

**Virtual Study room on social media  
“Study with me” videos on *Bilibili* among Chinese  
university students**

**by  
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Bachelor of Arts, Minzu University of China, 2019

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## Abstract

“Study with me” is a phenomenal video topic on the internet. In these videos, university students document their study process and share/livestream these videos online. Through ethnographic research on “study with me” videos and its virtual community within *Bilibili*, this project expects to understand why self-study videos perpetuate on the internet, evaluate the efficiency of this new study style, and examine the mentality and rationality behind this cyber self-study phenomenon. Based on investigations on *Bilibili*, SWM videos, and interactions within this virtual study space, this thesis concludes a manual grounded by student-initiated study habits that can be employed by educators and institutes to make online education more accessible and inclusive in the new normal of post-COVID.

**Keywords:** Computer mediated communication; Generation Z; Self-regulated learning; Virtual study community

## Dedication

*To students born into this digital age.*

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## List of Acronyms

SRL	Self-regulated learning
SWM	Study with me

# Introduction

With the increasing internet access in China, digital devices are embedded into everyday life. As of June 2021, China's internet penetration had reached 71.6%<sup>1</sup>. From online shopping, daily entertainment, to public transit, the internet is closely associated with one's access to social services and their connections with others. University students in 2010s and 2020s are categorized into Generation Z.<sup>2</sup> Besides using internet as a tool to search for information, Generation Z recognizes the internet as a space to share personal life and build virtual connections with people holding similar interests (Singh, 2014; Jaleniauskiene & Juceviciene, 2015; Giray 2022). Further, despite that the concept of Generation Z was originally discussed in the west, with the technology advancement in Asia, this word has been used by scholars to describe Asian students' use of technology and their dependences on the internet (Kennedy & Fox 2013; Parry, 2020). While digital natives rely tremendously on the internet in their personal life, universities actively develop online education to accommodate this generation's use of the internet, and their endeavors have been accelerated with the outbreak of COVID.

The concept of "generation" in Chinese studies has been explained in multiple ways and under different frameworks in relation to political and historical connotations. It is common to refer to age cohorts in China as different generations, for instance, the first generation in China consists of people born before 1949, and those growing up after 1989 are the fifth generation. Further, the Chinese media also refer to generations based on their date of birth. For example, discussions on Chinese youth born between 1980 and 1989 are categorized as examinations of "post-1980s generation" (Rosen, 2009; Tan & Cheng, 2020). Besides, scholars studying Chinese generations use different age cohorts to infer people's attitudes, values, experiences within different socio-economic historical contexts, and these researchers academically construct the notion of generation with a centre inquiry from the lens of western democracies (Bischoping &

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics from "The 48th Statistical Report on China's Internet Development".  
<https://www.cnnic.com.cn/IDR/ReportDownloads/202111/P020211119394556095096.pdf>.  
Accessed 15 March 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Generation Z, along with "I-generation", "net-gen", and "digital natives", describe youth born in the mid-1990s through the late 2010s. Marc Prensky in his Article "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants" defined Generation Z as "digital natives"- they have spent their entire lives surrounded by and using computers, videogames, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age.

Gao, 2018). Different from this emphasis of political and historical factors, Generation Z, in this paper, inherits Prensky's definition and addresses young people's use of the technology and their constant access to the internet. Kalkhurst (2018) discusses Generation Z under this framework, and explains that Gen Z students use up to five screens when they learn, including smartphones, televisions, tablets, laptops, and desktops. And these technologies account for 10 hours of their daily activities. This research investigates university students, as Generation Z, their "outside classroom" learning practices on the internet, especially since the outbreak of the pandemic.

Since early 2020, city lockdowns and school closures were imposed world-widely to control the spread of COVID pandemic. As of August 2020, over 105 countries had enforced localized closures, and more than 1 billion learners had been affected by this crisis.<sup>3</sup> Online education was elevated from optional activities to universities' daily operations. In China, the user size of online education reached 325 million in December 2020, and this number once hit 423 million when the epidemic was dominant in early 2022.<sup>4</sup> Higher education was experiencing an unprecedented challenges as institutions, educators, and students connected entirely over the internet. Instructors were expected to deliver online courses as they would have done in-person courses, and students were encouraged to perform online self-directed learning (Zhu and Jing, 2020). With the dominance of COVID and public health orders, institutional efforts in online course delivery and students' self-directed learning were extended in this epidemic.

Despite virtual resources offered by schools, university students still increasingly suffered from both practical and emotional difficulties when they studied alone from home, including fear, anxiety, boredom, loneliness, depression (Aristovnik et al. 2020; Brooks, 2020; Cao, 2020; Karalis, 2020; Liu, 2020; Perz 2020; Ma, 2021). This uncertainty of schooling and fear of "study from home forever", affected not only university students' schoolwork, but all perspectives of their life, including time management, relationship building, and career advancement opportunities. Without physical attendance on campuses, university students experienced different types of

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<sup>3</sup> Statistics from UNESCO news reports. <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>. Accessed 7 August 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Statistics from "The 48th Statistical Report on China's Internet Development". <https://www.cnnic.com.cn/IDR/ReportDownloads/202111/P020211119394556095096.pdf>. Accessed 15 March 2022.

loss, including in-person friendships, chances to access student services, mentorship opportunities from faculty members and senior students. Thus, students' educational experience at home during COVID, especially how they approached self-regulated learning, is not only an educational topic that needs to be addressed arising out of the epidemic, but also a sociological issue begging urgent awareness to accommodate the "new normal" in a post-COVID era.

Although university students struggled with diverse challenges during COVID when they studied alone at home, some students in China's internet space innovatively incorporated social media into their learning to combat these difficulties and enhanced their individual learning experience. They used productivity mobile applications, shared daily study journals with others on social media, and contributed to online study-support groups. Despite facing different difficulties, they actively utilized their advantages as Generation Z, and sought support on the internet to facilitate their individual study process. In fact, this attempt to employ the internet in a self-study space has been around for several years, for instance, people use Forest<sup>5</sup> to manage their time and combat phone addictions, and this mobile application has received wide recognition as a tool to boost users' productivity. Although young people have incorporated various tools into their self-study process before this epidemic, much of the prominence of virtual study space came about as a result of COVID-19.

"Study with me" (SWM) videos represent a virtual niche culture engaged by Generation Z on video-sharing platforms in both China and the western world. In these videos, young people document their actual study process using a video camera and share these videos on social media via both uploaded video channels and livestream functions. In virtual study rooms initiated by SWM videos, university students study alone from home; meanwhile, they play SWM videos on their digital devices. In this shared online self-study space, video creators and their audience members study together without the boundary of time and space. While some people criticize the efficiency of this study style, many young adults, especially university students in China, claim that these videos help them block out unnecessary distractions, concentrate on their work, survive their final exams, and eventually achieve their study goals.

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<sup>5</sup> Forest is one of the most famous time-tracking apps world widely. As of 2022 May, it has over 40 million active users around the world.

Contrast to traditional views that digital devices and social media are distractions of individual study activities, SWM videos demonstrate university students' endeavor in incorporating social media to support their self-study sessions. These videos are used to block out study distractions at home, for instance, household noises, temptations from video games, and loss of motivation. As digital natives, digital devices are embedded into students' everyday life, including their individual study process. Thus, participants of SWM videos approach "dedicated study space" with more flexibility, and innovatively use social media and online connections to create new study space. This genre of videos has been utilized by students in their individual study time since the early 2010s, yet it did not enter public discussion until the outbreak of COVID-19.

In traditional university norms prior to COVID, students used school libraries or classrooms as dedicated space to work and study. This situation, unfortunately, could not be sustained during the pandemic when campuses were closed. However, virtual study rooms, initiated by SWM videos on social media, offered an alternative dedicated study space for university students that they had access to when studying alone at home. Mediated by the internet, students are provided with an opportunity to establish customized virtual self-study space, build connections with others, and participate in an online study-support community that is distinct from traditional offline study space, including libraries and classrooms. Although universities and students are gradually going back to campuses these days, the impact of COVID on people's life habits has persuaded universities to make strategic changes and accommodate students' needs in the post-COVID era.

Besides, this online study option is also significant for knowledge delivery on a global scale, such as international students who live in different regions from their campuses. Although schools can offer diverse resources and academic assistance remotely, a customized study space and a study-support community engaged by peers on the internet are potentially beneficial to boost students' motivation to access school services and form self-regulated learning habits. Thus, students' self-learning process in this epidemic, especially how they innovatively incorporated generational use of the internet to support individual study process at home, deserves a close investigation.



This research draws from a well-developed video-sharing platform in China, *Bilibili*,<sup>6</sup> and examines university students' online self-study rooms and interactions initiated by SWM videos. Although *Bilibili* is originally an entertainment-focused platform, evidence has shown that this website is widely used by young people for the purpose of studying. As the most extended livestream video topic on *Bilibili* in 2018, “ ‘study with me’ reached 1,460,000 hours in total” (Hu & Zhang, 2019). One of the most important mainstream news media in China, CCTV News, commented that “*Bilibili* is a new socialized study platform,” and reported that over 18.27 million people had studied on this platform in 2019, and this doubled the number of people attending the national entrance examination of China (Huang, 2019). As *Bilibili* is recognized as a new socialized study platform by Chinese mainstream media, this research digs into *Bilibili*'s historical trajectory, and investigates its endeavors on adding “study” as a main feature into this entertainment-focused video-sharing platform. With this tracking of historical evidence, this research offers some reasons as to why students choose *Bilibili* over other social media platforms for the purpose of studying.

Besides an overview of *Bilibili*'s efforts of engaging the youth, this research inquires university students' mentality and rationality in incorporating SWM videos into their self-regulated learning process at home. Thus, both qualitative and quantitative research approaches are incorporated in the examination of this virtual self-study phenomenon. With an ethnographic research mindset, I have observed, participated, and immersed myself into this online study space for two and a half years. Through both content analysis and online participants' studies, this research aims to understand Chinese university students' new study habits on the internet, including their individual study goals and learning purposes within China's dominant learning cultures, students' perceptions of their “study” practices, and how they approach “efficiency” in their individual learning process.

Through an analysis of elements of “study with me” videos, this research scrutinizes how visual and audio factors in this video genre help university students enhance the “efficiency” of their study practices, and what features attract students to watch these videos. Furthermore, with both online surveys and in-depth interviews, this

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<sup>6</sup> *Bilibili* is a popular video sharing and livestreaming platform on Chinese internet. This platform is widely recognized for its focus on Anime, comics, and games (ACG).

project asks how computer mediated communication enabled by SWM videos on *Bilibili* helps university students develop new study habits and confront distractions when they study alone from home. With a deeper understanding of university students' pioneering efforts in enhancing their self-regulated learning experience, this research concludes a manual grounded from the youth's study habits that can be potentially employed by educators, institutions, governments to make online education more accessible and flexible in a post-COVID world.

This thesis is composed of an introduction and seven chapters. Following a succinct outline of the context, research questions and methodologies of this study in the introduction, Chapter 1 situates the exploration of SWM videos at existing scholars' work. Although self-study videos have not been widely investigated in the academic world, some newspaper reporters have brought this phenomenon into the public discussion, and several young scholars in China have briefly mentioned students' use of the internet for self-study purposes in their research into vlogs, productivity mobile applications, and ASMR videos. Besides, dominant learning cultures in China are hugely influenced by Chinese history and the governments' education policy: examination-based social selection system. Within this context, Chinese university students' perception to "study" affects not only their study goals, but also their self-regulated learning practices.

Chapter 2 focuses on the methods of this project. This research borrows Joseph Walther's proposal of computer mediated communication (CMC). He argues that CMC consists of three forms of interactions - impersonal, interpersonal, and hyperpersonal (1999). Different interactions initiate different relationships between message senders and receivers. Through an analysis of students' interactions initiated by SWM videos in *Bilibili*, this research examines functions of CMC interactions in this online study community, and how students utilize three forms of interactions to support both peers and themselves in their self-regulated learning process at home. In order to acquire concrete data evidence for further discussion, this research collects video samples, observes user interactions in both comments and *Danmu*, and designs online surveys and in-depth interviews, for future analysis of overarching characteristics of this virtual study community with a grassroots research mindset.

After articulating the theoretical framework and methods of this study, Chapter 3 looks into *Bilibili*'s endeavors in both its features of "entertainment" and "education." Through an overview of this video-sharing platform, knowledge about why university students in China's virtual space choose to upload "study with me" videos into this website are explored. This chapter highlights *Bilibili*'s efforts in creating a "study" atmosphere in an entertainment-oriented platform.

Chapter 4 presents my detailed content analysis of "study with me" videos. Based on video samples I collected from *Bilibili*, I divide "study with me" videos into 2 delivery forms and 3 content types. Although this research defines self-study videos as a genre that contains minimal knowledge, some young people also use this video topic to share their study tips. Thus, I include "experience/resources sharing" in my content analysis and explore students' innovative methods to share their self-learning outcome in SWM videos.

Besides general classification of SWM videos, dominant video elements and their functional messages in students' self-study process are closely investigated in Chapter 5. From both visual and audio elements, I conclude two major patterns of Generation Z's self-study phenomenon, including the presence of self-study images and generational study habits. Besides creating an endeavor in productivity and personal success, students address self-care and wellness in their SRL at home with various elements and their unique features, SWM videos function as a background music, generate study ambience, and offer a dedicated study space for students regardless of physical locations or real-world scenarios. Further, critics of these two major patterns of student's learning space are presented to conclude this chapter. Although "the presence of self-study images" and "generational study habits" in "study with me" videos partially demonstrate video uploaders' real-time individual learning process, the incorporation of different video elements may come from reasons outside of "study" purposes, for instance, performances of "fake study" sessions to attract potential student audience and online followers, showing off luxurious stationeries to illustrate middle class aesthetics.

A critique of Joseph Walther's proposal on three forms of computer-mediated communication is incorporated in Chapter 6 to discuss students' interactions within the self-study space initiated by "study with me" videos on *Bilibili*. Based on both responses from online surveys and in-depth interviews, I analyze the effectiveness of SWM in

students' self-regulated learning practices, and conclude that Chinese university students build dynamic connections in SWM virtual space to support their preparation for important exams, tests, and assessments. Different from the emphasis of "critical thinking" of study practice, students in China focus more on how to succeed in the examination-based social selection system. From impersonal, interpersonal, to hyperpersonal, they use SWM and relationships within this online community to facilitate their self-regulated learning. Although they prioritize different interactions, self-study is portrayed as the core intention of this virtual study phenomenon by users of SWM.

This thesis ends with a discussion of the implications of virtual study space and limitations of this research in Chapter 7. Although students use these videos for different purposes, a virtual dedicated self-study space is beneficial for students in their self-regulated learning, especially for student groups who lack a dedicated study space due to different demographic and socio-economic backgrounds. Meanwhile, a virtually customized individual study space increases education flexibility and adaptability for students with various neurological conditions. SWM virtual study style, furthermore, is beneficial to make higher education in post COVID more inclusive and accessible to different student groups. Thus, lessons learned from this virtual study phenomenon are helpful for both educators and students in higher education to adapt to the new normal in the post-COVID era. However, due to limited time and resources, this thesis is only a starting point of the discussion on SWM videos and university students' generational learning habits. Limitations of this thesis and suggestions for future research are presented at the end of this thesis.

# Chapter 1. Literature Review

## 1.1. “Study with me” stream in Media

As a relatively new topic, not too many scholars have directly investigated this online self-study phenomenon. However, because of its prevalence and huge online influence, the concept of “study with me” has been extensively covered in the local newspapers in China. Under China’s mainstream narrative of “all people learning, lifelong learning,” these news articles introduced the “study with me” videos to the public, discussing how these videos assist students’ self-study process, and why this online study style aligns with the needs of the Generation Z. Most journalist reports tend to applaud this online study phenomenon. Although most of these reports have concluded positive effects of this online study style, they nevertheless fail to share an in-depth analysis and scientific evidence to support their conclusions.

An article from *China Science Daily* reports that “‘study with me’ brings motivation and lateral supervision to both its producers and the audience” (Hu & Zhang, 2019). Reporters from *Southern Metropolis Daily* explore further and explain reasons why young adults are involved in this study style: “students in 2010s are born into new media. Internet is no longer restricted to information searching and daily entertainment, the youth are now living on the Internet, literally” (Mu, 2020). Mu acknowledges the new lifestyle of the Generation Z in China. As digital natives, Chinese university students’ life is inherently woven into the internet, and their incorporation of the internet into a self-study process results from students’ generational dependence on the internet. With the outbreak of the COVID pandemic, many more articles about the “study with me” stream have been published in China, which brought more public attention to this online study style. Besides the positive effects, journalists have brought online self-study behaviors into the context of COVID remote learning, and addressed how these SWM videos help students to confront extreme competition for educational and career opportunities (Pa, 2021). However, due to the information-sharing nature of news articles, authors of these reports focus more on descriptions of this online study trend. Instead of in-depth scientific analysis, their main purpose is to introduce this phenomenon to the public, and advocate for different modalities of self-study tools on the internet.

Similar to the perpetuation of “study with me” in China, this video theme is also popular in regions outside of China, and has attracted the attention of the journalists in the West. Some YouTube observers conclude that “self-study” videos give students new study tools and help them stay focused (Welsh, 2019; Snyder, 2019). As an increasingly prevailing video topic, “study with me” also has different modalities in both Japan and South Korea. This video genre is known as “benkyou douga (勉強動画)” in Japan, and “Gongbang (공부)” in South Korea. Summarized from interviews with video creators, news journalists reported that these videos support creators’ self-study process tremendously, and help them gain a huge amount of online followers (Ashcraft, 2018; Smith, 2018; Spooky, 2018). Although these journal articles address how self-study video streams help students increase their productivity, as with the Chinese news articles, little data was available to support their conclusion of the effectiveness of this new “study tool” to both video creators and the audience. Without an in-depth analysis of video elements and an observation of participants’ study experience, these reports only presented authors’ general impressions of this study style. In their discussion, these authors perceived “study with me” as only study tools in students’ study process. Without clear definitions of study tools and styles in the discussion of study with me videos, they only focus on this phenomenon, and ignore the online study style and space brought by these video streams.

