

The pragmatic strategies of apology in WeChat communication

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Abstract: A personal private apology is an interpersonal social act in which the apologizer makes an explanation for the offense and repairs the relationship between the two parties on the social media—WeChat. It also involves the harmonious relationship management of the apologizing subject. This paper uses 65 private WeChat chats as a corpus to explore the discourse strategies in private apologies. It is found that personal private apology strategies include expressing apology, explaining reason, self-blaming, and caring for the offended, and less often used strategies such as offering repair, promising to avoid, showing measures done and expressing will. The distribution of strategies indicates that personal private apology is mainly aimed to maintain one's positive image and reduce self-blame and secondly to repair the face and dignity of the hearer in order to finally dissolve the offending crisis event and repair the friendly interpersonal relationship between both parties. Individuals have the discursive sense to repair the harmonious relationship between the offender and the offended.

Keywords: private apology; discourse strategy; social media; WeChat.

1. Introduction

Apologies are polite restorative speech acts in which people acknowledge responsibilities and express regrets for a breach of trust, either in person or using social media (Kim, 2004). The speech act of apology exists in daily interactions. With the development of the Internet and social media, apology is also widely used in digital communication. Previous studies have investigated the analysis of everyday public apologies (Glinert, 2010), focusing on written apology strategies (Lutzky & Kehoe, 2016) in the public domain, such as political (Kwabena Sarfo Sarfo-Kantankah, 2021) and commercial apologies (Hu & Yang, 2020). However, few scholars have analyzed private apologies or personal apologies on social media. To this end, this paper aims to examine the pragmatic strategies of apology on Chinese social media, WeChat. This study focuses on personal private apologies and analyzes the specific linguistic forms and pragmatic performance of apology strategies in non-public contexts. This study also explores the rapport management between the two communicative sides during their repair of relationships on social media.

2. The previous studies on apology

Apology is a relational restorative speech act in response to the need of saving face for the offended person, aiming to avoid or ameliorate the listener's or the third party's impolite appraisal of the offense triggered by the apologist, thus harmony between the participants in the communicative event can be restored (Holmes, 1989). Focusing on the cross-cultural communicative context, Cohen & Olshtain (1981) and Blum-kulka & Olshtain (1984) suggested that apology strategies of different linguistic groups not only differed significantly, but also showed a high degree of similarity. The similarities in apology strategies are reflected in the illocutionary force indicating device (IFID, henceforth) and self-blame, while the differences are mostly reflected in the apologists' explanations, offers of repair and promises of avoidance (Blum-kulka & Olshtain, 1984). Apologists adopt different discursive strategies depending on the socio-cultural contextual elements such as the target of the apology, the degree of offense, the relationship between the apologizing parties, and the purpose of the apology.

Public apologies differ from everyday apologies in terms of the addressee and the participatory structure of the hearer. Whereas everyday apologies usually occur between two acquaintance parties, and the motivation for the speaker to apologize is often based on personal identity or face-offending (Holmes, 1990).

Public apologies are made to the public as well as the group whose identity or face has been offended. In this particular one-to-many communicative relationship, the cause, degree, object and scope of public apology have strong public openness and social moral rules. Kádár et Juliane (2018), for example, specifically examined public ritual apologies, suggesting that the main purpose of an apology is to acknowledge the offence and expect to restore public moral order. Meanwhile, the public needs to understand the event and feel the sincerity of the apology. Therefore, self-accusation and explanatory strategies are commonly used, while offering repair and promising to circumvent are rarely applied. In addition, the identity of the apologist in a public apology also directly affects the choice of apology strategy (Qi et al., 2019). In political apologies, governmental institutional groups often use apologies to save their own face, and the speaker minimises his or her own responsibility by admitting fault to the public, expressing apology and self-blaming (Kampf, 2009). Thus, they can repair and maintain a harmonious relationship between the government and the public. In political diplomacy, it is difficult for states and government groups to remedy the situation in a short period of time through concrete and continuous measures, and therefore apologists rarely use the offer-repair, commitment-avoidance strategy (Harris et al., 2006). Speakers tend to use explicit apology extra-verbal expressions and self-attribution of blame in order to gain sympathy and support from third-party listeners, such as the media and audience (Liu et al., 2016).

