Hou & Yu, 2023). The platform also allows teachers to issue instructions for homework and provide feedback while students can use it to submit completed assignments with the capacity to accommodate images, audio, and video content.

China’s rapid switch to online instruction as the pandemic unfolded was unsurprising considering the country’s burgeoning edtech sector in the preceding years. By 2018, the number of online learners in China had reached 172 million, with 142 million engaging in mobile-based learning (Feijóo et al., 2021). The annual expenditure per capita for online K-12 education was RMB16,000 (est. USD2,246). China witnessed a substantial increase in edtech investment in 2018, reaching around €4 billion (est. USD5.8 billion), nearly double the total from 2017. The primary sub-sectors in the Chinese edtech market are K-12 education and language learning, with Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education emerging as the fastest-growing sector. Edtech innovations have catered largely to higher education, primarily focussed on STEM subjects, in-class applications, after-school classes, and tools that support the overall education system (Feijóo et al., 2021).

The Chinese edtech market is also frontier pushing, with relatively novel innovations such as facial recognition, drones, and brain headsets to assess

students' attention levels having been trialled in schools (Feijóo et al., 2021). Data on students' in-class behaviour and responses are relayed to the instructor in real-time and shared with parents via mobile applications. Deep learning is then employed for image and pattern recognition and classification, and the collected information is subsequently utilised to generate a performance index for each student. Although the use of such groundbreaking technologies could raise concerns about surveillance and data privacy, Chinese schools do not typically seek consent from parents, and the country has yet to impose tight regulation of biometric information (Feijóo et al., 2021). Furthermore, Chinese parents are in fact likely to welcome a service to help them learn more about their children's learning habits especially since they believe that children's diligence and ability to concentrate are keys to academic excellence.

ONLINE EDUCATION DURING COVID-19

It was in the wake of COVID-19 that edtech platforms realised their broadest application worldwide and China was no exception. The 'China Parenting Report under COVID-19', published by professional parenting platform *Yuerwang* in 2020 noted that the country saw a 22% year-on-year increase in the daily activity of online parenting communities and a surge of 50.58% in the daily activity of online education consultation services during the pandemic (Zhao & Ju, 2022). Indeed, China effectively transitioned to online education as a complementary educational technology during this emergency period. Following an initial bout of panic with some missteps, a coordinated initiative involving government ministries and internet/mobile providers swiftly enabled nearly 200 million targeted students to connect and learn from anywhere at any time (Feijóo et al., 2021). The Chinese Ministry of Education launched the 'Disrupted Classes, Undisrupted Learning' exercise to provide flexible online learning to students in their homes, coordinating 22 online learning platforms that collectively provided 24,000 free and open online courses at the national level (Huang et al., 2020). Additionally, provincial-level schools and educational institutions offered a substantial amount of open learning resources to ensure the availability and flexibility of resources during the lockdown. These resources encompassed filmed lectures and educational games, tailored to meet the characteristics and needs of students.

Schools across all academic levels had to implement new approaches to cater to their students. For instance, Guangzhou International Middle School Huangpu ZWIE introduced a self-inquiry course during the COVID-19 period, allowing students to select topics based on personal interests and strengths

(Huang et al., 2020). Students could then turn in assignments in their preferred formats, such as letters, posters, brochures, videos, songs, or dances, to express appreciation for frontline heroes in Wuhan City, China. Binbei School in Shandong Province initiated a ‘Course Supermarket’, offering students diverse courses ranging from photography and calligraphy to housework and fitness tasks to nurture self-management skills (Huang et al., 2020). In terms of assessments, No.1 Primary School in Puyang, Henan province, employed a system where students wrote their test answers on paper, took photos of completed answer sheets, and submitted them to instructors via real-time chatting tools such as WeChat (Huang et al., 2020). Instructors manually graded and provided comments on the photos, addressing non-real-time questions and counselling needs. To further support students’ inquiries, Beijing launched an online Q&A platform, attracting 13,705 registered instructors by 23 February 2020 (Huang et al., 2020). Grade 3 junior high school students in Beijing accessed the Q&A module of the ‘Smart Learning Partner’ through computers, mobile apps, or WeChat, uploading questions as text or pictures. Teachers responded with ideas and methods to solve problems, selecting the best answer for each question.