Although educational systems and workspace expectations vary immensely in different regions of the world, learners share similar anxiety and pressure when facing project deadlines, huge workloads at school, especially during the COVID pandemic when most students were forced to work and study alone from home. While these news articles brought self-study videos to public attention, few scientific studies have been implemented to investigate the effectiveness of “study with me” programmes, and to examine the attractiveness of this video topic from the audience’s perspective. Through virtual ethnographic research on this self-study video topic, this research intends to collect video samples, observe students’ online interactions, and introduce concrete data to illustrate students’ challenges when studying alone at home, and investigates their creative methods in enhancing self-study ambience with the assistance of these videos and their interactions with others in this online study space.

## 1.2. “Study with me” in Vlog

Although research on SWM videos and students’ online self-study is still in the early stages, some scholars have briefly mentioned this video topic in their investigation of vlogging (video blogging<sup>7</sup>) trends in China. With the popularity and normalization of new media and video-sharing platforms, young Chinese people document and upload their vlogs to social media, sharing their personal life experiences. Based on Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis approach to human social interaction (2002), vlogs are recognized as a media for video creators to exhibit their “performances” in life, and a channel to satisfy the audience desire to peek into other’s lives (Li, 2017; Yang, 2020; Zhu, 2020; Tian, 2020; Zhang, 2020). “Study with me,” in these research projects, categorized as a sub-genre of vlogs, is also a means through which vloggers can exhibit their “study life” and cater to the emotional needs of their viewers (Zhu, 2020; Tian, 2020; Zhang, 2020). Similarly, Laura Ludena, Global Head of Research for YouTube Ads, identified “study with me” videos into the category of “with me” videos including cooking, shopping, cleaning, or exercising. Common places shown from these videos, she proposed that viewers acquire company, in-depth information, and motivation from vloggers’ real-life experience (2019).

Besides pre-recorded vlogs, people also use video streaming to share their personal life and interact with one another synchronously. Given the performative nature of video streaming and interactions between streamers and viewers within the streaming process, scholars concluded that parasocial interactions<sup>8</sup> initiated a strong sense of perceived intimacy for viewers, as streamers are speaking in a conversational tone in the video camera (Anjani et al., 2020). From entertainment-focused streaming (video games and eSports) (Hamilton et al., 2014; Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017), to real-life live videos (eating and shopping) (Anjani et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021), video creators utilize an inviting tone in their narratives in streaming sessions to engage their audience

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<sup>7</sup> According to Collins dictionary, “A vlog is a set of videos that someone regularly posts on the internet in which they record their thoughts or experiences or talk about a subject.”

<sup>8</sup> Donald Horton and R Richard proposed this form of interaction in 1956. This interaction refers to a state of psychological relationship experienced by the audience in their mediated encounters with performers in mass media industries, for instance, television and online video platforms.



and initiate a sense of company and parasocial interactions, eventually result in a shared emotional connection between video creators and the audience.

Unlike most vlogs featuring “conversational tones” within the video camera, “study with me” videos lack this explicit emphasis on viewer-streamer interactions. Instead, according to Lee’s observation (2021), the closest type of live streaming video is live videos of “nonhuman agents with chill music”. In such videos, viewers cannot interact in the same ways as they would do with human streamers, yet the animation still offers a sense of comfort. Autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR) is a cross-sensory phenomenon featured by a static-like sensation which originates from the head and disperses throughout the body resulting in a relaxed state (Barratt & Davis, 2015). And this sensation can be triggered by visual and auditory stimuli in real life. In recent years, many ASMR-inducing YouTube channels have been created and helped the audience to experience the sensation, relax, and alleviate anxiety and stress (Del Campo & Kehle, 2016; Poerio et al., 2018; McErlean et al., 2020). Similar to these ASMR videos, “study with me” videos simulate dynamic “visual and auditory stimuli” and create different ambiances for viewers to experience.

Although scholars briefly mentioned SWM videos in their discussion of effects of vlogs and parasocial interactions in livestreaming videos, the categorization and definition of “study with me” into the umbrella video theme “vlog”, is simplified and generalized for the analysis of students’ online learning activities and the role of virtual study space in their individual learning process, especially in the epidemic. Although real-life experience in vlogs equips viewers with both informational and emotional support in diverse life occasions, how “study with me” videos facilitate viewers’ individual studying process, especially the functions of video elements and online interactions within this virtual space, requires a more detailed examination. Furthermore, unlike most vlogs and video streaming topics, SWM video stream lacks creators’ explicit conversational tones in their videos. Instead, a dominant feature of this video theme is the presentation of video creators’ authentic individual study process, with minimal conversations within video content. Similar to ASMR videos, “study with me” simulate dynamic “stimuli” without explicit emphasis on viewer-streamer interactions. Without the “conversational tone” used by most vloggers in their videos, parasocial interactions discussed in previous research begs for further investigation in this virtual self-study space.



### 1.3. Dominant Learning cultures in China

China is a society with an extensive tradition of examination-based social selection system. From the establishment of *Keju*<sup>9</sup> (a competitive civil service examination system) in ancient China during the Sui Dynasty, to the implementation of *Gaokao*<sup>10</sup> (the National College Examination) in 1952 by the newly founded People's Republic of China, the education-based evaluation method has been used as a top-down social selection system by the central government (Liu, 2016; Jiang & Guo, 2020). *Gaokao*, interpreted as a “high-stake test” in contemporary China, is a curriculum-based exam that evaluates students’ “mastery of the subjects that they learned in high school (Bai, Chi, & Qian, 2014; Muthanna & Sang, 2016)”. Lian (2011) commented that *Gaokao*, compared to the American test, such as Students’ Achievement Test (SAT), is more intensive regarding the level of competitiveness, thus results in greater challenges for students in China. Furthermore, “high-stake tests” in China are not limited to *Gaokao*. With the inherited examination-based social selection system, dynamic exams are designed by China’s governments for students to acquire academic and professional credentials, and “achieve” social status upward mobility, including *Kaoyan*<sup>11</sup>, civil service entrance examination, certificate exams.

Besides traditions and practices of examination-based selection system, Liu proposed that China’s communist party strategically “expanded higher education as an integral part of the ‘Development and Stability’ (发展与稳定) during the 1980s to deal with the turbulent reality and the ideology vacuum(2016)” resulted from the “Reform and Opening-up”(改革开放) policy. Despite the Party decided to develop market economy and open the country to the world, political and social pressures and conflicts consequently appeared, for instance, widened inequality. *Gaokao*, with its feature of exam-based selection, addressed the notion of equalness in social status upward mobility, thus attracted the Party’s attention and became one of the most important

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<sup>9</sup> *Keju*, known as the imperial examination, was a civil-service examination in imperial China. Its purpose was to select candidates for the state bureaucracy, based on results of national-wide written exams.

<sup>10</sup> *Gaokao* is Chinese National College Entrance Examination. This exam is mandatory to all students around the nation who intend to attend college. Different from the west, in China, students’ final scores in *Gaokao* are the only criterion for their college enrolment and admission.

<sup>11</sup> *Kaoyan* is Chinese university students’ Postgraduate Program Admission Test.

channels for the central government to create “fair” opportunities and justify the widening inequality from the market-reform. Furthermore, the China’s communist party has embraced the notion of “all people learning, lifelong learning”, and incorporated it into the 16th Party Congress national report in 2002 as one of the most fundamental strategic development objectives. In 2020, Xi Jinping, explicitly readdressed the importance of “all people learning” and advocated for a more resourceful and convenient life-long learning system (Liu, 2020). Further, with a thorough censorship regime on media outlets and practices, China’s government has closely monitored news narratives, filtered out unwanted voices, and directed mainstream narratives in alignment with current policies (Xu & Albert, 2014; Tai, 2014; Chang et al., 2021). Thus, China, in the past several decades, has embraced *Gaokao*, promoted “all people learning, life-long learning”, and framed mainstream news with “positive” narratives in current educational policies and encourage society-wide learning-for-exam activities.

With the outbreak of COVID, much uncertainty has been brought to university students in China, including their learning environments, interactions with educators and other students, future employment expectations after graduation. Although mainstream news and national education policies have addressed the fairness of exam-based social selection system and promoted the notion of “all people learning, life-long learning”, students still have different difficulties that they need to resolve when they graduate and enter job markets. Moreover, due to strict public health orders and constant city-lockdowns in China, companies’ daily operations were shut down, and some led to mass layoffs (Li, 2021). Some university students, in response to the increased competition in job markets, seek either employment opportunities via the civil services’ exams or further their education by attending *Kaoyan* and enter graduate programs.

“Study with me”, as student-initiated learning activities on the internet, may shed some lights on the understanding of university students’ online study habits, and methods that they innovatively incorporated to support their exam preparation process when they study alone amid this pandemic in the context of China’s dominant exam-based learning cultures.

## 1.4. Online Education and Self-regulated Learning in the Context of COVID

Education scholars have conducted extensive research on how COVID impacted higher education, and proposed potential directions for university educators to follow so as to increase online education quality and adapt their courses for online learning scenarios. Marinoni presented several interconnected dimensions that impact the feasibility and the quality of distance learning (a. Technical infrastructure and accessibility; b. Distance learning competences and pedagogies; c. The field of study) (2020). This research portrayed these dimensions as both challenges and opportunities for higher education. Zhu and Liu (2020) further pointed out that technology infrastructure, including internet, artificial intelligence, and cloud-based platforms are just the starting points for a more flexible way of teaching and learning. Furthermore, scholars addressed that a new paradigm of teaching and learning should be considered, especially student-centred approaches (Plota & Karalis, 2019; Chandasiri, 2020; Thanassis & Natassa, 2020).

While education scholars addressed technical accessibility and pedagogy reforms in online education, their lens fell into institutional-level strategies (Tierney, 2014; Dabbagh, 2021). While new forms of teaching and learning were proposed, prior research overlooked the importance of students' individual learning process in this teaching and learning activity. Besides, with the proliferation of MOOCs<sup>12</sup> in higher education, the internet initiated endless online resources shared by both academic institutions and independent knowledge disseminators, thus university students acquire great agency and autonomy in their choices of learning materials and channels. However, despite educational assistance from their academic home institutions or resources from independent knowledge-sharing platforms and educators, students' ability to self-regulate their learning process plays an essential role in their success, especially in this epidemic where they could not receive traditional in-class supervision, offline peer-support, and dedicated study space as they would have in a pre-COVID era. Although schools and campuses gradually return to offline operations, the pandemic has

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<sup>12</sup> Massive open online courses (MOOCs) are one of the most prominent trends in higher education in recent years. "MOOCs" represent open access, global, free, video-based instructional content, videos, problem sets, and forums released through an online platform to high volume participants aiming to take a course or to be educated.

reshuffled our needs, which are now based on a new order (Pacheco, 2021). As technical infrastructure and curriculum changes are addressed for this new order in higher education, students' ability in self-regulated learning should also be taken into consideration.

Self-regulated learning (SRL) is the process where learners personally activate and sustain cognitions, affects, and behaviors that are systematically oriented toward the attainment of personal goals (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2012). As addressed by scholars, the ability of SRL is becoming a key ability for students as they are given enormous online recourses, yet lack autonomy in managing their learning pace (2012). And the need for this capability in students' success was escalated in COVID when students study alone at home. Prior research addressed both technological and social affordances in self-regulated learning. For instance, scholars conclude that digital productivity tools activate students' SRL ability via screen-time tracking, and personalized ambience (Kim et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2021); social connections initiate group coherence and companionship in a virtual learning community (Wang & Zhang, 2021). Although both technological and social perspectives were discussed in SRL research, how students integrate productivity tools into their virtual self-study practices, and their rationales in playing SWM videos through an entertainment-oriented platform in their individual study process are underexplored. Moreover, how students use "study with me" videos to facilitate their exam-preparation learning activities within China's exam-based learning cultures, begs for further investigation.

In light of the gaps identified in the literature review, the research questions motivating the current study were as follows:

1. Why did university students in China choose *Bilibili*, an entertainment-focused video website as their dedicated self-study platform before and within the epidemic?
2. What are students' self-regulated learning practices of "study with me" videos?
3. How do "study with me" videos facilitate participants' individual studying process, especially video elements and students' online interactions within this virtual space?

4. To what extent do students find “study with me” videos effective and helpful in students’ self-study process at home?
5. How can higher education institutions and educators incorporate students’ new study styles to increase students’ success and engagement in the new normal in post-COVID era?

## Chapter 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Theoretical Framework

With the internet's revolutionary change in the way people connect with one another, media scholars propose a new social order - "networked individualism." Elaborating on this new social order, Rainie and Wellman have redefined how the "individual" works and connects in current hybrid media ecologies (2012). They argue that the internet has reshaped people's perception of themselves and the way they interact with each other. Because of the swiftness and diffusion of the internet, in opposition to traditional social structures like families, neighborhoods and hierarchical structures, people function more as connected individuals and less as embedded group members. Surpassing the boundaries of physical distances, time differences, and even social statuses, people are given the chance to connect with others holding similar interests, goals, and concerns. With the individual's needs being the axis of his/her relationships, people are connected as individuals rather than as representatives of certain groups.

As access to the internet increased through connectivity and affordability, people gain more power over their online presence, social connections, and interactions within internet communities. With computer mediated communication (CMC) in online relationship building, people have space and time to optimize their self-presentation, refine messages, and look for their ideal "friends" and connections on the internet. Joseph Walther espoused a functional approach to communication research, and investigated how people approach social influence, impression management, and relationship formation in different contexts of CMC (Walther, 2015). He noted three relationship phases on the internet: impersonal, interpersonal, and hyperpersonal relationships (1996).

Impersonal CMC refers to task-oriented messages. The simplicity of message reduces cognitive loads when people get instructions, so one can fully focus on tasks, and minimize socioemotional concerns, thereby increasing their effectiveness in a task-oriented workspace. Interpersonal interactions are CMC's affordance in social relationships. Although CMC moderates impersonality due to the lack of non-verbal cues, Walther pointed that people tend to adapt their verbal behaviors to CMC and

initiate social information exchanges. Thus, with the increasing rate of social information changes over time, people will build interpersonal connections via CMC, as they would do in offline relationships. Following research on impersonal and interpersonal interactions, Walther proposed a new relationship phase mediated by CMC—hyperpersonal relationship— and suggested the hyperpersonal model of CMC as the foundation of this communication. This model consists of four concurrent routines, including receivers, senders, channels, and feedback. Moderated on the internet, Walther stated that “CMC that is more socially desirable than we tend to experience in parallel in-person interaction” (1999), and the logic behind this hyperpersonal intimacy is the inflated nature of feedback in computer-mediated communication.

Different interactions of CMC are illustrated in the virtual self-study space that initiated by SWM videos. And these interactions are displayed through different modalities. This research aims to understand different stages and forms of CMC interactions happening in this virtual space, and examines whether these interactions enhance students’ self-regulated learning practices in the context of China’s examination-based learning cultures. If so, this research further investigates why and how these interactions facilitate students’ individual learning process, mainly for their exam-preparation. With a better understanding of students’ CMC interactions and their relationship building in their self-study process, this research concludes with implications about how CMC communication supports students’ self-regulated learning, and proposes suggestions on methods to incorporate students’ new study styles into academic transition support in higher education.

## 2.2. Research Methods

This research addresses issues arising from both humanities and social sciences (communication and sociology). Thus, I conducted virtual ethnographic research and employed both qualitative and quantitative research approaches to investigate students' individual study practices within virtual spaces initiated by SWM videos. This research was initiated in 2020 and finished in 2022. In this time scale, I observed SWM video posts, video content and students' interactions in this online self-study space.

Besides observing this video trend on this platform, I recruited community members in this virtual space, and invited them to take online surveys and participate in semi-structured interviews. Through phenomenon observation, video content analysis, online surveys, and in-depth interviews, this research collected both videos and participants data for further discussion, including effectiveness of these videos in SRL, students' motivations and use of "study with me" videos, and their perceptions of interactions and relationships happening in this virtual community.

### 2.2.1. Observation

To get a general understanding of students' individual study practices on *Bilibili*, I not only observed "study with me" videos in this platform, but also investigated the mechanism of this video-sharing platform. I conducted a comprehensive research on how this platform works and *Bilibili's* endeavors in developing its "study" feature. Further, I observed "study with me" videos and audience interactions within this virtual study community. Out of the huge quantity of videos in this online platform, I browsed both pre-recorded videos and livestreaming videos using a phrase "study with me" on *Bilibili*, collected 200 most popular "study with me" videos on *Bilibili* (ranking by both numbers of viewers and comments) from May-December 2021, and conducted content analysis of these samples, including summarizing dominant video delivery forms, content types, and overarching elements of "study with me" video samples. Besides examining predominant video elements that "study with me" stream consists of, I explored how these features amplify self-study ambience and engage study immersion for university students in this virtual space. In discussing leading components of "study with me" videos in *Bilibili*, this research borrowed one representative video exemplar to delineate and explain how



these elements work together to augment the study experience of students when they play these videos during their self-study process.

After gaining a general understanding of “study with me” videos in both forms (pre-recorded and livestreaming), from these 200 videos, I randomly selected ten video sample interfaces and collected multimodal meaning making assemblage, including video titles, descriptions, and participants’ comments, to extract keywords and dominant themes from these data, to better facilitate my investigation into different forms of computer-mediated communication in this virtual self-study space. This source provided solid text content for me to understand students’ self-regulated learning (SER) goals, motivations, and practices in their individual study process.