In the business environment, companies use apology discourse to repair their own face and maintain a trusting and harmonious relationship with consumers. In order to avoid secondary offense and damaging their positive face, companies rarely explain the offense how has occurred, but mostly make suggestions to repair the damaged identity of the company (Page, 2014). They aim to avoid and eliminate corporate-consumer conflicts and gain more consumers' approval. It is important to note that while an apology can help to rebuild harmony between the parties, it can also pose a threat to the apologist's reputation (Ogiermann, 2009). As a result, corporate apologists are often reluctant to take responsibility for the offence in question in their apologies (Berry, 2018). For instance, bank CEOs rarely make direct apologies for their offending behaviour in crisis response and refuse to take on responsibility (Hargie et al., 2010). These findings all point to a significant tendency and discursive strategy of minimising self-responsibility incorporate public apologies. These are all discursive strategies of public apologies, and it can be seen that there is less research on the apology strategies of private apologies, which is one of the starting points for this. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the private apology strategies on WeChat in Chinese digital communication.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data collection

The dataset of this study was derived from the WeChat chats of 38 young Chinese WeChat users who volunteered to participate in this study. They are all college students with a mean age of 22.5. Gender differences were not considered. Following the "participant" perspective in politeness research (Kádár & Haugh, 2013), WeChat users selected their own apology chats from their daily communication. Each participant provided 1-4 apology-bearing chats. A total of 65 apology episodes were obtained for this study. This data collection method ensured that the data collected were perceived as apology and that the data were collected with the participants' consent. To protect the participants' privacy, all sensitive information that could identify the user was omitted from this study.

3.2 Data analysis

Based on Cohen and Olshtain’s (1981) apology strategy classification framework, the collected Wechat chats were coded according to the following eight strategies: expressing apology, explaining reason, self-blaming, caring for the offended, offering repair, promising to avoid, showing measures done, and expressing will. Due to the limitation of space, the specific strategy categories and examples are detailed in Section IV.

During the coding process, we found that some chats contained two or more apology strategies. In this paper, we counted each strategy that appeared in them separately, so the 65 apology contents collected in this paper contain a total of 222 apology discourse strategies.

4. Research findings

Table 1 presents the pragmatic strategies and the frequency and percentage of apologetic speech act in this study. The analysis revealed that the apology discourse strategies in WeChat can be divided into eight categories, namely, expressing apology, explaining reason, self-blaming, caring for the offended, offering repair, promising to avoid, showing measures done, and expressing will. From Table 1, we know that in private apologies in WeChat, the more frequently used apology strategies are expressing apology, explaining reason and self-blaming, and the less frequently applied ones are caring for the offended, offering repair, promising to avoid, showing measures done, and expressing will. In the following, the frequency and specific content of the apology strategies are analyzed in terms of their respective discourse functions.

Table.1 Frequency and percentage of apology strategies

Apology strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Expressing apology	77	34.68
Explaining reason	60	27.03
Self-blaming	42	18.92
Caring for the offended	15	6.76
Offering repair	11	4.95
Promising to avoid	7	3.15
Showing measures done	5	2.70
Expressing will	5	2.70
Total	222	100

4.1 Expressing apology

The expression apology strategy in WeChat often refers to the IFID to express apology. IFID includes: “sorry”, “excuse me”, “I was wrong”, “I apologize”, etc. IFID appeared 77 times (34.68%) in the present study’s discourse, and 10 of them used two different extra-verbal expressions of apology in one apology (see Table 2). Among them, “sorry/对不起/dbq” was the most frequent expression, followed by “excuse me” and “apologize”.

In private apologies on social media, WeChat, expressions such as “sorry / 对不起 / dbq” were used most frequently (42 times, accounting for 54.55%), followed by expressions such as “excuse me“, which is not as strong as “sorry”, and emojis and emoticons, which were used least frequently (2 times, accounting for 2.60%; 1 time, accounting for 1.30%). In the case of public apologies in social media, “sorry” and “apologize” ranked in the top two; in the case of corporate apologies for individual customer complaints, the former was almost six times more frequent than the latter (Page, 2014); the latter is 1.63 times more frequent than the former when companies apologize to some customers and to public groups (Kádár et al, 2018). In private apologies on social media, “sorry/对不起/dbq” and “excuse me/不好意思” are used very frequently, accounting for 54.55% and 14.29% respectively. When the situation is more serious, more solemn expressions such as “apology” and “regret” are used, which help show a sincere and good attitude. It is worth mentioning that due to the

private nature of personal apologies, a small number of people also expressed their apologies with the help of emojis and emoticons, which also eased the awkward and tense atmosphere between the two sides.