DingTalk, originally designed for enterprises, became widely used by primary and secondary schools during COVID-19. Over five million students from more than 10,000 institutions attended livestreaming classes via DingTalk (Huang et al., 2020). The platform developed a distance education package, offering health reports, online class reports, live interaction, real-time announcements, and notices. DingTalk provided free access to online and live classes, supporting over one million simultaneous learners. These online classes facilitated teaching, homework submission, corrections, examinations, and various learning simulations. For students and families, the main issues around the abrupt switch to online education related to parental pressures for their additional burdens. Notably, a social media post captured the prevailing sentiment among parents during that time. A father from Jiangsu province shared a brief online video where he complained bitterly about his child’s teacher instructing parents to review their children’s homework (Yuan, 2020). He grumbled in the video’s concluding words: ‘I teach the children, I correct the homework, and then I have to say in the WeChat group that I appreciate teacher’s hard work. But who is the one working hard?’. The video quickly became viral having struck a chord with many online who began to question the role of teachers and indeed the existence of these WeChat parent–teacher groups.

Of course, it was the students taking major exams such as the *gaokao* who were the most stressed about the pandemic’s impact on their learning and

academic performance. Nevertheless, despite the challenges, *gaokao* scores from the pandemic period were similar to those in previous years as parents had kept their children occupied with extracurricular online classes or access to mobile educational content (Feijóo et al., 2021). Students also adapted fairly well to online tools and surpassed their teachers who were hampered by their lack of prior training in edtech platforms and the absence of interaction in online classrooms.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHOD

It was against this broader backdrop of digitalisation of family life in China that we conducted our study. We sought to explore Chinese families' experience of using digital technologies in parenting their schoolgoing children. We conducted individual interviews and guided explorations of the parents' mobile devices, relevant apps, and app content to answer the following research questions:

- What are Chinese parents' experiences of using social media and edtech platforms in parenting their schoolgoing children?
- What is the nature of their interactions with teachers and other parents?
- How do these experiences influence their perceptions of parenting?

We conducted 80 interviews with 60 Chinese parents in two key Chinese metropolises of Beijing and Hangzhou before and during the COVID-19 lockdown. Institutional ethical approval was sought and obtained for both phases of research. Of the 60 participants, 40 were from Hangzhou and 20 were from Beijing. These parents could either be male or female, with at least one schoolgoing child aged 7–18 as of 2019, corresponding to students from the first grade of primary school to the third grade of high school. Among the 60 parents interviewed, 56 were mothers and 4 were fathers. The majority of participants belonged to the middle class, predominantly working as white-collar professionals, while the rest were full-time stay-at-home mothers; 41 out of the 60 parents had only one child at the time of the research, and the remaining 19 had two children. No respondent had more than two children. Respondents had to be users of digital technologies that supported their parenting, including but not limited to platforms designed to help parents with their children's homework, that offer parents the ability to track their children's academic performance, and that facilitate parent–teacher and/or parent–parent communication. The respondents were recruited via social

media platforms such as WeChat, and interviews commenced after written consent had been sought and obtained.

Our first round of fieldwork was carried out in Hangzhou from July to September 2019, where we interviewed 40 parents in Hangzhou face to face. Once the pandemic broke out, we were no longer able to visit families in China to conduct our research and had to pivot to online research methods (Lim & Wang, 2021b). Hence, the second wave of interviews took place online from March to April 2020 during the COVID-19 lockdowns. We conducted follow-up interviews with 20 parents in Hangzhou from the 2019 cohort and recruited 20 Beijing parents for virtual interviews. All interviews were conducted with parents individually in Chinese using semi-structured interview questions and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Permission was also sought from respondents for audio recording the interviews and taking screenshots of their mobile devices, including for the use of interview quotes and screenshots in publications and presentations. The screenshots of the platforms they use and their content allow us to obtain a clearer understanding of how our respondents use them in their everyday life and to compare and contrast experiences of different parents and platforms. Respondents received a grocery voucher as a token of appreciation if they completed the entire interview.

Interviews began with questions about respondents' family's background, media use habits, motivations when they first opted to use specific platforms to support their schoolgoing children, their standard modes of use, their positive and negative experiences with them, and any other themes that emerged in the course of the conversation. Throughout the interview, we asked the respondents to show us the platforms as they mentioned them in response to our questions and screenshots were correspondingly taken. Follow-up questions were asked via emails, chat messages, or phone calls only with respondents who had agreed to be re-contacted. Respondents were also asked for referrals to other eligible contacts but were not obliged to do so. Overall, our respondents were open to the interviews and participated actively with a keen interest to share their experiences. Our findings thus offer rich vignettes of family life in urban Chinese households, and we present our analysis along with interview excerpts and visual illustrations in Chapters 3 and 4. To protect their privacy, respondents whose views are reproduced *ad verbatim* are referred to by pseudonyms and screenshots that are featured have respondents' identifiable information blurred.