### **2.2.2. Online Surveys and In-depth Interviews**

Besides observation on videos and interactions initiated under the name of “study with me” (SWM) videos, I conducted both online surveys and in-depth interviews with participants of SWM, and examined their experience of playing SWM videos in their individual study process, including how they get to know this topic, frequency and scenarios of playing SWM videos, interaction preferences and their motivations of participating in this virtual space. My goal was to find patterns in viewers’ individual study practices and their interactions with both videos and other viewers in *Bilibili*.

Participants of this research were Chinese university students using “study with me” when they study from home alone during the COVID-19 pandemic. The sampled group was designed to include at least 100 university students who were actively using *Bilibili* for the purpose of studying. My recruitment criteria were those who have watched SWM videos in their individual study process at least 10 times during this epidemic. Because this research observed Chinese university students’ study behaviors, Mandarin was used as the main language in recruitment, online surveys, and in-depth interviews. The participation in this research was divided into two steps: online surveys, and semi-structured interviews. At the beginning of the study, potential participants of online surveys were contacted via *Bilibili*’s Personal Message function. And the recruitment was written in a mini-text format. At the end of the online survey, participants were asked if they want to participate a 30–40-minute interview. I reached out to 10 people who

accepted my invitation to be interviewed at the end of online surveys, and offered 25 RMB (approximately CAD 5) for compensation.

Although the phenomenon of watching “study with me” videos in self-regulated learning (SRL) process have received huge attention from mainstream news in China, this study style is still in a pioneer stage, and the human population behind this video phenomenon is underexplored. To build a general picture of the participants of the “study with me” community, online surveys were used to collect basic information of “study with me” viewers, including: sex, age, academic discipline. Questions about when and where students watch these videos were also included in the survey so as to determine how these “study with me” streams support the self-study process. Moreover, since this research also investigated how interactions initiated in the name of “study” affect students’ focus span and productivity in their self-study process, questions on relationships within this virtual community was also be included in this online survey (See Appendix). The goal of this online survey was to establish an overall understanding of “study with me” participants, and probe university students’ preferences and scenarios in using these videos for the purposes of studying.

Besides general inquires of SWM participants’ profiles and their attitudes towards “study with me” videos and the virtual community through online surveys, in-depth interviews were also included in my research design. Considering the COVID social distancing recommendations and technologically mediated communication tools, I conducted these in-depth interviews remotely, and contacted Chinese university student participants in China from the west coast of Canada via their preferred methods. In-depth interviews and focus groups normally use a single standard set of questions and ask in turn to stimulate discussion and conversation in a given session (Lune & Berg, 2017). Thus, I used a semi-structured interview approach in these conversations. Besides prepared guiding questions, I asked follow-up questions and encouraged interviewees to explain their rationality behind the answers they provided. For instance, I asked which video type was their favorite. Depending on their answers, I proposed follow-up questions about attractiveness of their favorite videos and reasons for their answers. My guiding questions were as follows: (1) What study video types have you watched on *Bilibili*, and which type is your favorite?; (2) What elements in “study with me” videos do you think help you most in the self-study process?; (3) When did you start watching “study with me” videos? Is there is huge change before and post COVID?; (4)

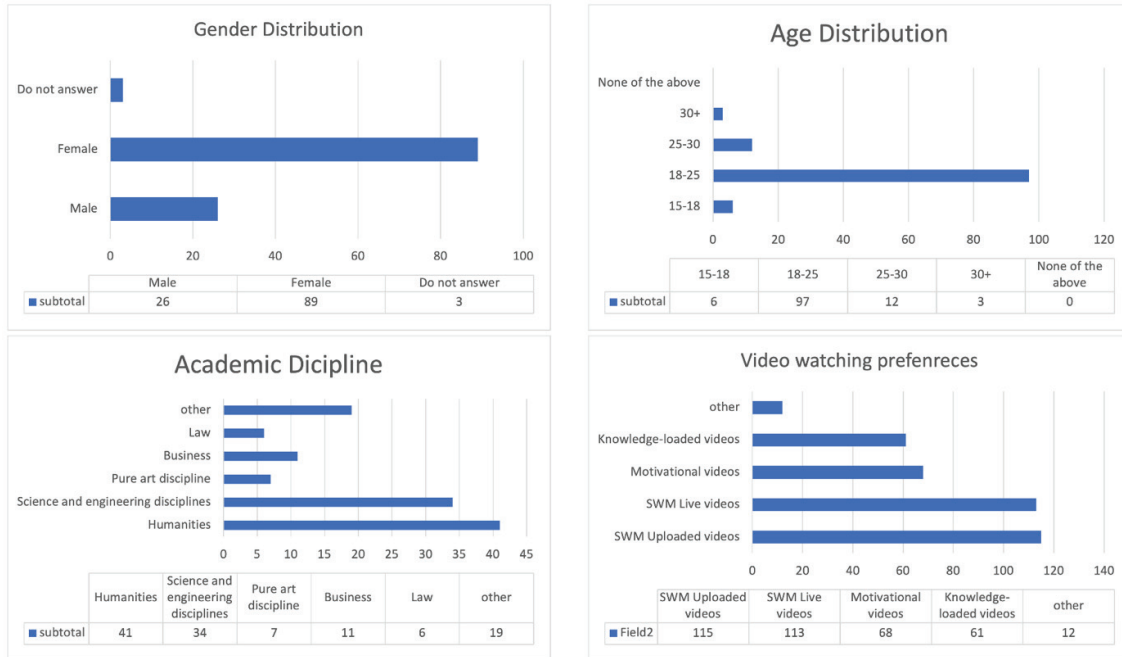
Why do you watch “study with me” videos?; (5) Do you interact with within the online study space on *Bilibili*? If so, how?; (6) Are you comfortable sharing the results of your self-study?; (7) Have you considered watching “study with me” videos after achieving your goals this time?; (8) Is there anything else you’d like to add before we end?

### **2.2.3. Participants’ Information**

#### ***Online Survey***

I contacted active participants of SWM via the *Bilibili* Inbox function and invited them to take my online surveys. In this process, 122 students took the survey, and 118 of the 122 surveys were valid. Because the number of this virtual study’s community participants was relatively large, I selected survey participants carefully and contacted people who offered a full profile of the overarching features of members of this community. Thus, I contacted people who were active in interactions initiated by video samples I collected in this research. These selected SWM community members either constantly contribute to video comments or join virtual study groups.

Besides my careful selection of participants, the results of these online surveys were analyzed cautiously, due to the limited number of participants in this research. As illustrated in Figure 2-1, 85 respondents self-identified as females and 26 as males. And most survey participants were 18-25 years old. Although the number of students in “humanities” was relatively higher than those from other disciplines, students were from various academic programs, including humanities, sciences, pure arts, business. Meanwhile, for study-related video watching preferences, besides SWM uploaded and live videos, students also watch motivation, knowledge, and other genres of study videos in this platform. So, although I focused on SWM videos, other subtopics are also categorized into this video genre.



**Figure 2-1. An Overview of Survey Participants' Background Information**

### ***In-depth Interview***

Besides online surveys, I recruited 10 students to participate in online semi-structured interview sessions. As displayed in Table 2-1, six participants were undergraduate students, three students recently graduated from their undergraduate programs, and one student was currently in his graduate program. Their academic backgrounds differed broadly, yet these students shared similar study goals as preparing for important examinations, including graduate admission tests, end-of-semester exams, and professional certificate assessments. Although most students' focus was exam preparation, some also mentioned their tentative goals to form new habits. The human population of this in-depth interview echoed the dominant examination-based learning cultures in China I discussed in previous chapters. Instead of addressing critical thinking when they study alone at home, research participants' major study goals are related to written examinations, and their main study activities are memorization of key concepts assessed in different tests. Study efficiency, for these students, was perceived as how much exam preparation they could achieve within a limited time scale, and it was essentially evaluated by final scores and results of different exams.

**Table 2-1. An overview of Interview Participants' Basic Information.**

In this table, "F" refers to "Female"; "M" refers to "Male".

	Phase of Education	Academic Discipline	Current Study goal	Sex	Location
P1	Undergraduate (Final year)	Social Work	-Graduate admission exam -Develop reading habit	F	Beijing
P2	Undergraduate (Third year)	English	-Japanese proficiency exam	F	Hebei
P3	New Grad	Accounting	-Public Services entry exam	F	Hunan
P4	New Grad	Education	-Graduate admission exam; -Public Services entry exam	F	Sichuan
P5	Undergraduate (Second year)	Medical school	-Final exam -Learn new things beyond academic programs	M	Chongqing
P6	New Grad	Chinese Literature	-Graduate admission exam (Second time)	M	Shanxi
P7	Undergraduate (Final year)	English	-Graduate admission exam	M	Guangxi
P8	Undergraduate (Third year)	Marketing	-Final exam -Develop reading habit	F	Guangdong
P9	Undergraduate (Final year)	Physics	-Final exam	F	Shanghai
P10	Graduate student	Education	-Certificate Exam	M	Chongqing

In this research on SWM videos and students' practices in their individual study process, I first explored the mechanism of *Bilibili*, and examined how this platform engages with young people and encourages "study" content in an entertainment video-sharing platform. Additionally, I searched and observed practices of "study with me" videos and students' interactions in this virtual space, and extracted SWM key features from both videos and participants' reactions. Furthermore, I recruited university students to participate in both online surveys and semi-structured interviews to investigate virtual self-study community members' profile, and their rationality of engaging this new study style. With collected data and participants' responses, I borrowed Walther's functional approach to communication research, and investigated how SWM, as a student-initiated video genre, facilitate their self-regulated exam-based learning process. Eventually, I

proposed some implications for students' individual learning that can potentially help both educators and students succeed in the new normal of a post COVID era.

## Chapter 3. *Bilibili* as Youth's Online Community

*Bilibili* is one of the biggest video-sharing platforms in China, and this platform has been a multi-cultural youth community covering over 7,000 niche culture groups (baidubaike). By March 3, 2022, average monthly active users (MAU) reached 271.7 million, and mobile MAUs reached 252.4 million.<sup>13</sup> Per business analysis upon this platform, by 2023, *Bilibili*'s MAUs shall reach 400 million, with the majority of those users as millennials and Generation Zers.<sup>14</sup> With the proliferation of *Bilibili* and its huge number of its online users, this video-sharing platform has become one of the most important channels for young people in China to seek information, share interests, and create online communities.

Described as a User-generated content (UGC) website similar to YouTube, *Bilibili* is distinguished by its social functions engaged by *Danmu* (Jia, 2017). Inspired by Japanese ACG<sup>15</sup> platform, *Niconico* (ニコニコ),<sup>16</sup> *Bilibili* was initially designed to be a virtual space specifically for Chinese ACG lovers, with a core interaction feature of *Danmu* function, an overlaying flying commentary system on user-generated videos. When watching videos/live-streams, users submit, display, and share their in-time comments to the video-playing interface. The combination of the video and synchronous on-screen comments creates an immersive experience that triggers togetherness and community (Nozawa, 2012; Johnson, 2013; Nakajima, 2019; Zhang, 2020). Watching videos on *Bilibili* is similar to watching a sport game in a local pub. Besides watching videos, people create human noises by posting *Danmu* and share in-time comments.

Since the establishment of *Bilibili* in 2009, scholars mainly discuss this platform as a targeted youth culture practice community and its business and marketing model (Liu, 2017; Chen, 2021; Jiang, 2022). Starting as a ACG culture platform, this company

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<sup>13</sup> Statistics extracted from "Bilibili Inc. Announces 2021 Fourth Quarter and Fiscal Year Financial Results." <https://ir.Bilibili.com/node/8136/pdf>. Accessed 14 March 2022.

<sup>14</sup> Information extracted from "China Internet Watch." <https://www.chinainternetwatch.com/31131/Bilibili-quarterly/>. Accessed 14 March 2022.

<sup>15</sup> ACG refers to Anime, Comics, and Video Games.

<sup>16</sup> Niconico (ニコニコ) is a video-sharing platform founded in 2007 in Japan, with a feature of ACG culture. This platform was the first one using "flying commentary system" on video-playing screens.

has developed multiple strategies to refine its business model and engage with broader youth community in China, including its relationship with Japanese Otaku(おたく)<sup>17</sup> community, Chinese youth production and consumption of ACG-related topics. Besides youth media practices and participation, recent research has also probed how the China's government organizations utilize this platform for political ends and assure "correct" and "healthy" media usage, especially for the youth (Lu, 2017). They "stifle relevant alternative information through communicative and technical strategies, such as censoring unwanted voices, drowning out counter-discourses, and relying on digital biases within the platform to marginalize oppositional influencers (Schneider, 2021, p61)." In response to issues of governments' censorship upon youth practices in Bilibili, scholars also explored the ongoing contestation between young people and the state in their subculture participations (Yin, 2017; Zhu, 2017; Wu, 2020; Mei, 2021).

This research, different from prior scholars' discussions on young people's contestation with the state, explores how *Bilibili*, as a video-sharing platform, engages with the youth under ongoing censorship from China's government institutions, and how this website attracts young people to engage and participate in *Danmu* comments. I have conducted comprehensive research on the mechanism of this virtual youth community, and probed *Bilibili*'s endeavors in developing the "study" feature of this entertainment focused platform.

### **3.1. Brief Overview of How *Bilibili* engages with the youth**

As youth community and *Danmu* are key features of *Bilibili*, this platform has introduced multiple strategies in nurturing a "friendly" and "harmonious" environment for reciprocal interactions in this platform, especially for *Danmu* interactions, and these endeavors include an account registration exam, level-based progression system, and a formal regulation document about *Danmu* etiquette in *Bilibili*. Besides functions as engaging youth interactions, similar to China's government's censorship approach to the media, these methods constantly monitor young people's practices on this platform, and ensure a relatively "safe" and "healthy" environment that prevents "unwanted" voices.

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<sup>17</sup> *Otaku* is a Japanese word that describes people with consuming interests, particularly in anime, manga, video games, or computers



Any internet user can watch videos in *Bilibili* without a registered account, but they cannot post any comments or interact with others unless they get a “pass” score from the *Bilibili* “entrance” exam. If people intend to interact with others by posting comments in *Bilibili*, they first need to attain a formal account by taking an entrance exam of 100 single-select questions, and get at least 60 correct answers in this test. Topics in the *Bilibili* entrance test range from ACG culture and *Danmu* etiquette, to general knowledge of science and art. This test ensures basic *Bilibili* literacy among users, and filters out people outside of this ACG community. With a consensus on *Bilibili* knowledge and proven ability on basic judgement, *Bilibili* utilizes this entrance exam as a filter-out system, and creates a “safe” space for members in this community to share comments and interactions with one another. This entrance exam works as the first layer of *Bilibili*’s regulation and control of its users. Although people can watch videos on this platform without taking the registration exam, they can post comments and connect with others only if being an “official” account holder.

Besides the entrance exams, *Bilibili* integrates a level-based progression system to stimulate interactions and enhance engagements among its users. This level-based progression system is based on that of the game Dungeons & Dragons (D&D), and is widely used in game designs. In roleplaying games, players start from level 1, and their skills and levels increase by gaining experience points via accomplishing challenges and missions assigned by the game designers. In *Bilibili*, all users start at level 1 when they pass the entrance exam. Users can accumulate points to boost their levels by participating in activities assigned by this platform, for instance, daily login-ins, video watching and uploading, *Danmu* comments, virtual currency contributions. As their levels increase, users’ levels are displayed in their personal profile. Besides, users’ *Danmu* input capabilities are improved accordingly, including an increase in the number of *Danmu* font choices and color choices, duration of appearance, the exact coordinates on screen, their credentials to evaluate *Danmu* quality of other users. The incorporation of level-based program system gamifies users’ interaction experience in *Bilibili*; thus encourages their online engagements and community intimacy in this video platform.

As well as entrance examinations and the level-based progression system, *Bilibili* introduced a formal document about *Danmu* etiquette,<sup>18</sup> and announced that anyone breaking these community agreements would be punished by having their *Bilibili* accounts frozen for an indefinite time duration. For example, spam messages, spoilers, and personal attacks are explicitly prohibited in *Danmu* comments. These advocacies endeavor to maintain a “warm”, “loving”, and “welcoming community” where users share their “positive” personal opinions and interact with others. Besides a comprehensive censorship algorithm programming to identify potential “inappropriate” comments, *Bilibili* also set up a “reporting” system and encouraged its users to anonymously report others who posted offensive or rude comments. The community agreements, censorship programming, and “reporting” system are used as a second layer of *Bilibili*’s regulation of young people’s interactions on this platform. The entrance exam filters out people outside of this community, and the *Danmu* etiquettes prevent potential “unpleasant” youth interactions.

With the *Bilibili* entrance exam, the level-based progression system, and *Danmu* etiquette guidelines, this video-sharing platform made efforts to create a “safe” virtual space for young people in China to interact with one another in this online platform. The entrance exam filters out people outside of this youth community; the level-based progression system stimulates community members’ motivation to interact with one another in this space; and the *Danmu* etiquette document is used as a guidance for users’ interactions and a punishment system to minimize “unwanted” voices. All these approaches encourage people’s contributions to this space and prevent “unfriendly” behaviors that may result in conflicts or hostilities. Although this platform focuses on ACG culture, it has gradually broken the wall between AGC culture and other youth communities. By incorporating more topics and video content on *Bilibili*’s platform, this socialized video-sharing platform aims to provide its users with a “harmonious” space to make connections. Besides entertainment content, more educational-oriented videos have been uploaded onto this platform over the past few years.

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<sup>18</sup> This document is posted on *Bilibili*. All people have access to this document, including people without registration in this platform.  
<https://www.Bilibili.com/blackboard/help.html#!/?qid=d74f5e0abdc4437b583a1318e92fb4b&pid=f80ff5461cc94a53a24fd1a42ce90fe0>. Accessed 15 March 2022.