In the above IFID apology strategy, individuals clearly explained the reason for the offense (45 times) by saying “I’m sorry I did something” and other similar expressions. When describing the reason for the apology, individuals tend to state the objective reason truthfully; if it is due to their own subjective reasons, they tend to embellish their self-reduction of blame. The above discussion shows that when individuals make an apology, they usually use words that express their regret and then state the subjective or objective reasons to obtain the other person’s forgiveness. The exact words used depend on the seriousness of the offense.

Table.2 Frequency and percentage of IFIDs in the apology discourse

IFIDs	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sorry/对不起 (the transliteration of the second character of sorry in Chinese) /dbq (the pinyin acronym of sorry in Chinese)	42	54.55
Excuse me/不好意思 (the transliteration of the first character of excuse me in Chinese)	11	14.29
apology	9	11.69
regret	8	10.39
Sorry/骚瑞(the transliteration of sorry in Chinese)	4	5.19
Emoticon	2	2.60
Emoji	1	1.30
Total	77	100

4.2 Explaining reason

The apology strategy of explaining reason refers to the speaker explaining the reason for the offending event and further emphasizing his or her intention, such as “Hello Minister, I was supposed to attend the meeting today, but I didn’t participate in the meeting on time because of the unexpected event. I’m really sorry, I will ask for leave in time next time (knocking emoji)”. This strategy was used frequently in this study, with a percentage of 27.03%.

Private apology aims to redeem and protect one’s reputation and trustworthiness by means of crisis communication. On the one hand, the offending incident may have an impact on the personal reputation and the apologizer needs to defend himself/herself; on the other hand, when the offending event occurs, the offended person will ask for a reasonable explanation of what happened, especially when some disputes are involved (Coombs & Holladay, 2008). Thus, in private apologies, individuals often give uncontrollable reasons (e.g., “traffic”) to make their offense logical, but their explanations also allow the speaker to indirectly acknowledge their offense (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981). When individuals indicate explanations in private apologies, they prefer to use explicit explanatory statements to redeem their reputation, such as acknowledging the subjectivity of personal responsibility and attributing it to uncontrollable factors.

Table.3 Frequency and percentage of explaining reason strategy types

Type of explaining reason strategy		Frequency	Percentage (%)
explicit explanation	recognition of the subjectivity of personal responsibility	32	53.33
	attribution to uncontrollable factors (e.g., traffic, weather, etc)	12	20
implicit explanation	indication that the initial intention is not consistent with the offence	10	16.67
	emphasis on the accidental nature of the offence	6	10
Total		60	100

4.2.1 Explicit explanation

Explicit explanation note refers to the apologizer’s indication of the reasons why he or she had to do the offending act. In this study, on the one hand, apologists chose to acknowledge the subjectivity of responsibility more often in order to gain the understanding or comprehension of the other party; on the other hand, private apologies also minimized their responsibility by attributing the cause of offending the other party to objective factors such as weather, traffic, or third-party subjects.

[1] 我们班这段时间确实一直很散漫，一点也不像大三学长学姐的样子，没有起到带头作用。

Our class has been really scattered recently, not at all like the seniors, and we did not play a leading role.

[2] 学长，对不起。周三我没有看到需要排版的信息，直到今天上午才发现，又因为一直有课，没能尽早完成任务，希望您原谅。

Senior, I’m sorry. I didn’t see the information posed on Wednesday until this morning, and I hope you will forgive me for not completing the task as early as possible because I have been in class.

In Example 1, the monitor apologized on behalf of the whole class to the teacher for not setting an example and not changing the scattered style of the class. Those led to the teacher’s angry outburst, and thus apologized, hoping that the teacher would give them another chance. In response to the offense, they acknowledged the subjectivity of the offense, seriously reflected on their fault, sincerely expressed their remorse, and hoped to get the teacher’s understanding and forgiveness. In example 2, a student who could not finish the task on time because he did not see the cell phone message in time. He admitted his fault, explained the reason, and expressed his apology hoping to get forgiveness from the other party. In addition, individuals also shirk their responsibility to apologize by explaining uncontrollable factors. As in example 3:

[3] 今天本来要参加会议的，突发事件没有参加，真的不好意思，下次会及时请假的。

I was supposed to attend the meeting today, but I didn’t participate in the meeting because of an unexpected event. I’m really sorry, and I will ask for leave in time next time.