### 3.2. “Study” on *Bilibili*

As mentioned above, *Bilibili* initially was a video-sharing platform for ACG lovers as a sub-culture virtual space. However, with its business expansion and website redesign in the past decade, *Bilibili* has become one of the biggest professional user generated content (PUGC) platforms in China. Besides ACG-themed content, it has expanded video topics and included music, dance, life, science, fashion, and movies.

Although *Bilibili* was originally an entertainment platform, some users come to this space for the purpose of study. Before 2020, *Bilibili* did not have a separate “study” channel on its interface design. Study-related videos were categorized under “channel/life/daily/study” (Figure 3-1). Through the feedback that it received from its users, *Bilibili* gradually reformed its website interface, organized “study in *Bilibili*” online campaigns, and emphasized its “study” function within this youth community.



**Figure 3-1. Screenshot of the “study” video location in *Bilibili*. The author took the screenshot in 2020, February 11.**

With the abrupt outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in China in early 2020, all schools of both K-12 and higher education had to move the teaching to purely being online as opposed to being in-person and started “cloud classrooms.”<sup>19</sup> As an emergent approach, Shanghai Municipal Education Commission appointed *Bilibili* as one of their official online education platforms. Thousands of K-12 teachers were assigned to deliver online teaching to their students via either livestreaming or video uploading<sup>20</sup> on *Bilibili*. Meanwhile, *Bilibili* collaborated with higher education institutions and continuing studies organizations in China, including Tsinghua University, Peking University, to promote

<sup>19</sup> A literal translation from Chinese “空中课堂” (kongzhongketang).

<sup>20</sup> This announcement was reported by multiple news channels in 2022 March. <https://cn.technode.com/post/2020-02-26/Bilibili-2/>. Accessed 15 March 2022.

“Canceling class, non-stop studying” online campaign events<sup>21</sup> on its platform (Figure 3-2). In partnership with official institutions and government educational departments, *Bilibili* had successfully expanded out from its ACG subculture community and added an “educational” feature onto its outlook.



**Figure 3-2.** Screenshot of *Bilibili*'s “study” campaign amid Covid-19. The author took the screenshot in 2020, February 11

With the growth of the “study” community in *Bilibili*, this video-sharing platform redesigned its interface and created a “Knowledge” channel to its home page in June 2020.<sup>22</sup> Instead of storing all knowledge-related videos into categories of “Life” and “Science”, *Bilibili* created a dedicated channel for users to watch, create, and upload knowledge-related videos, including topics on science, art, economics. With this redesign of video channels, collaborations with formal educational institutes, and “study on *Bilibili*” campaigns, *Bilibili* synthesized its educational resources from both formal

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<sup>21</sup> This is a literal translation from Chinese “停课不停学” (tingkebutingxue).

<sup>22</sup> This announcement was published by *Bilibili*'s official “general knowledge” (泛知识) account @好奇星人知识酱. <https://space.Bilibili.com/517491339/dynamic>. Accessed 15 March 2022.

schools and user-generated videos from video creators, and escalated its “study” feature, especially during the epidemic.



**Figure 3-3.** Screenshot of the "knowledge" video location in *Bilibili*. The author took the screenshot in 2022, February 11.

Although *Bilibili* officially launched a “knowledge” channel for users to watch and share knowledge-related videos, much of its emphasis leans towards knowledge resources, similar to Coursera and open MOOCs. However, “study with me” videos, as a key study-related representative video genre, are not knowledge-loaded videos. And this video topic is categorized under the *Bilibili* “Life” channel instead of “knowledge”. Interestingly, when *Bilibili* first collaborated with its video uploaders to promote the “study” feature in August 2019, most video clips integrated into the promotion video campaign were extracted from “study with me” videos (Figure 3-4). Unlike knowledge-loaded educational videos, “study with me” videos contain minimal knowledge exchange. While online courses were proliferating on this platform, *Bilibili* highlighted young people’s participation in “study with me” as their key feature.



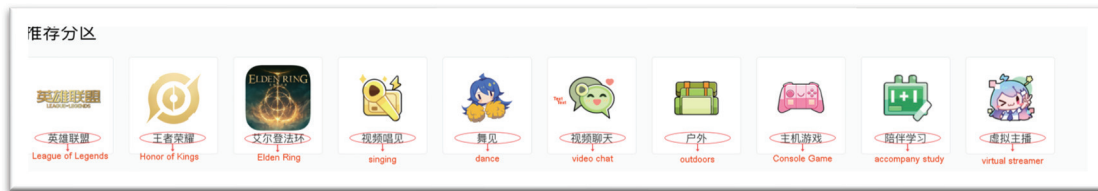
**Figure 3-4.** Screenshot of *Bilibili*'s promotion video on its "Study" feature. The author took the screenshot in 2022, February 11.

Although *Bilibili* did not launch a standalone channel for “study with me” videos, the platform nonetheless introduced a new livestreaming topic in its live video channel—“accompany study”<sup>23</sup> (Figure 3-5). In *Bilibili*'s recommending streaming topics, most themes are entertainment-oriented, for instance, video games (League of Legends, Elden Ring), singing, dancing. “Accompany study”, among these entertainment topics, indicated both *Bilibili*'s and users' engagement with study-related activities. While logos of other topics are more fun, this logo of “accompany study” is designed as a battery in charging of powers, symbolizing a potential for users to gain personal growth in this entertainment-focused platform. This recommendation list echoes *Bilibili*'s efforts to incorporate a “study” feature on its platform. Although this video sharing platform is still mainly about ACG culture, they endeavor to create space for users to not only entertain

<sup>23</sup> This is a literal translation from Chinese “陪伴学习” (peibanxuexi).



and relax in their free time, but also achieve personal goals and get one’s life “recharged” in terms of both study and work.



**Figure 3-5. Screenshot of *Bilibili*'s livestreaming video recommendations. The author took the screenshot on March 29, 2022.**

With this close investigation of *Bilibili*'s efforts in youth community engagement and “study” feature, I concluded two reasons why students in China choose *Bilibili*, over other platforms (both educational-oriented MOOCs and entertainment-focused platforms in China), as their self-study space: a) *Bilibili* is a youth community, b) *Bilibili* emphasizes both knowledge-loaded educational resources and students’ self-study experience. Although *Bilibili* is famous for its AGC culture, this platform has developed different ways to attract users outside of ACG community. With a special focus on its “study” feature, *Bilibili* utilized its youth community engagement, and elevated students’ experience in this epidemic when they were studying alone from home. While the “study with me” video theme originated outside of China, this topic has attracted great attention and invited millions of Chinese university students to watch, create, and comment on such videos.

## Chapter 4. Closer Look into SWM videos

Instead of defining “study with me” as just an online video trend, this research perceives this video stream as an initiative of university students’ online self-study space and a study-support community within the context of China’s dominant exam-based learning cultures. Beneath the curtain of videos and livestreaming, Chinese university students innovatively create new study space on the internet, and actively connect with similar people within this online community. While university students bear different challenges when studying from home, some students actively seek customized study space on the internet to cope with their offline study challenges.

Statistics have shown that “accompany study” livestreaming video rooms in *Bilibili* were initiated 1.39 million times, and the number of SWM views and clicks exceeded 327 million times from July to early December in 2021.<sup>24</sup> Although *Bilibili* was initially an ACG culture platform, it has attracted great attention from students in need of a dedicated time and space to study. In this chapter, I collected the 200 most popular “study with me” videos from both pre-recorded uploaded videos and livestreaming channels from May to December 2021, divided them into two forms and three content types, examined video features of SWM, and analyzed how these videos help students with their self-regulated learning process during COVID.

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<sup>24</sup> Statistics extracted from *Bilibili* 2022 “post-graduate examination season” report. <https://t.bilibili.com/604298393863013120?tab=2>. Accessed 15 March 2022.



## 4.1. Two Forms

As mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, “study with me” is a trendy video theme on the internet among Chinese university students. Unlike content-focused MOOC courses, SWM videos highlight students’ initiated self-regulated learning, and support their individual study process. Based on delivery format and content, I have divided these 200 video samples into two delivery forms and three content types. The two delivery forms are uploaded videos and livestreaming video rooms; and the three content types include “self-study display”, “environment simulation”, and “experience/resource sharing”. With a close investigation of these two forms and three types, I have concluded how SWM on *Bilibili* engages with students’ individual study process, and how university students use these videos per their different preferences and study purposes.

Under the theme of “self-study”, two video delivery forms are presented in *Bilibili*: a) uploaded videos, 2) livestreaming study rooms. While uploaded videos are pre-recorded video clips, livestreaming rooms broadcast videos in a synchronous manner to audience members. In *Bilibili*, video uploaders are nicknamed *apozhu*,<sup>25</sup> whereas live video initiators are called *zhu*.<sup>26</sup> The self-study theme, in different video delivery forms, has different hashtags. In pre-recorded uploaded videos, self-study videos are tagged with “study with me”, “study vlog”, or “cloud study”. In live video rooms, self-study video stream rooms are marked with “accompany study”, “online study room”, or “immersive self-study”. Although videos in different forms share different hashtags, these videos share an overarching theme: “self-study”.

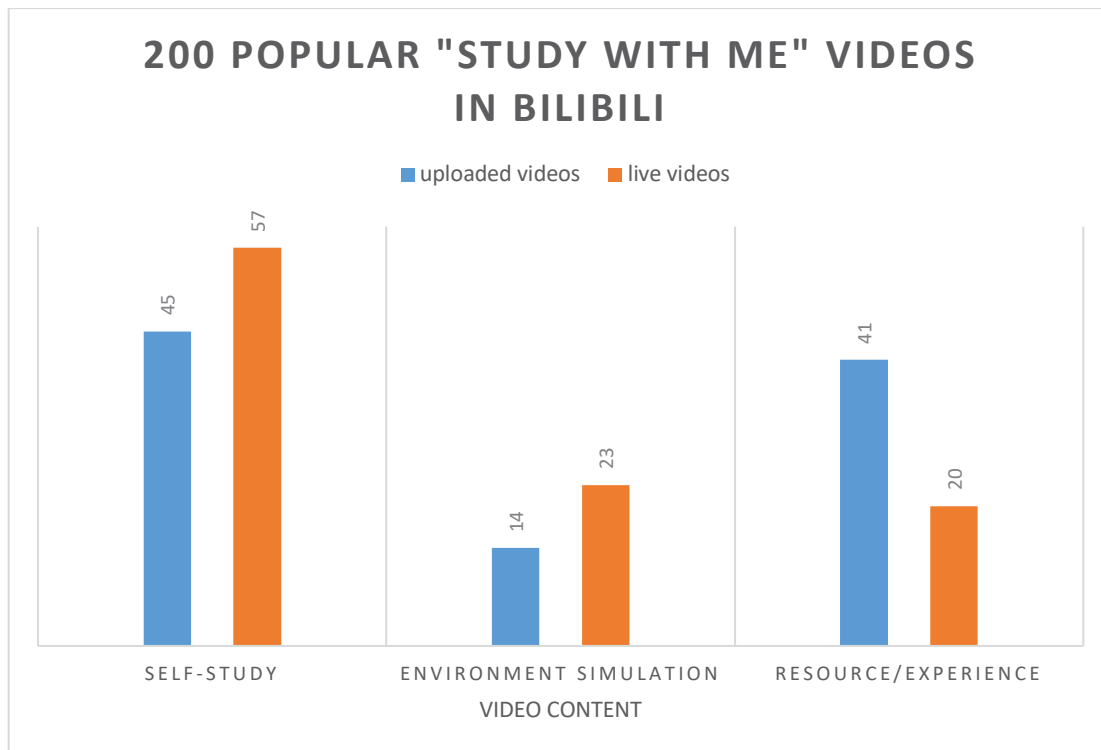
Due to differences in delivery forms, pre-recorded videos and livestreaming videos enable different video-editing potential for creators. In uploaded videos, *apozhu* have great authority on what and how to edit and reorganize these video clips into their ideal versions before uploading to the platform. However, live self-study rooms afford minimal editing space for *zhu*. Although self-study offline settings can be carefully planned and decorated before livestreaming, due to the “real-time” feature of live videos,

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<sup>25</sup> The pronunciation of *Apozhu*(阿婆主) is similar to “uploader” in Mandarin.

<sup>26</sup> *Zhu* within the context of the internet is an online streamer. In *Bilibili*, online streamers broadcast themselves online through livestreaming rooms. Genres include playing video games, personal life, study.

*zhuo* cannot edit videos in their streaming process. Therefore, uploaded videos and livestreaming videos carry different content types under the tag of “study with me”. Uploaded videos enable more agency for uploaders to edit video clips, thus this video delivery form allows *apozhu* to include various elements and information into minute-long videos. Among the 200 videos collected in this research, a significant difference in the numbers of “resource/experience” is presented in this figure (Figure 4-1). With huge editing agency in pre-recorded videos, *apozhu* not only share their self-study process, but also use the SWM video tag to present their personal experience. Livestreaming videos, on the other hand, usually lasts for hours and broadcasts *zhuo*’s study process synchronously. As illustrated from samples in this research, *zhuo* use these features of real-time and hour-long duration to share their individual study process and create a virtual environment for their audience to simulate a customized study ambience.



**Figure 4-1.** The author collected the 200 most popular “study with me” videos from May to December in 2021 from both uploaded videos and live videos on *Bilibili*.

Besides content topic dynamics, this difference in delivery forms enables uploaded videos and live self-study rooms with different interaction interfaces for both creators and the audience in *Bilibili*. Meanwhile, despite differences on website

interfaces and interaction, audience members in both channels are immersive into the virtual study space created by these SWM videos. In the interface of uploaded videos (Figure 4-2), participation statistics, *Danmu* comments, and interactive icons are embedded into the video screen. These elements work together to enhance the sense of immersion and togetherness for video creators and audience members. Statistics of both total views and *Danmu* participation are presented at the upper-left corner, and numbers of real-time viewers and comments are displayed at the bottom-left corner of the video window. Through these real-time views and participation data, users are acknowledged as watching videos with hundreds of people at that moment.

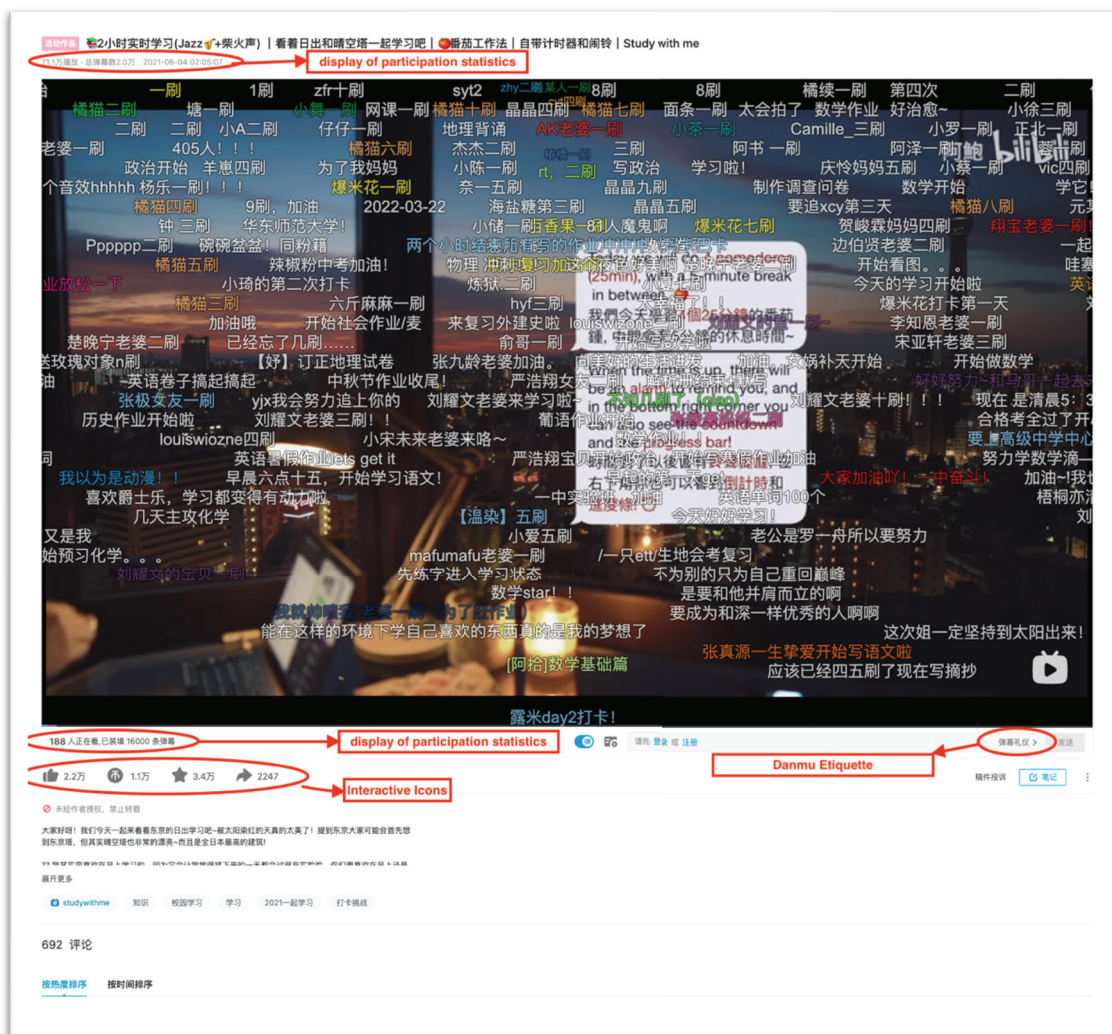


Figure 4-2. The Screenshot of a “study with me” uploaded video created by @abao. The author took the screenshot on 29 March, 2022.

This feeling of togetherness is elevated by interaction functions, including regular comment space below video-play windows, and *Danmu*, the video overlaying commentary system. Regular comment modules below video windows are similar to YouTube comment space. After watching videos, users share and exchange short comments. This commenting function in *Bilibili* inherits features from traditional video platforms, and works as an online forum for users to leave individual thoughts and communicate with others. Similarly, *Danmu* is also a comment system that allows users to share their ideas and comments, yet anonymously. Future viewers watch videos with entire comments displaying together without seeing authorship or commenting dates of these artifacts, and these viewers will gain a temporal sense of live interaction (Johnson, 2013; Li, 2017; Zhang & Cassany, 2020). With this feeling of togetherness initiated by participation data, forum-style comments, and interactive *Danmu*, *Bilibili* endeavors to create a temporal real-time human “noise” when users watch videos. Although audience members watch videos individually at home in offline space, they are surrounded by study-related ambience generated by these “human noises”.

Unlike pre-recorded uploaded videos, interactions between *zhuo* and the audience in livestreaming rooms are real-time messages and these texts are not retrievable after live sessions. Similar to YouTube Live and Facebook Live, *Bilibili* Live incorporates massive chats into these videos. Viewers participate in the event happening in live video rooms by posting comments and responding to real time messages. Although video streamers cannot edit videos in the process of broadcasting, they can interact with the audience directly. Compared to YouTube Live, massive chats in *Bilibili* also share features of the *Danmu* commentary system. Besides a scrolling chat box on the right, massive chats in live video rooms are displayed as *Danmu* flying across video screens from right to left. However, unlike *Danmu* in uploaded videos, comments in live self-study rooms cannot accumulate because of its real-time feature. Besides comments, the audience can give gratuity to *zhuo* to participate in the event happening in live video rooms. Although uploaded videos and live video rooms have different interaction forms, both video channels encourage a sense of togetherness for video uploaders, streamers, and the audience.

Although self-study videos have two delivery forms in *Bilibili*, both forms encourage participation and interaction between video creators and the audience, especially with the use of the *Danmu* commentary system. With the social feature of

*Danmu*, video uploaders, streamers and the audience are invited to a shared virtual self-study space. While some participants choose to actively join this space to exchange ideas, others may decide to use this video purely as a tool to acquire a customized study ambience and enhance their self-regulated learning process remotely at home. During COVID, students' access to campuses and library space was closely restricted. With attempts to seek an alternative dedicated study space and block out SRL distractions at home, students used SWM to simulate study atmospheres that are similar to pre-COVID offline study rooms, experienced a temporal sense of togetherness, and formed new study habits that were distinct from the pre-COVID era. The effectiveness of this online self-study-together will be explored in later chapters.

With the social affordance of the internet, technologically mediated media has integrated to everyday life. And the outbreak of COVID accelerates the penetration of internet into everyone's offline space, especially among Generation Z. In the virtual SRL space initiated by self-study videos, video uploaders and streamers present their individual study process to the audience. Despite differences on video delivery forms, *Bilibili* endeavors to enhance a sense of togetherness through participation data visibility and temporal real-time interactions among video uploaders, streamers, and audience members. This immersion of virtual study space not only blurred boundaries between offline and online space, but also facilitated students' time management, schedule building, and study habit formation when they study alone at home.

## 4.2. Three Types

Besides differences on delivery forms and interactions of “study with me” videos, video content of this self-study theme has evolved and expanded over the past several years. With a close investigation of the 200 most popular “study with me” videos collected from both uploaded and live videos in *Bilibili*, this research concludes three major content types under the title of “study with me” videos, including “self-study display”, “environment simulation”, and “experience/resources sharing” (Figure 4-1). While the ratio of “self-study display” is predominant among these three video types, “environment simulation” and “experience/recourses sharing” also play essential roles in enhancing self-study experience at home for university students.

Deriving from entertainment-focused video platforms, “study with me” was initially a sub-topic under “with me” videos, and mainly worked as a video medium to disclose a person’s offline study process to the internet. As more people use these videos to enhance productivities when they study alone from home, new content elements have been added into this video topic. “Environment simulation” establishes virtual study ambience in place of traditional physical study settings, and “experience/recourses sharing” offers peers’ advice across the world that people have little access to in offline close relationships. While most videos under this “study with me” tag are still recordings of students’ offline self-study process, some video creators produce either “environment simulation” or “experience/resources sharing” using “study with me” as their video titles. “Self-study display” is the video creators’ intuitive way to both share their personal study session and invite peer supervision from the video audience, and these two new contents function as resources of self-study assistance for university students participating in this online self-study community.

“Self-study display” is recorded or live videos of students’ offline study sessions. While most videos only have one individual studying in front of the camera, some users incorporate Zoom meeting functions, recruit students to join a muted zoom study session, record/livestream their online study zoom meetings, and share these videos to *Bilibili* either as pre-recorded or live videos. Despite differences in numbers of participants in front of cameras, a prominent feature of this video type is an immersive sense of study ambience created by video creators’ elaborate arrangement of their study space. Besides a decorated offline study room or desk catering to a certain aesthetic



(bright/dimmed lights, tidy/wide desktop, minimalism or maximalism), functional elements to increase productivity are also integrated in these videos, for instance, a Pomodoro timer for time tracking, soothing ASMR audios or classic music to relax viewers from emotional anxiety when working from home and under pressure from challenges. Video creators, arrange an immersive sense of study ambience for both the audience and themselves in self-study time. Besides individual study sessions in *Bilibili*, university students in China also incorporate virtual conference tools, like Tencent Meetings and QQ meetings, to study together in an audio-muted virtual environment. Among 102 “self-study display” videos collected in this research (Fig 4-1), 15 videos include external virtual conference tools. Students turn their cameras on when joining these virtual study rooms, and work on their individual projects in muted mode. Besides video samples in this research, start-up companies in different regions of the world embrace this “virtual study room” idea, integrate Zoom meeting functions, and create several proprietary online self-study platforms, including StudyStream in the United Kingdom, StudyTogether<sup>27</sup> in German, and Studygang<sup>28</sup> in India. Users with privacy concerns creatively use cartoon avatars to present themselves in these virtual study rooms,<sup>29</sup> screen record or livestream their virtual attendance in these 2D classrooms. Like a 2D version of Meta’s Horizon Workroom,<sup>30</sup> university students in the “study with me” community enter a shared virtual space either with an avatar or their real face, sit together next to one another in the screen, and work on their own projects. Deriving from an intention to share one’s life and study, “study with me” has evolved into a dedicated virtual space for students to regain the immersive study ambience that they used to have in offline classrooms or libraries when they study alone from home.

As “self-study display” expands to a dedicated virtual self-study space for students, a new video type, “environment simulation”, has been created to support

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<sup>27</sup> StudyTogether is a start-up company based in Berlin. <https://www.studytogether.com>. Accessed 15 May 2022.

<sup>28</sup> Studygang is a start-up company based in New Delhi. <https://studygang.app/about>. Accessed 15 May 2022.

<sup>29</sup> A mobile app in China, Costudy, allows users to choose cartoon avatars to present themselves in a 2D classroom within this app.

<sup>30</sup> Horizon workroom is a new collaboration platform brought by Meta in 2019 that allows employees to join a virtual space via either VR or website. <https://about.fb.com/news/2021/08/introducing-horizon-workrooms-remote-collaboration-reimagined/>. Accessed 15 May 2022.

students' online individual study process. Instead of documenting or livestreaming real-time study sessions, this video type creates study ambience by simulating diverse environments as dedicated study space for viewers. It blurs the boundaries between reality and virtual space, and allows students to mentally situate themselves into a virtual space for work and study. Among 200 "study with me" videos collected in this research, 37 videos (14 uploaded videos and 23 livestreaming videos) simulate different settings and invite students to study in these imaginary places (Figure 4-1). In these "environment simulation" videos, besides offline study space (libraries, well-decorated study rooms, a table at coffee shops), both fictitious settings (screen recordings from anime, movies, and videogames), and interactive videos are innovatively incorporated to generate study ambience. In these videos, 1) locations of offline study space are "self-study display" without the appearance of video uploaders; 2) fictitious workstations are screen recordings from external video resources, like Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry from *Harry Potter* magical world, cozy sunset from Japanese anime movie *Whisper of the Heart*, sci-fi office from video game *Cyberpunk 2077*; 3) interactive videos contain a series of video clips and allow users to click and play with narratives of these videos. In these interactive videos, through incorporations of the Pomodoro technique, video creators gamify the self-study process and add positive feedback loops for students when they play these videos in their individual study process. For instance, among 200 videos collected in this research, an interactive uploaded video in *Bilibili* incorporates the Pomodoro technique into a role-play escape game.<sup>31</sup> Like other escape games, users can escape a closed room only if they accomplish tasks and challenges assigned by the video creator. Instead of puzzles and clues hidden in the room, tasks in this interactive video consist of a bunch of dedicated 25-minute study sessions. By doing so, viewers' massive study projects are divided into small study sessions with positive feedback loops. "Environment simulation" videos not only offer an imaginary space for students to study, but also psychologically decrease their pressure in face of challenging projects. Despite different scenarios these videos put on display, a dominant feature of "environment simulation" videos is the absence of video creators. Instead of showcasing one's hard work, this video type emphasizes functional use of "study with me" videos

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<sup>31</sup> This is an uploaded video in *Bilibili*. Unlike traditional video forms, interactive videos allow users to decide plots and narratives by clicking interactive buttons embedded in these videos. [https://www.Bilibili.com/video/BV16C4y147fh?spm\\_id\\_from=333.337.search-card.all.click](https://www.Bilibili.com/video/BV16C4y147fh?spm_id_from=333.337.search-card.all.click). Accessed 15 May 2022.



when students study alone and play these videos on their digital devices. Similar to broad applications of “self-study display” in virtual self-study rooms, the idea of “environment simulation” is also embraced by a group of Generation Z students. During COVID, a start-up company from South Korea launched an online platform, LifeAt Spaces.<sup>32</sup> With an ambition to help people mitigate Zoom fatigue in online learning and working environment, this platform offers diverse virtual backgrounds in this website, for instance, “night at a bookstore”, “chill with hamster”, “view from the sky”. While studying alone is not an issue for some people, an abrupt transition from traditional offline workplace to completely online learning in COVID has triggered a 25% increase in prevalence of anxiety and depression worldwide (Brunier & Drysdale, 2022). Although “environment simulation” videos and similar platforms are emergent solutions for people feeling stuck and isolated in COVID, university students continue to use the internet for study purposes. These videos and websites are gaining more attention among students from all over the world. Lessons learned from this pandemic and young people’s innovative ways to confront these challenges deserve scholars’ close investigation for strategies to accommodate post-COVID working and learning environments.

“Experience/resources sharing” highlights video creators’ study stories and experience. Although this video type is not knowledge-minimal, like “self-study display” and “environment simulation”, young people still include “study with me” as keywords in both their video titles and descriptions when uploading videos to *Bilibili*. Among 200 video samples collected in this research, 61 pieces (42 uploaded videos and 20 live videos) are tagged as “study with me” videos (Figure 4-1). Unlike curriculum courses delivered by educators at schools, “experience/resources sharing” is a channel for video creators to share their self-study updates, offer peer advice, and give back to this online study community. Creators of these videos are also participants of SWM online study space. Like mentor talks, *apozhu* and *zhubo* generously share their real-life experience with peers facing similar challenges when studying individually at home. Topics in these videos differ broadly, including exam preparation tips, interview strategies, productivity techniques. With the abundance of SWM topics, participants of SWM acquire instant peer resources to refer to when they encounter challenges and difficulties. In this virtual

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<sup>32</sup> LifeAt Spaces is a start-up company located in South Korea. With a feature of DIY virtual space, this platform is widely known as a tool to study with K-Pop Idols. <https://lifeat.io>. Accessed 15 May 2022.

study-support community, video uploaders and viewers are not only message senders and receivers, but also comrades in their study journey. Sharing personal experience as a peer in these videos narrows power distances between video creators and the audience. Instead of relationships between a teacher and a student, community members within this virtual self-study space are equal and support one another as study buddies in their difficult times. Furthermore, with the rise of profitable online influencer economy in China, more and more people seek “internet fame” and turn it into a profitable avenue for business (Lucas, 2020). SWM, as a popular video theme on the internet, has great potential for online influencers. Thus, besides a chance to give back and build connections, SWM video creators acquire one more layer of motivation in actively participating in this virtual study space.

In titles and descriptions of “study with me” videos, most users explicitly state that they are studying for a certain goal, like high grades in final exams, dream schools, and preparation for professional certificate assessments. Within the context of China’s dominant exam-based learning cultures, students’ practice of “individual study” outside of classrooms is mostly for exam-preparation purposes. Despite different content types, these SWM titles and descriptions indicate students’ intentions and efforts in seeking methods to increase their productivity and combat depression when they study at home for different exams during the pandemic. “Productivity” and “efficiency” for these university students are evaluated with the outcome of exams and tests. The actual results and effectiveness of this virtual study initiative will be explored from Chinese students’ perspectives in later chapters. Instead of showing off one’s self-study process, students in these videos connect with one another to seek support for their self-study purposes. “Self-study display”, with a focus on sharing individual study process, initiates this online self-study video trend; “environment simulation”, with a feature of virtual study ambience, incorporates various tools to enhance functional use of SWM videos; and “experience/resources sharing”, addressing peers’ advice, adds personal story content into a video theme featuring functional usages in self-study process. “Study with me” videos, expanding from displays of individual self-study process to a peer-support virtual study community, demonstrate how the internet, as digital infrastructure, enables networks individuals and nourishes interactions and relationships beyond offline space. University students create, share, and watch SWM videos to facilitate their individual

SRL process, and build connections with a shared intention to block out distractions and achieve their goals.

Besides dividing “study with me” videos into 2 delivery forms and 3 content types, further investigation of video elements of online self-study videos is beneficial in understanding functions of these elements, and their implications and impacts to young people’s life. Although public health orders were lifted COVID restrictions since early 2022, students’ study and work habits have changed over the past two years. With a close examination of “study with me” elements, this research concludes with innovative ways that higher education can incorporate in students’ online engagement and success, especially in their SRL process.

## Chapter 5. Video elements of SWM videos

Although digital infrastructure has advanced significantly over the past decade, research has shown that providing the access conditions cannot mitigate the digital divide of internet usages (Van Deursen & Van Dijk, 2013). People from different socio-economic statuses use internet differently. While socially disadvantaged students use internet more for entertainment, people from high socio-economic status use the internet more for educational purposes and have better academic achievements (Chen & Liu, 2021). SWM videos, perpetrated in an entertainment platform, *Bilibili*, is outstanding because its educational feature flourished in an entertainment platform. Through an investigation of “study with me” video elements and their functions in individuals’ self-study experience, this chapter discusses how “study with me” videos make study sessions more pleasant for students, and their unique features as a synthesis of “feeling good” and “doing good” for SWM participants.

Although I concluded two delivery forms and three content types from these 200 video samples, the disclosure of individual self-study session was how this video topic gained public attention in the first place, and this content is still the most predominant content type representing SWM videos in *Bilibili*. Therefore, this chapter takes a “self-study display” video sample from the 200 “study with me” videos collected in this research, and conducts a comprehensive analysis of its video elements and their functions in students’ SRL process. The video sample discussed in this chapter is one of the most popular real-time self-study videos in *Bilibili* in 2021.<sup>33</sup> With a title of “two-hour real time study” created by @*abao*,<sup>34</sup> this video had reached 933 thousand views and received 27 thousand comments as of December 2021 in *Bilibili* (Figure 4-2). With elaborate designs on video shooting and editing, this video includes essential elements of a study ambience, increases self-study immersion, and accommodates students’ home study experience in terms of both productivity and relaxation. In presenting this virtual study ambience, this “two-hour real time study” consists of both visual and audio elements, including a countdown timer, presence of the video creator, computer/ tablet, a decorated offline study space, and relaxing music playing in the background. Unlike

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<sup>33</sup> With a close observation in *Bilibili* “study with me” video theme from 2020-2022, the author finds this video continues to be ranked among top 10 popular “self-study” videos in 2021.

<sup>34</sup> The creator of this sample video.

traditional views of study-for-exam as a boring and mundane process, @abao adds both aesthetic and soothing elements into this individual study activity, and conveys messages that self-study can be a fun and joyful process.

## 5.1. “Evidence” of Self-study

The integration of countdown timer in @abao’s video (Figure 4-2) represents the use of the Pomodoro technique in “study with me” videos. Known as a time management strategy, the Pomodoro method was invented by an Italian student, Francesco Cirillo, in the 1980s. Overwhelmed by gigantic tasks at school, Cirillo broke down his work into 25-minute intervals, separated by short 5-10 minutes breaks. Using a tomato-shaped kitchen timer to regulate these concentration intervals (Pomodoro is the Italian word for “tomato”), this time management method is named after “Pomodoro” and has been used by people for over 50 years (Cirillo, 2006).

In the past several years, people experienced rigid lockdown, and universities implemented online courses to accommodate remote learning during the COVID pandemic. However, although educators mobilized the education from home, both teachers and students experienced great depression because of these unfamiliar instructional challenges (Swan, 2020). Some scholars discussed effects of the Pomodoro technique in mitigating university students’ difficulties and concluded with scientific evidence that this technique had a positive impact to students’ concerns on multi-tasking, procrastination, and zoom fatigue in online learning (Usman, 2020; Almalki, 2020; Costales, 2021). While huge projects are terrifying, Pomodoro forces users to break down complex work into small and actionable steps, and requires them to focus on a single task within these 25-minute intervals when until the timer rings. In SWM videos, creators incorporate this time management technique to support students’ individual study process at home. Besides full concentration on a certain task within a 25-minute session, viewers are advised to take a full non-working break after the intensive working period. With this alternate arrangement between working and relaxation sessions, students are protected from burnout and zoom fatigue when they study alone at home.