In Example 3, the person apologized for not being able to attend the meeting because of an unexpected situation, and attributed blame to objective uncontrollable factors to reduce her responsibility.

4.2.2 Implicit explanation

In addition to attributing causes to subjective and objective reasons, individuals tend to reiterate and emphasize that their initial intention was not in line with this offense, that this offense started from a correct and positive point but the outcome of the event was not as expected, or the accidental nature of the offense (Hu Jiabei, 2020).

[4]对不起，我很多分享没有注意到你的感受，但你要相信我本意是完全不带炫耀的。

I’m sorry that I didn’t notice your feelings during my sharing, but you have to believe that I intended it to be completely without bragging.

[5]对不起宝，我真的没有那个意思。

I'm sorry Babe, I really didn't mean it that way.

In Example 4, the apologist unconsciously brought a hint of bragging into the conversation with a friend, making the other person uncomfortable. She apologized, emphasizing that she did not mean to brag. In example 5, the offended person felt that he has been treated indifferently and complained to the apologist. After the communication, the apologist realized that a misunderstanding had been caused and emphasized that she did not intend to be distant. The individual turns the situation into a good one by telling the other person, mainly through direct expression, that his or her original intention was not consistent with the offense. In implicit explanations, individuals also emphasize the incidental nature of the offense to enhance the power of the apology and to absolve themselves of blame, as in Example 6, where the apologist explained that getting up on the wrong side of the bed was an isolated incident and not a regular occurrence.

[6] 啊啦啦今天太累了没跟你说就直接上你床了，要是清醒的话就不会了，对不起。

Ahlala, I was too tired to tell you today, and I went straight to your bed.

As can be seen, whether explaining their own subjective involvement in the offending behavior or the inconsistency between their personal initial intention and the offending event, or emphasizing the accidental nature of the offending event, individuals acknowledge their own negligent behavior and take the initiative to apologize to seek the other party's understanding and redeem their image or reputation in the other party's mind.

4.3 Self-blaming

Self-blame strategy is an expression in which the apologizer admits that he or she did something wrong, such as "I'm sorry that we let you down so much, we just did it to make sure there is no gap between us and you". In contrast to public apologies, individuals use more self-blame strategies in private apologies (42 times, accounting for 18.92%). Self-blame strategies were more often presented in a direct manner (24 times, accounting for 57.14%), i.e., directly acknowledging oneself as the responsible party, with expressions such as "I was wrong/it was my fault/my bad" being used more often. In addition, indirect apologies were also used quite often in private apologies, appearing 18 times (42.86%). On the one hand, due to the private nature of the personal private apology setting, individuals are more open to admit their mistakes directly; and on the other hand, self-blame indicates the sincerity of the apologizer toward the apologized person, so individuals tend to choose direct self-blame (Kimoga, 2010).

4.3.1 Direct self-blaming

Typical direct self-blame is found in everyday conversations, where the expression "I was wrong/it was my fault/ my bad" (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981) is used to acknowledge mistakes. The present corpus shows that this strategy is also used in non-face-to-face private apologies in social media to express a sincere acknowledgement of wrongdoing. For example, in Example 7, the apologist directly admits his mistake to the apologized person, demonstrating a sincere apologetic attitude.

[7] 我的错，对不起宝贝。

My bad, sorry baby.

4.3.2 Indirect self-blaming

Indirect self-blame refers to verbal expressions with explicit avoidance of taking responsibility, where the apologizer indirectly acknowledges his or her offending behavior. In this study's corpus, since the private apologies occurred on social media, the apologists often used emoticons, emojis, or onomatopoeic words of cry, such as "Ooo/555" to euphemistically express their apologies and indirectly acknowledge their offenses. For example, in Example 8, the apologist apologizes directly to the person being apologized to, and later attaches an emoji to politely express his or her apology again

[8] 对不起大家（大哭表情包）

I'm sorry, everyone. (crying emoji)

In conclusion, when choosing a self-blaming strategy, individuals can use social media to make the accusation less heavy and can send related emojis or emoticons to ease the tension and awkwardness between the two parties and avoid deterioration of the relationship.