Adrian Mackenzie proposes that “personal productivity literature and its ‘how-to-relax-and-control-your life’ techniques are a response-in-denial to the competitive

pressures of the informational economy” (2008). Individual working and studying style, under the framework of the Pomodoro technique, indicates a strategically compromised solution for people in need of both maintaining professional performance and having some space for self-care. With over 10.79 million students attending *Gaokao* in 2021, more than 1.2 million students participating *Kaoyan*, and numerous Certificate Tests, peer competition in China is severe, especially for university students who attend exam-based social selective system. Similar to “personal productivity literature”, the Pomodoro technique in “study with me” videos is students’ response-in-denial to Chinese fierce competition in exam-based education. When degrees and certificates are aligned with future social status and one’s competitiveness in job markets, students voluntarily become attached to efficiency and actively explore methods to both increase their productivity and decrease anxiousness when they study alone for exams and encounter challenges.

Besides intensive workload in 25-minute Podomoro sessions, students have 5 minutes for relaxation and self-care. With an alternative schedule of working and relaxing, students practice their “response-in-denial” approach to online schooling and multitasking. Except “experience/resources sharing”, both “self-study display” and “environment simulation” videos have this Pomodoro time element embedded in these videos. Although higher educational systems vary tremendously in different regions of the world, university students share similar concerns in terms of time management and procrastination, especially in COVID. The use of time management techniques in “study with me” videos demonstrates students’ pursuit of efficiency, and their innovative ideas to incorporate productivity tools into their everyday study sessions.

While this element of countdown timers in @*abao*’s “two-hour real time study” video demonstrates his efforts in incorporating the Pomodoro technique, video creators also use this element to count their study hours, edit videos into accelerated versions, and motivate both audience and themselves. Meanwhile, besides real-time individual study videos, video creators also share accelerated versions of SWM videos in their channels. While real-time study videos last for several hours, accelerated study videos normally contain several minutes. Among 45 uploaded “self-study display” video samples collected in this research, over 10 videos are accelerated versions of creators’ hours long study sessions. Countdown timers in these videos are “evidence” of uploaders’ real-time study sessions: they not only demonstrate video creators’ study

persistence and capability in self-discipline, but also inspire the audience with these hard-working personas presented via SWM videos. Although little concrete proof can testify whether these video uploaders really focus on their individual study tasks or they just perform a “fake” study session to the audience, this element of countdown timers creates an image of a “hard-working” peer for SWM viewers; thus, video uploaders within these cameras are perceived as a role model, especially for students preparing for important exams. SWM, in these accelerated versions, is not only time management tools in individual study sessions, but also a motivation and inspiration for the audience when they encounter difficulties or experience lack of motivation when studying alone at home.

To enhance this motivation function of “study with me” videos, video creators constantly present themselves within the camera of the “study with me” stream. In this process, they are both video editors and performers. In @*abao*’s “two-hour real time study”, the uploader demonstrates his presence by including his keyboard-typing hands as an essential element in this video. In the 200 video samples collected for this research, both “self-study display” and “experience/resources sharing” videos exhibit creators’ individual study process and address creators’ presence. While “self-study display” emphasizes an uninterrupted individual study process, “experience/resources sharing” elevates functional use of “study with me” videos via “positive” advice and feedback shared by video creators.

Similar to the element of countdown timers, the presence of video creators demonstrates their hours long commitment to course assignments, exam preparations, and personal study goals. Video creators, as performers in their videos, borrow external supervisions to avoid them from distractions at home. Because they constantly present an image of self-study in “study with me” videos, pressure of optimal self-presentation to their potential audience members forces them to focus on their work when documenting or livestreaming their individual study videos.

While video uploaders get supervision from their potential audience, viewers of “study with me” stream acquire both companionship and motivation from these video creators. Besides the hashtag of “study with me” as the dominant keyword of this video

trend, in the 200 video titles collected in this research, “accompany you”(peini)<sup>35</sup> appears 41 times, “self-study room”(zixishi)<sup>36</sup> shows 38 times, and “with me”(hewo)<sup>37</sup> appears 32 times. This emphasis on “study together” from video titles implies peer-accountability of “study with me” videos. When students attend online schools in COVID, they still actively seek study peers in virtual space.

“Study with me” videos, as a bridge between students’ offline individual study space and online self-study presence, connect students from different regions and academic disciplines, and equip them with strategies to combat challenges when they study alone at home, especially students who lack a dedicated space to focus on their tasks in COVID pandemic online schooling. With the incorporation of time management technique: Pomodoro, and the presence of video creators’ individual study process in SWM videos, video creators and audience members acquire not only a scientific method to cope with their procrastination, but also emotional peer support when they experience burnout at home, including motivation, supervision, and companionship.

Besides innovative methods in time management and self-discipline, these students develop a “response-in-denial” approach to extreme exam competition in China and online schooling. While students make efforts to increase study efficiency in Pomodoro sessions, they are entitled to relax in intervals of these intensive working period when watching SWM videos. When students adapt to online universities, they create an online version of study rooms at home and mentally immerse themselves into these virtual space and study together with peers from diverse backgrounds. However, due to the exam-based learning cultures in China, most students in these individual study sessions seek external help to increase their efficiency when preparing for important exams; further, with the prosperity of online influencer economy in China, the authenticity of SWM video creators’ study practices in these cameras is questioned and doubted. However, with the incorporation of countdown timers and video creators’ presence in SWM, this video genre generates a “self-study” image for viewers, and motivates these students to stick with their individual goals regardless of challenges.

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<sup>35</sup> This is the Chinese expression of “accompany you”.

<sup>36</sup> This is the Chinese expression of “individual studyroom”.

<sup>37</sup> This is the Chinese expression of “with me”.



## 5.2. Generational study habits in this study space

Besides functional elements to increase students' efficiency and mitigate their emotional pressures when studying alone at home, creators of "study with me" videos also incorporate various elements to escalate immersions of study ambience, including computer/tablet, aesthetic stationeries, and distinct sceneries fitted into students' preferences. In this "two-hour real time study video" created by @abao, he uses a laptop to work and study, puts a succulent and an aromatic candle on his desktop to address self-care and wellness, and shares a unique sunrise view from the tallest building in Japan, Skytree, to initiate a pleasant atmosphere. While the laptop represents necessary tools to work and study for Generation Z, stationery and the sunrise scenery in @abao's video demonstrate his aesthetics, advocacy for self-care, and efforts in engaging study immersion with the video audience. Besides an emphasis on the "response-in-denial" approach to online universities and extreme competition in both education and job markets, Generation Z in China blends their generational studying and working habits into this online individual study space and utilizes this ambience to augment their sense of immersion. Study settings in SWM not only share similarities with traditional offline study space, like public libraries and study rooms, but also integrate young students' generational study habits, like use of digital devices and personalized study ambience catering to students' different preferences.

Digital devices have been an essential part of our everyday life. Born into the internet era, Chinese university students, as digital natives, use computers, tablets, and mobile phones to work, study, entertain, and relax. In "study with me" videos, the incorporation of computers represents students' daily tools to work and study. From sourcing knowledge, attending e-courses, to drafting essays, university students use computers and laptops to take notes and generate reflections in both in-class and their individual study time. In @abao's "two-hour real time study" video, this computer element not only conveys a message of his individual study, but also indicates the integration of digital devices and new media in university students' daily study life. During the outbreak of COVID, all students stayed at home and attended university course deliveries and activities fully via the internet. Scholars and journalists have addressed issues of economic, social and psychological repercussions when students are away from the traditional in-person schools (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Generation Z

in China, despite experiencing similar repercussions and concerns, approaches this unprecedented online university style with a positive attitude and creates innovative methods to cope with physical separation and build virtual connections. In his video, @abao addresses the image of “authenticity” in this individual study through this “computer” element, and invites the audience to sit down, have their working devices ready, and start doing things. Despite that the presence of computers and laptops is not sufficient to prove a real study session, this element demonstrates a necessary component of one’s study setting in this digital era.

Besides function as productivity tools, the choice on brands of “computer” also represents one’s aesthetics, economic capabilities, and social status. Checking the most popular “study with me” videos, although uploaders’ choices on brand vary individually, Apple products, either MacBook or iPad, are frequently displayed in these video clips. Widely recognized as overprice digital devices in China, the use of Apple devices in “study with me” videos represents Chinese university students’ endeavor in chasing higher economic and social status. Jean Baudrillard pointed that:

People “never consume the object itself (in its use value). Instead, you are always manipulating objects (in the broadest sense) as signs which distinguish you either by affiliating you to your own group taken as an ideal reference or by marking you off from your group by reference to a group of higher status” (2016).

Although Chinese university students use personal computers as their necessary study tools, not all students can afford a MacBook laptop. Comparing to most personal computer brands in China, MacBook is advertising and marketed for its high aesthetic standards and advanced technical design, and it is more expensive. Thus, MacBooks, or Apple products, are widely recognized as a sign to distinguish social status. Apple consumers not only seek its use values, but also sign values- distinguish one from his/her own group. By incorporating Apple products to “study with me” videos, video uploaders exhibit their financial capabilities in purchasing these expensive devices. This not only represents their social-economic status, but also enhances and elevates Apple products function as a sign of higher status for Chinese university students. When viewers watch these videos, they unconsciously are invited to the value system, build their aesthetics within the structure, and ritualize the study settings and ambience that video uploaders have created and imposed in these videos. In @abao’s video, the uploader has included 4 Apple devices, including iPhone, MacBook, iPad, and Apple

pencil (Figure 4-2). While the use of Apple ecosystem “amplifies” users’ experience on productivity, the price of a while Apple ecosystem is beyond financial capabilities of an ordinary Chinese university student.

Besides presence of “productivity tools” in “study with me” videos, aesthetic stationery are also essential elements in university students’ individual study settings. These “unnecessary” tools not only function as supplements in enhancing study ambience, but also address students’ self-care and emotional regulation when they study individually at home. In this self-study video uploaded by *@abao*, besides regular stationeries, like pens and papers, he places a succulent and an aromatic candle on his workstation, and both these tools indicate his efforts on self-care and resilience. Research has shown that indoor plants not only improve air quality through their purification capabilities, but can also positively impact human physiology and psychology, including learning and working efficiency, emotion regulation, and recovery of physical and mental health issues (Raanaas, 2011; Deng & Deng, 2018; Zhang, 2020; Yin, 2020; Yan, 2022). Similarly, aromatherapy has been widely used as a treatment for anxiety in most countries. Recent research used a meta-analysis of clinic trials and proved that aromatherapy with essential oils could alleviate anxiety, especially temporary anxiousness (Gong et al, 2020). Both the plant and the candle within *@abao*’s SWM video are scenically testified that they are beneficial to mitigate emotional difficulties, especially in the mitigation of anxiety.

In SWM videos, apart from succulents and candles shown in *@abao*’s video, students also include other stationaries that are not necessarily designed for study, for instance, a photo of loved ones, a gift from friends, and a toy from favorite animes or video games. Despite that students may put different tools in their study settings, and these small decorations cannot increase their SRL efficiency directly, these “unnecessary” stationeries help them manage emotions when they feel stuck, experience screen fatigue, or lack of motivation in their individual study sessions. Besides these aesthetic stationeries, *@abao* is also known for sharing beautiful sceneries in his SWM videos. Due to COVID and travel restrictions, travelling for Chinese people, especially going abroad, is extraordinarily difficult and unpredictable. By including unique sceneries from Japan in SWM videos, *@abao* helps university students in China to virtually sightsee and experience a unique study place in Japan, and motivates young people through these beautiful landscapes and sceneries. These visual

elements work together, demonstrate university students' generational study habits as digital natives, address a balance between study and relaxation, and alleviate anxiety, in these individual home study sessions.

Besides visual elements in “study with me” videos, audios in these video clips also share similar melodies and sound patterns. Mostly, white noise or relaxing music are featured on titles of these videos. In the 200 video samples collected in this research, both “self-study display” and “environmental simulation” videos contain white noise and relaxing music. Video uploaders and viewers listen to background music via headsets in the process of their self-study. By doing so, they intend to use these sounds to increase concentration span and self-study efficiency. White noise is a type of sound that is produced by combining sounds of all different frequencies with equal intensities. Research has found that white noise helps to mitigate the effects of environmental noise and increase concentration while studying (Jeon & Oh, 2019). Similar to white noises, music functions to drown out distractions, thus increase concentration levels (Ghassemi, 2006). Empirical research on 600 students from Japan, the UK, Greece and the USA has concluded that music played while studying strongly helps relax, alleviate boredom, and help concentration (Kotsopoulou & Hallam, 2010). The integration of white noise and relaxing music into “study with me” videos are Generation Z's efforts to be more productive in their self-study when preparing for exams.

Unlike other entertainment videos, students in these videos rarely speak, and most of the time they just study alone in front of cameras with white noise or relaxing music played in the background. Besides white noise and relaxing music, a new audio type is gradually gaining students' attention- original sound tracks from television shows and movies, for instance, *Harry Potter*, *zhenhuanzhuan*,<sup>38</sup> *wulinwaizhuan*.<sup>39</sup> In the 200 video samples, 20 live videos broadcast the audio of these video shows. Instead of enhancing concentration levels and maintaining mental flows in self-study, these audios help to reduce anxiety and pressure in the process of self-study, although its effectiveness on increasing work efficiency has not been investigated.

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<sup>38</sup> A China's historical drama. Its English translation is “Empresses in the Palace”. This drama was initially launched in 2011.

<sup>39</sup> A China's comedy series. Its English translation is “My Own Swordsman”. This drama was initially launched in 2006.

Chinese university students, although using social media for fun and entertainment, some of them voluntarily seek study support from these entertainment platforms. Online self-study in SWM videos, represent a new study style initiated by these young people. Mediated by *Bilibili*, students not only blur boundaries of space and time, but also mix behaviors between entertainment and study. Through a versatile investigation of video elements of @*abao*'s SWM video, this research concludes functional use of these elements by university students. Countdown timers represent students' creative incorporation of the Pomodoro technique in their time management at SRL process. By dividing gigantic tasks into multiple 25-minute sessions, students practice this technique and increase their study efficiency in SRL. Meanwhile, these countdown timers and presences of video creators are "perceived" evidence of their individual study process. Despite that these elements are not enough to prove the authenticity of creators' study sessions, viewers follow this alternate time arrangement of intensive working and 5-minute relaxation intervals, and use SWM to practice the Pomodoro in their individual learning sessions.

Besides evidence of self-study, "unnecessary" stationeries in SWM demonstrate students' generational study habits. Apart from common use of digital devices, students address self-care and emotional management when studying alone at home, for instance by using green plants and aromatic candles. Further, besides the emphasis on the common use of digital devices by Generation Z, Apple devices embedded in these videos imply young people's sign values and how their aesthetics are influenced by the value system created by companies within a market-economy social context in China.

Moreover, besides visual elements, white noises and relaxing music, as dominant audio patterns in SWM, shows students' efforts to increase their concentration span and alleviate boredom when they study alone for important exams. Although some audio tracks, for instance, TV drama audios, cannot increase students' working efficiency directly, they are beneficial for students in their emotional management and anxiety alleviation. As a new study habit, regardless of work efficiency, these audios mentally release students' anxiety when they prepare for important exams at home in this pandemic.

In order to examine the effectiveness of the SWM from Chinese university students' perspectives, this research recruits participants of the SWM self-study

community, and investigates how students interact with SWM videos and other peers via computer-mediated communication in *Bilibili* in the following chapter. Through a close look into the procedure of different interactions in this learning community, this research explores how SWM videos enhance students' study and help them to compromise with results of their study goals.

## Chapter 6. *Bilibili* “Cloud Studyroom”: A New Self-Study Space

In this research, I observed SWM videos in *Bilibili* from 2020 to 2022, and collected 200 most popular video samples from this platform. With a comprehensive investigation of both interfaces and content types of SWM videos in *Bilibili*, I examined how this website creates a temporal sense of togetherness, and identified three types of SWM videos that support students’ self-regulated learning. Besides, with the discussion on video elements in SWM videos, students’ innovative incorporation of self-regulated tools and their generational study habits when studying for important exams have been closely investigated.

However, apart from an overview of both the platform and SWM videos, students’ personal experience within this virtual study space, their perceived effectiveness of this new study habit, and implications of this generational remote learning strategy deserves further research. Thus, I connected active community members of SWM, and invite them to share their motivations and comments in incorporating SWM to their individual study process via both online surveys and in-depth interviews. In this online study space, students engage with both SWM videos and other students via computer mediated communication (CMC). From impersonal, interpersonal to hyperpersonal CMC communication, university students filter out distractive environment elements in their offline space, exchange socioemotional information that they cannot express with offline networks, and utilize online relationships to support their self-regulated learning process.

## 6.1. SWM as a task-oriented tool

Perceiving new media through a functional lens, this research categorizes SWM videos as exemplars of impersonal CMC, and concludes that SWM is used as a task-oriented tool by students in their SRL process. Despite a tendency in research literature to address relationship building and affective space on the internet, Walther argues that sometimes less interpersonal or socioemotional communication is helpful and beneficial (1999) in computer-mediated communication. Previous research has shown that CMC was more task-oriented compared to in-person meetings and interactions. Because CMC enables limited cues in interactions, impersonal communication in this process filter out affective components of communication (for instance, interpersonal noise) and focus more on task content (Culnan & Markus, 1987). With the filter-out of distractive elements, impersonal communication of CMC helps communicators to focus to task contents, take actions, and start doing things.

SWM, as a form of impersonal communication, conveys a message of “getting things started” in their video titles and descriptions, and simulates customized study ambience in video content for students so that they have a dedicated virtual space. In 200 video samples collected in this research, all titles include a keyword of “study”. Besides, in their descriptions, 95% include introduction to time management tools used in these videos, and personal study plans and goals of video creators. These textual descriptions of SWM create an “action” message for potential audience, and invite them to follow video creators’ study schedules and start focusing on individual goals when watching these videos.