4.4 Caring for the offended

The speaker's caring for the offended is also one of the commonly used apology strategies (Blumkulka & Olshtain, 1984), and this apology strategy was also frequently chosen in personal apologies (15 times, accounting for 6.76%). The apologist's care for the offended party strategy is reflected in the offending party's awareness of the other party's aggravation and attention to comfort the offended party's emotions, e.g., "I've been pretty bad to you lately and often forget to return your messages and ignore your feelings". Direct concern in personal private apology can express that the offending party is aware of the impact they have caused to the injured party. What's more, they can also get inside the other one's mind and better eliminate the gap between the two parties. For example, in example 9, the speaker showed her attention and care towards the offended.

[9] 也真心希望你能够遇见合适而真心相爱的人。

I also sincerely hope that you will meet the right person and truly love each other.

4.5 Offering repair

Offering repair is a further personal fix to the offended person's face or rights, informing the offended person of the subsequent acts, such as "I'm sorry, next time I'll send you a box of masks". The low frequency of this strategy (11 times, accounting for 14.29%) echoes the results of everyday apologies in the study by Heritage et al. (2019). Offering repair strategies means that the apologist points out what he or she will do next time, such as "I'm sorry, next time I'll send you a box of face masks." The corpus shows that the individual is able to make urgent repairs after the offense has occurred in order to preserve the relationship with the offended person and the apologist's face. For example, in Example 10, the apologizer provided repair to remedy the offense immediately after explaining the reason directly to the apologized person.

[10] 我回错信息了，下次送个面膜给你吧。

I replied to the wrong person, I'll send you a mask next time.

The repair strategy reflects the individual's measures to make amends to the offended person. Demonstrating appropriate measures taken and future fixes can go some way to portraying the individual as a positive and responsible person, thereby reducing the likelihood that the relationship will deteriorate as a result of the offense.

4.6 Promising to avoid

Promising to avoid refers to the apologizer's use of words that express commitment or determination, such as "I'm sorry, don't be mad after you wake up. It won't happen again". Apologists rarely use commitment avoidance in everyday spoken apologies (Harris et al., 2006; Kador, 2009), and similarly, this strategy is used less frequently in private apologies on social media (7 times, accounting for 3.15%). Individuals make promises by being affirmative, direct, and clear to enhance the restorative language power of the apology and maximize the repair of the relationship with the offended person.

[11] 下次不会再这样了！

It won't happen next time!

As in Example 11, the apologizer promised to avoid something in the future, demonstrating his sincere apologetic attitude. Indirect promises such as "I'll try to next time" show that the apologist has left himself or herself room for maneuver while repairing trust.

4.7 Showing measures done

The strategy of showing measures done serves to repair the identity of the individual, which indicates that the individual fixes the offense. This strategy is infrequently employed in the present

dataset (5 times, accounting for 2.70%). While at the same time the apologist intends to be able to project an image as prompt, reliable and responsible, thus preserving the positive face of the individual and reconstructing the trust relationship. Show what has been done means that the apologist expresses his or her apology with the expression “past tense + verb of measure”, such as “I’m sorry, but let me make it clear that first of all, she saw that you were my top in WeChat. I did tell her about our relationship, and we both introduced our friends to each other. Then there will be no burden.” As in Example 12, the speaker apologized directly to the offended person and then demonstrated the measures that have been taken to meet the requirements set forth by the offended person.

[12] 不好意思, 我已经报过寝了。

I’m sorry, I’ve already checked in.

4.8 Expressing will

In addition, individuals show their determination to improve their development and further optimize their behavior by making promises to the offended person in order to gain their understanding and subsequent trust. This strategy is also infrequently employed in the present dataset (5 times, accounting for 2.70%). For example, “words that express commitment + words that indicate future measures/changes” are used. For example, in Example 13, the apologizer apologizes to the counselor on behalf of the whole class for the poor school spirit in the class, and the apology shows a determination to present a better attitude toward learning in the future.

[13] 对不起, 我们让您这么失望, ...接下来的时间里, 我们能做的就是让各位专业老师看到我们的改变。

I’m sorry that we let you down so much, ... All we can do in the next few days is to show all the professional teachers that we have changed ourselves a lot.

5. Discussion

This study shows that individuals’ private apologies mostly use the strategies of expressing apology, explaining reason, self-blaming, and caring for the offended, and less often use the strategies of offering repair, promising to avoid, showing measures done, and expressing will. The results suggest that when individuals apologize privately on the social platform WeChat, they use appropriate language strategies to gain understanding and maintain friendly interpersonal relationships between them. Individuals in crisis relationships apply private apologies to preserve their positive image, save the dignity of the offended party, and build a framework for continuing to maintain a harmonious relationship linguistic competence, and achieve their linguistic purposes through different strategies in private apologies on WeChat.