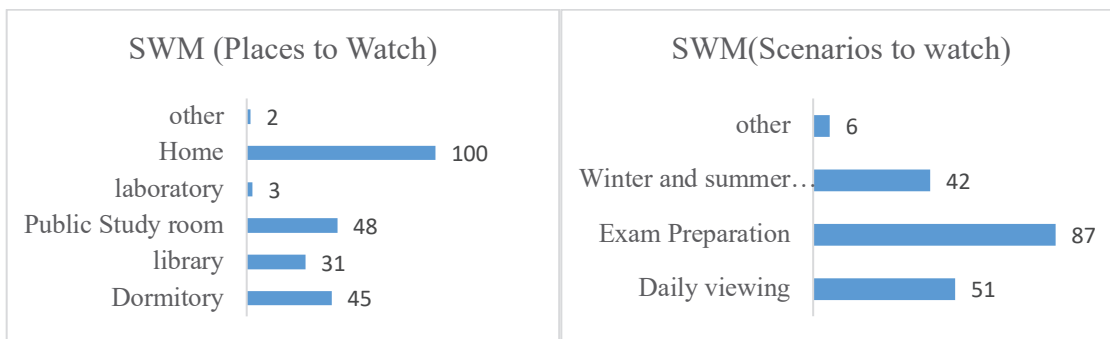
When students receive the “action” signal from SWM, they ignore affective concerns, and fully immerse themselves into a study mode. Slightly different from Walther’s proposal on impersonal interactions of CMC, information shared in SWM is not specific task instructions. Instead, this video genre conveys a persuasion for students to physically start their individual study process. Meanwhile, SWM creates customized study ambience that prevents students from distractions in their self-regulated learning. Although CMC initially addressed interactions and communications in the purely text-based environment, task-related messages in SWM videos filter out negative factors and increase viewers’ exam-preparation efficiency in their individual study sessions. When students switch into their study mode, SWM no longer expects students to watch videos,



instead, these videos become background images and audios. And these video elements work together to virtually create a study space, and increase students' concentration in their SRL process.

Unlike most motion-media, like movies and narrative-loaded videos, students rarely watch SWM attentively in their self-study process. Instead, SWM are mostly used as productivity tools and background music. Through an elaborate design of study ambience and incorporation of time-management tools, SWM weaken its function as information-loaded videos, and creates an immersive study space that invites the audience to initiate their self-study sessions regardless distractions, either from offline environment settings or emotional disturbances.

As shown from 118 valid online survey responses, 95% participants state that SWM videos have increased efficiency and productivity in their SRL process. Besides, 100 students use SWM videos at home, and the majority of participants play these videos when they prepare for exams (Figure 6-1). According to these responses, students mostly use SWM videos when they need to intensively work for important exams in spaces that are not originally designated for study-purposes, like homeschool in COVID. Besides individual homes, participants also have SWM played in their digital devices when they study in public spaces, for instance, public study rooms, dormitories, and libraries. Despite some places are traditionally recognized as “study space”, like public study rooms and libraries, students report that these public-shared rooms can be distractive for one’s individual study sessions because they are easily distracted by others who make unpleasant noises or even unintentionally interrupt their concentration level.



**Figure 6-1. An overview of where and when students watch SWM videos based on online survey responses collected in this research.**

Thus, I designed a question in in-depth interviews, and investigated why students play SWM videos, specifically when they study in distractive environments. Functioning as a study-ambience simulation, SWM is not only an initiator of dedicated study sessions for students, but also a blocker that prevents them from external noises and maintains the duration of self-study process when they prepare for exams at places that are distractive, including both offline environmental distractions and emotional disturbances when students prepare for exams and tests (Table 6-1). Slightly different from traditional views that “dedicated study space” is a quiet environment, participants address a new layer in their SRL process- a relatively steady mental state. Besides, the “environmental quietness” is no longer enough to constitute a study space for Generation Z, and distractions of SRL can be quiet, yet seductive. For instance, temptations to constantly check messages or play entertainment games on digital devices are soundless, yet easily capture one’s attention. SWM, as a tool for students to filter out both physically distractive factors and internally mental disturbances in their SRL process, facilitate students’ endeavors to convert into a “study mode” regardless of places and scenarios, essentially increase their concentration level and efficiency when studying for important tests and projects.

**Table 6-1. Participants’ use of SWM and distractions they intend to block out through SWM.**

This table is based on in-depth interview responses in this research.

Distraction Sources	Distractions	Interviewees’ responses
External Factors (Physically distracted)	Digital Devices (social media; entertainment apps)	<i>P1;P8: I cannot get rid of phones, even when self-study. But I try to use my phones to positively influence my learning through SWM videos. P2;P4;P5;P6;P7;P10: When these videos are played on my phone, I won’t check any entertainment apps, because my phone is preoccupied by these videos.</i>
	Interruptions by strangers (unpleasant noises; behaviors that are not study-related in public study space)	<i>P2: I don’t like to listen to others’ studying noises, like typing or turning book pages. I just feel super annoyed and cannot focus on my study. P9: Libraires are no longer study space for many people. They just come here having snacks and hanging out with their romantic friends.</i>
	Greetings/Judgments from friends	<i>P2: I enjoy study alone without close friends. If he/she unexpected looks at me or says hello, I cannot ignore that signal. But I really feel interrupted by their greetings sometimes. P5: I don’t want to inform my friends of any of my self-study sessions. If I invite friends to study together, they just complain that I’m a workaholic. P6: I don’t like studying with my classmates. The potential competition between us just annoys me way too much. I prefer watching SWM.</i>
Internal Factors (Emotionally over-loaded)	Anxiety due to exams; environments; peer-competition	<i>P4;P5: Sometimes pressures from exams suffocate me, and I cannot do anything due to the huge anxiousness. SWM helps me ignore these negative feelings and start doing things. P1;P2;6;P7: I only invite my friend to play, instead of study. I’ll get nervous to see peers study.</i>
	Lack of self-discipline	<i>P1;P9;P10: When I studied alone at home last winter, I was under zero supervision. SWM was an external tool I borrowed to control myself from doing nothing. I am never a good student and I need something to discipline my behaviors at home.</i>

This combination of “getting started” messages and customized study space settings allow students to focus on individual tasks regardless of physical settings and emotional pressures. Instead of specific task instructions, SWM video creators post a general message of “getting started” in video descriptions, and viewers use these

messages as a sign to start working and concentrating on their own projects. Meanwhile, study space displayed in these videos creates self-study atmospheres that cater to viewers' dynamic aesthetics and invite them to mentally immerse themselves into these virtual spaces.

Due to COVID, university students in China have been stuck at home and dormitories since early 2020. Although city lockdowns were lifted in China, local governments still imposed strict public health orders periodically if new cases were reported. These policies brought much uncertainty to university students' study routines and schedules. SWM was their creative solution to cope with this unpredictability in individual learning space, and to stick to personal study plans despite uncontrollable external disturbances. As a symbol of dedicated study, SWM block out factors that may interfere with students' concentration levels, and convert themselves into a mentally steady and unagitated state for self-regulated learning from their physically distractive environments and cognitively overloaded minds when studying alone at home.

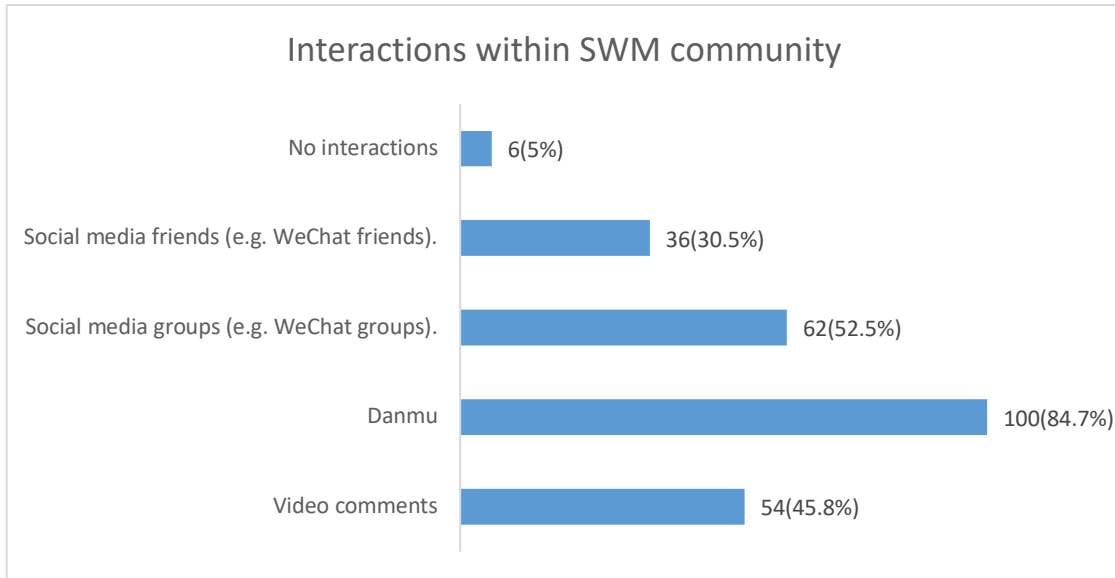
In a remote learning environment, university students access educational resources from home, and their performance and achievements mostly depend on their capability of self-regulated learning. Prior research indicated that younger students and students from families with low socioeconomic status are mostly negatively influenced by school closures (Hammerstein et al., 2021). Besides, these differences in family backgrounds directly influence students' use of the internet- socially disadvantaged people intend to use internet more for entertainment (Chen & Liu, 2021). SWM videos, thus, as a task-oriented tool, are especially beneficial for university students lacking self-discipline when they take courses that are delivered purely remotely or prepare for exams in a physically distractive environment. These videos not only filter out distractive factors in students' offline study places, but also create customized study ambience and equip students with time management tools. Although most western countries use co-exist strategies with COVID, 2 years of lockdown and remote learning fundamentally impact landscapes of higher education. When scholars propose hybrid learning options (Singh et al., 2021), a discussion on how to improve students' self-regulated learning experience is instrumental in creating strategies for higher education to adapt to the "New Normal" in the post-COVID era. SWM, as students' initiated virtual study space, is used by Generation Z as task-oriented tools. And this generational study habit is

beneficial for higher education to explore possibilities in accommodating students' learning environments in this transition time.

## **6.2. SWM as a space for interpersonal communication**

SWM is used as a task-oriented tool in students' individual study sessions, this functional use of SWM in SRL addresses impersonal CMC between students and self-study videos, more generally, between humans and computers. However, after they are published by creators, SWM videos become a standalone entity in virtual spaces, and audience members are given autonomy to initiate different interactions within SWM. These interactions include yet not limited to impersonal CMC. Out of its features as a "getting started" message and customized dedicated study ambience, some audience members consider it purely as a tool to augment individual study vibes and rarely interact with other humans in their SRL process. Thus, when students use SWM to assist with their individual productivity through video descriptions and virtual study-space setups, this video genre helps students avoid distractive factors and minimize human connections as an impersonal CMC exemplar.

However, according to 118 valid online survey responses, only 6 students report that they have never had any interactions with others, and most participants engage interactions with others via multiple channels on *Bilibili*, including *Dannu* and comment modules below video-play windows, and other social media platforms, like WeChat groups (Figure 6-3). Thus, despite that SWM is partially used as purely productivity tools, most students seek opportunities to connect with others and engage in conversations that are meaningful to them.



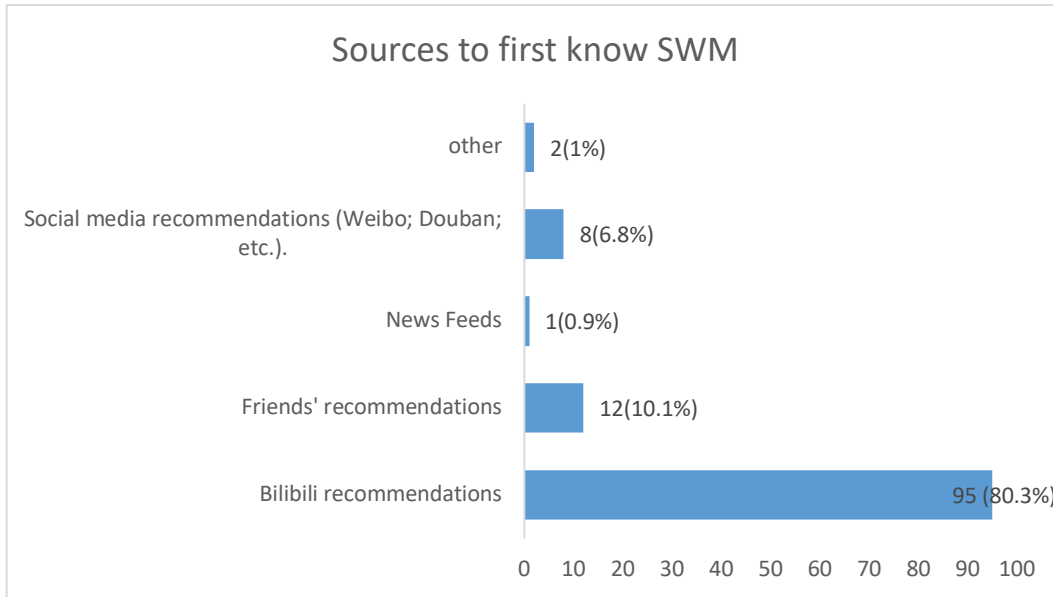
**Figure 6-2. An overview of interactions in SWM community based on online survey responses collected in this research.**

Walther proposed that “communicators use whatever cues they have available to them in order to generate and apprehend interpersonal (as well as instrumental) messages ... individuals may adapt the encoding and decoding of social information (i.e., personal, socioemotional, or relational messages) into text (2015).” University students in SWM virtual study space share similar study goals as full-time students in China, enable mutual influence via interactions with others, and employ creative methods to support one another in their self-study process. Despite participants of SWM receiving instrumental messages of SRL, these students, as communicators of CMC interactions, they apply whatever cues they receive to extract interpersonal messages and decode social information in their participation of this virtual self-study space. In this process, SWM is not only limited to an amplifier of impersonal CMC, but also functions as a medium between humans, and support interpersonal communications.

Most interactive social media applications, like Facebook, Google Map, YouTube, encourage users to leave comments on messages produced by website proprietors or other users (Barnes, 2015). Similarly, *Bilibili*, as a user-generated video platform, prioritizes users’ input in both videos and interactions, encourages both synchronous and asynchronous interactions, and design multiple channels for registered users to share personal ideas and connect with others, including interactive buttons and several comment systems. Although SWM videos include minimal conversational tones,

the temporal sense of togetherness in *Bilibili* nurtures parasocial interactions among its creators and the audience, and supports interpersonal CMC in this online self-study community (Table 6-2). While SWM videos convey a message of “getting started” and simulate a customized study environment, interaction channels in these videos nurture interpersonal interactions and a virtual community where people cross-support one another, despite that they may hold different personal study goals.

Interactive buttons in *Bilibili* consist of “like”, “bonus”, “collect”, and “forward” (Figure 4-2). These interactive icons are simplified methods for users to share their feedback to uploaded videos. Instead of spending extensive time and energy to type words or sentences to comment modules, users share their general expressions of watched videos by clicking these interactive buttons. This simplification of video interactions eases both physical and cognitive loads for audience members when they comment on videos and increase the accessibility of video feedback. *Bilibili* has developed a versatile algorithm machine to calculate interactions of videos. For video creators, more clicks on these positive interactive icons will increase their video exposures to the targeted audience. Similarly, for the video audience, with the accumulation of data (e.g. clicks on these buttons), they will receive video recommendations that cater to their needs to preferences. And these recommended video lists are also influenced by some other factors, including *Bilibili*'s online campaigns, users' registered information, and their most viewed topics. According to the results of online surveys, over 80% users reported that they were introduced to SWM because of *Bilibili*'s video recommendations, and 10% knew this video topic via friends' recommendations (Figure 6-3). Interactive icons below videos give users an easy access to share general impressions. Through data collected by *Bilibili*, users from similar groups are recommended with topics that they share positive feedback before. Thus, interpersonal CMC, through these interactive icons, collect users' preferences and expose them with topics that they are interested in. SWM, with a core feature of “study”, caters to university students' needs, and acts as a bridge between students' virtual connections.