First of all, individuals preserve their positive image by apologizing so that they do not continue to be morally condemned. Individuals use more solemn expressions such as “I am sorry” when apologizing, acknowledge the subjectivity of their personal responsibility and take responsibility for the offense when explaining the reason, and build a positive personal image of being responsible. Individuals are morally bound to take responsibility for their offenses, to show their commitment to avoid them in the future, and to express their will, all of which indicate their commitment to self-improvement (Koehn, 2013; Zhang & Vásquez, 2014), with the aim of maintaining a friendly relationship. However, the above strategies are also two-sided. The four strategies of offering repair, promising to avoid, showing measures done, and expressing will are less frequently used by individuals to express their apology. They often just apologize for the offense itself, but rarely to make a promise not to make the same mistake again; they also imply that they are not capable of guaranteeing that such offenses will not be repeated. Although the frequency of use of the above four strategies is relatively low, they can also reflect the discursive features of self-identity and behavior management in personal private apologies, consistent with the low frequency in everyday spoken apologies or social media corporate-customer one-on-one apologies (Page, 2014; Heritage et al.,

2019), and contrary to corporate public apology strategies in business context with the more obvious features of self-risk aversion.

Second, the individuals apologize through self-blame and sincere admissions of fault, instead enabling the situation to be calmed down more quickly. Adequate and practical language strategies can defuse potential conflicts and threats arising from them (Lakoff, 1989), and individuals not only minimize self-threats through a two-sided apology strategy, but also justify their offenses and interpersonal conflicts through explanatory texts. The main manifestations are: (1) apologetic expressions mostly stereotype apologetic behavior twice, blurring the nature of offense and weakening the severity of offense to downplay the serious consequences of offensive behavior. (2) the use of indirect attribution of blame is accompanied by the use of active direct self-blame. The individual's active and positive admission of fault is more effective in alleviating the offended person's anger or resentment than when the injured party comes to confront him/her (Lee & Chuang, 2012), while emphasizing the individual as the subject of problem solving (Page, 2014) in order to redeem and maintain his/her positive image. (3) frequent use of explanatory notes and apologies. According to Page (2014), it was found that companies on social media use less explanatory strategies when apologizing one-on-one to customers. In contrast, this study found that in private personal apologies on social platforms, individuals mostly use self-justification to maintain their reputation and trustworthiness. The performance is in line with the need for online socialization, where the speaker tries to avoid misunderstandings and give a convincing explanation for personal words and actions. Those all aim to no longer be morally inferior and to normally maintain their positive image including reputation (Ran & Yang, 2016). When a personal explanation is given, it is a way of expressing that the original intent of the event was not consistent with the offense by acknowledging the subjectivity of the event and showing the true "good self" (Goffman, 1971).

Third, personal private apologies preserve the offended party's face, dignity, and emotions. In some cases where it is impossible to repair the offense, individuals put themselves in the shoes of the offended party by showing concern for the offended party, promising to avoid expressing their will. They show their remorse and promise not to repeat the offense next time, thus preserving their harmonious relationship.

In general, the individual has a pronounced sense of discursive reinforcement for the maintenance of autonomous social rights. Their apology strategy is mainly used to maintain their positive image and reduce self-blame. Secondly, it can also repair the face and dignity of the listener, so as to finally resolve the offensive crisis and repair the friendly interpersonal relationship between both parties.

6. Conclusion

This paper mainly adopts qualitative analysis to explore the apology strategies in 65 WeChat apology conversations. The result shows that apologizers' apology strategies in private WeChat conversations include expressing apology, explaining reason, self-blaming, caring for the offended, offering repair, promising to avoid, showing measures done, and expressing will.

Individuals' private apologies on social media are mainly devoted to reducing the severity of the offense and maintaining their positive image as much as possible, while regaining the trust of the listener through certain remedial measures such as offering repair and expressing commitment to achieve the purpose of repairing the friendly interpersonal relationship between the two parties and finally dissolving the offense crisis event. However, the data collection sample in this paper is small, and future studies can expand the sample size to obtain more detailed and adequate types of apology strategies. In addition, future research could focus on the cross-cultural comparison of apology strategies.

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