**Figure 6-3. An overview of users' sources to first know SWM based on online survey responses collected in this research.**

Besides interactive icons, *Bilibili* also integrates various channels for users to build interpersonal interactions, like *Danmu* comments. Per survey results in this research, over 84% respondents participated in *Danmu* comments in their individual study sessions (Figure 6-2). Meanwhile, all in-depth interview participants expressed their reliance on *Danmu* when watching SWM videos (Table 6-2), and their *Danmu* participation styles and mentalities are different. As SWM incorporates time management tools, these videos are mostly divided into several 20-25 minutes *Pomodoro* sessions with alternate 5-20 minutes small breaks. Students participate in *Danmu* comments during these two time slots displayed different styles. They actively post comments in study intervals, yet passively observe others' *Danmu* input in *Pomodoro* sessions. In study intervals, students actively post *Danmu* for different purposes, including tracking study sessions, sharing personal goals, and building new connections with others. In these *Pomodoro* sessions, students passively participate in *Danmu* and check these flying comments from time to time, and acquire peers' emotional support, including motivation, supervision, and companionship. Furthermore, per online survey responses, the top three reasons that students watch SWM videos are companionship, motivation, and supervision (Figure 6-4). Results from online surveys and interviews validate findings in individual data pools, and demonstrate students' mentality when they engage with interpersonal interactions in SWM videos. Despite that

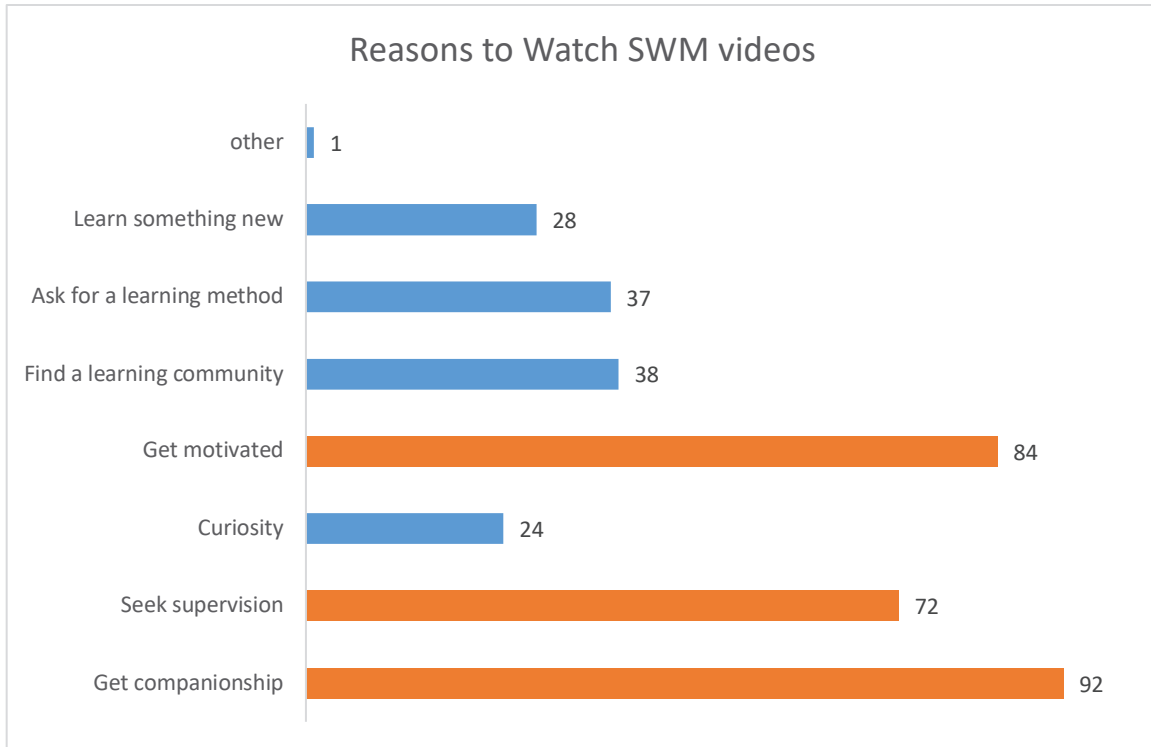


SWM is used as a task-oriented tool, this video genre offers a space for interpersonal communication and enables mutual influence among its community members.

**Table 6-2. Participants' Danmu Usage habits when watching SWM videos.**

This table is based on in-depth interview responses in this research.

When to input/check	Interviewees' responses	Danmu Function	How to input
Study Intervals (5-10 min)	<i>P1: I post my study goals to Danmu before I play SWM. Till today I have posted over 150 times of my study goals in SWM videos. P9;P10: I use Danmu to track my study sessions.</i>	Study-tracking	Active Participation (Post comments)
	<i>P4: Although I never explicitly expressed my dream schools to my off-line life circles, I enjoy sharing my goals here and just being sincere to myself.</i>	Share personal goals	
	<i>P7: I enjoy chatting with video streamers through Danmu. They give me real-time responses. And I feel I'm hangout out with a hardworking student. So proud. P10: I interact with people holding similar goals in Danmu.</i>	Build connections	
	Pomodoro Time (25-30 min)	<i>P6: I rarely post comments in Danmu. But looking at these comments makes me feel motivated.</i>	Motivation
<i>P8: I seldom watch SWM videos with my full attention, honestly. But Danmu in these videos are very positive, and I love to feel this hard-working vibe whenever I'm tired.</i>			
Pomodoro Time (25-30 min)	<i>P2: People input reminder words in Danmu, like "lower your heads"(ditou). Sometimes I feel bored when studying alone. And these words are helpful and force me to go back to study. They prolonged my focusing span.</i>	Supervision	
	<i>P3: I don't post Danmu while studying. But I do peek at these comments from time to time. I feel I'm studying with a group of people.</i>	Companionship	
	<i>P5: I never turn off Danmu when watching videos in Bilibili. These real-time comments create a sense of community, especially when I study alone at home.</i>		



**Figure 6-4. Participants' Reasons to watch SWM videos. These results are based on online survey responses.**

*Danmu* commentary system allows both synchronous and asynchronous interactions in *Bilibili* when university students' watch these videos, thus nurtures a sense of pseudo-synchronicity. A similar comment system in the west is live chats in Twitch, an interactive livestreaming service focusing on video game live streaming. According to Ford (2017), Twitch videos attracts over 10,000 concurrent viewers as crowd speak or massive chats. Both comments in Twitch and *Danmu* are triggered by video contents and displayed when audience members view the video. However, in *Bilibili*, *Danmu* comments are not live and synchronous messages, instead, *Danmu* is "a type of asynchronous CMC that is experienced synchronously, where users see messages (annotations) appear and disappear from the viewable screen at set times unless playback is interrupted" (Howard, 2012). This seemingly synchrony is recognized as pseudo-synchronicity in previous research, and considered as a key feature accounting for the popularity this commentary system (Johnson 2013; Steinberg, 2017; Yang, 2020; Zhang & Cassany, 2020). When users watch videos on *Bilibili*, all *Danmu* comments from previous viewers fly across video screens from right to left. Besides, users not only post new *Danmu* and have it displayed on the screen immediately, but

also interact with existing comments on their video screens. The combination of asynchronous accumulation of comments and synchronous presentations and interactions enables a sense of pseudo-synchronicity for all viewers. Users respond to messages and comments from long time ago, they still mentally experience a live chat feeling with the interactivity and accessibility of the *Danmu* system.

*Danmu* comments, as a form of interpersonal CMC, is a channel for both video uploaders and viewers to process information, form impression, and enable mutual social influence while watching SWM videos. Besides surveys and interviews for students' *Danmu* usage experience, this research collected and analyzed *Danmu* comments in 10 videos from the 200 samples, and discovered that motivation words are frequently mentioned in these interpersonal interactions (Figure 6-5), including fighting(*jiayou*), for sure(*yiding*), dream(*mengxiang*). These keywords function as cues for viewers to both apprehend interpersonal messages and build a sense of community in this online learning space. These motivational words indicate an essential feature of SWM community members: a group of people working hard to achieve their goals. This feature differentiates SWM members from other users of *Bilibili*: while most users watch videos for entertainment, community members of SWM use these videos to improve their study efficiency in the self-regulated learning process. Further, as *Bilibili* embedded a versatile censorship programming to constantly monitor users *Danmu* participation, they deliberately filtered out "unpleasant" comments and only presented "positive" words, in this case, motivational words. With this "manipulated" ingroup identification by *Bilibili*, users of "study with me" videos assimilate themselves into this online individual study community, and internalize its norms in these interpersonal connections, prioritizing study over entertainment in *Bilibili*.



selection, including achieving the highest scores in class, getting admitted into prestigious universities. Instead of in-depth conversations about life plans and future dreams, study-related comments in *Danmu* are limited to students' achievements in different examinations: students' standard of personal study success is only related to their scores. This implies not only the limits of *Danmu* as a communicative tool, but also the dominant exam-based learning cultures in China. With the in-time flying feature of *Danmu*, users cannot post long messages and elaborate their personal ideas. Further, growing up in an exam-based learning society, students' major goals are to succeed in different exams. Moreover, with the constant censorship programming from *Bilibili*, users' interactions are closely monitored, and only "safe" and "positive" comments are permitted to display. With all these factors, community members within this study space interact with others only for help to achieve their examination goals.

Besides anonymous mass chats in *Danmu*, some students take a step further and seek more intimate interpersonal relationships in this online self-study community. Although *Bilibili* does not integrate an online group function on this platform, these proactive students take initiatives and create online group chats on other social platforms, including WeChat and Tencent QQ. They share these external group chat links in video comments, and invite others to join these study groups in other social media platforms. Among 118 valid survey responses, over 50% students have joined group chats, and 30% students have established long-term friendships with members in this virtual self-study community (Figure 6-2). Students in these online groups are given space and chances to build closer relationships Compared to their anonymous mass chats in *Danmu*. In these online groups, students share personal self-study updates, exam resources, and initiate interactions based on their study goals. Although *Bilibili* does not enable group chat function, students in this online study community proactively employ other platforms to build connections, seek peer support, and cultivate further friendships.

With all these dynamic interactive channels, university students connect as individuals with one another in this online space. They share similar study goals as full-time students, influence one another by posting *Danmu* comments when watching videos, and use their own ways to expand study time and gain emotional support in their self-regulated exam-preparation process. Instead of educational resources or information sharing, interpersonal interactions in the SWM community offer students

emotional support and social bonding opportunities. Duck's research asserts that many messages we exchange in established relationships are mundane observations and opinions about things that we experience (2005). Instead of seeking information, others' responses provide the initiator with validation and ratification of one's perspective (Walther, 2017). Although communicators of SWM interpersonal interactions do not have a pre-established friendship between one another, they are community members in this virtual study space. These students use their self-regulated learning sessions for different study goals, yet they share similar concerns and seek similar peer-support in this process, for instance, companionship, motivation, and supervision. Interactivity and accessibility of *Bilibili's* commenting system offers space of interpersonal communication for these university students. Besides interactive icons and anonymous massive chats in *Danmu*, some students create online groups on other social media platforms. This transmedia grouping initiative not only enables more opportunities for friendships and interpersonal relationships, but also enhances students' self-categorization in this online self-study group. Motivated by both individual study goals and "study-group" expectations, the audience of SWM are equipped with two layers of motives to ignore distracting factors and immerse fully into a "focus" mode in their SRL process.

Interpersonal interactions initiated by SWM videos allow students to process information, generate impression, and form a shared social identity in this online space. When social identity becomes salient, individuals redefine themselves with respect to a social identity (Turner, 1985). In *Bilibili*, people are connected as networked individuals instead of embedded groups. While relationships in off-line classmates or dormmates are based on geographic locations, interpersonal interactions in this online self-study community are initiated by personal needs of self-study. In this online self-study community, all members' social identity as hardworking students become salient with these multiple interpersonal interactions. With this social identity, university students in this virtual space redefine themselves and adjust their behaviors in alignment with expected norms in this community- to keep a distance from distractions and focus on the action of self-study.

During the outbreak of COVID, online learning has become a new normal for many Chinese university students. And their study habits have changed accordingly. Besides e-attending courses, these young people are in need of an "alternative classroom" that allows them to concentrate on assignments or important tests. Besides

study environment simulations, interpersonal interactions in SWM community create a shared social identity, and enable mutual influence in this virtual study space. Similar to an offline classroom setting, SWM videos offer a virtual environment setup, and interpersonal interactions add human noises into this customized study space and enable socioemotional discussions. Although students have different study goals, the level of support they acquire from “study with me” videos and online self-study communities exceeds the help that they used to receive from off-line classrooms. For instance, visual tracking of individual study sessions and interpersonal supports initiated by *Danmu*. Despite traditional offline classrooms offer a dedicated space for students to do self-regulated learning, students rarely share personal concerns and support one another with time management tools and emotional assistance when they lack motivations in SRL sessions.

Through interpersonal interactions in both Pomodoro sessions and study intervals in *Danmu* and group chats in transmedia networks, these students get companionship, peer-supervision, and motivation from others when they prepare for important exams. Although participants of SWM physically study alone at home, they mentally experience a dedicated study space with thousands of peers in *Bilibili* and their group members in WeChat or Tencent QQ. Furthermore, because members in the SWM community are interconnected by the topic “self-study” anonymously on the internet, they are free from real-life offline social network identities and pressures. Thus, they are able to share authentic feelings and comments that they cannot express in offline settings. Some even attain hyperpersonal relationships with relatively greater desirability and intimacy that people rarely achieve in offline communications.



### 6.3. SWM as a channel for hyperpersonal relationship

SWM videos in *Bilibili* have attracted university students in China and opened a virtual self-study space for them to work on individual projects. Popularized in a video-sharing platform, SWM is Generation Z's innovative approach to deal with issues of online education. Besides, the outbreak of COVID elevated this virtual self-study habit to public's attentions. While educators address the need for accessibility and adaptability of higher education in institutional levels, university students in 2010s and 2020s, have shown their capability of accommodating virtual learning environments via SWM participations. Despite they encounter diverse challenges and difficulties when studying alone at home, task-oriented tools and interpersonal interactions initiated by SWM are beneficial to alleviate problems of home schooling in COVID. Although *Bilibili* was originally an entertainment platform, SWM videos gradually acquired the youth's attention and were used by students to enhance their self-regulated learning process. As an exemplar of CMC communication, SWM initiated different interactions and relationships in its virtual study community, including impersonal, interpersonal, eventually hyperpersonal relationships.

Recent research about technologically mediated communication has moved from definitions of asynchronous CMC as task-based medium to how CMC support interpersonal interactions (Walther, 2015). In my investigation of SWM videos and virtual study community, besides using SWM as task-oriented tools and interpersonal interaction topics, this online self-study video stream also initiates hyperpersonal communication among community members of this virtual study space. Compared to offline interactions, "hyperpersonal CMC is more socially desirable, and enables exaggerated sense of relationships (Walther, 1996)". To achieve this relationship, Walther proposed four elements of the expected mediated virtual environment: (a) an optimized selective self-presentation of the sender, (b) the idealization of the message receiver; (c) a discretionary engagement channel between interactors, (d) a feedback loop allowing reciprocal influences. In SWM virtual study space, students watch videos in their self-study sessions, interact with others via multiple channels, and utilize both environment simulations and socioemotional information exchanges to enhance their self-regulated learning. Besides impersonal CMC with computers, interpersonal CMC with other humans, participants attain hyperpersonal CMC with their idealized



community members in this virtual study space, and internalize these hyperpersonal relationships to optimize their offline behaviours.

In in-depth interviews, I designed questions and asked for participants' interaction experiences in SWM virtual space, including private messages, video comments (traditional video comment modules and *Danmu* comments), and group chats in their transmedia study groups. All participants mentioned that they have acquired study companions and peers that they never had in offline relationships. Meanwhile, these relationships and supports in this study community are “weak tie” and only exist in the context of self-study in SWM virtual space (P1; P2; P3; P4; P6; P7; P8; P9; P10). Proposed by Nick Granovetter, weak tie interactions deprive from the spread of information through social networks, and these weakly tied connections are likely to be more influential than strong ties, like close friends and families (1973). Mediated by CMC, these weak-tie connections are powerful for communicators to focus on their individual goals because their discussions focus on the topic that are most salient to them.

In the context of self-study, students' interactions are centered around this “study” topic. Message senders and receivers optimize and idealize one another, and this contextualized perfection of other community members not only generates motivations and companionships, but also initiates a positive pressure that encourages students to expand their focus span in self-regulated learning process. Meanwhile, with the anonymity and accessibility of CMC in SWM space, students' messages and comments are engaged discretionarily, especially that *Bilibili* set diverse rewarding systems to encourage *Danmu* engagements among users. In this reciprocal interconnections, self-study virtual space and communities provide a channel of empathy and peer-support that is rarely attainable in offline relationships and interactions.

### **6.3.1. Receivers and Senders**

In Walther's hyperpersonal CMC model, he argues that message receivers tend to exaggerate perceptions of message senders. Because CMC communication loses physical cues that off-line encounters offer (for instance, gesture, voices), receivers fill the blanks with stereotyped perceptions of others personality characteristics or person prototypes (2006). In the context of self-study in *Bilibili*, the audience of SWM

participates in online interactions with others regardless of their intentions, because of the interactive design of *Bilibili*'s default video-playing interface, for instance, display of participation statistics, *Danmu* flying across videos, interactive icons (Figure 4-2). When they start playing SWM videos, besides customized study ambience, these audience members are also immersed into a virtual interactive space where listing numbers of current hard-working students and “drifting” study-centered discussions. Although the audience cannot physically meet other peer students offline, they fill the blanks of others with “hardworking” impressions from this interactive study space.

Similarly, CMC facilitates selective self-presentation for senders in *Bilibili*. Online communicators share only cues that they admire, and intentionally conceal their undesirable speech behaviors (2006). Through a mindful construction of messages, members within the SWM study community portray themselves in desirable ways, and advance the idealized perceptions that message receivers develop of them. In communication initiated by SWM videos, people exchange messages via dynamic channels, including private messages, comment systems, and transmedia online groups. According to in-depth interviews, students in these channels optimize their self-presentations, idealized impressions to others, and imitate these optimal images to regulate their own study process (Table 6-3).

From these responses, I have concluded 2 main representations that students desire to build and create in their SWM interactions, including images of a role model and a supportive peer. In this dedicated study space, students' connections are based on the topic of study, and their perceptions to others are centered around “self-regulated learning”. With this idealization of senders and receivers, community members are influenced by others' hard-working images and engaged in dedicated study vibes within this space. Unlike offline close relationships, interactions within SWM are highly contextualized. Participants initiate and discover “study-related” message exchanges in this space only with people holding similar feelings or study schedules. Thus, discussions and interactions within SWM are mostly well-elaborated and optically drafted. In a “graceful” space full of “role models” and “supportive peers”, students mentally immerse into a state that is surrounded by study ambience and supportive peers. Eventually, this sense of fulfillment and surreal experience is beneficial to students' mental flow and concentration space in their SRL process.

**Table 6-3. Participants' perceptions to others in SWM community.**

This table is based on in-depth interview responses in this research.

Interaction Channels	Interviewees' Responses	Perception
Private Messages	<i>P4;P7: When I get replies from study streamers, I feel that I'm chatting with <b>a very dedicated student</b> that I can rarely connect in offline space. I enjoy following her and studying with her.</i>	Role Model
	<i>P8;P9: I followed a study uploader, and we exchanged our feelings when prepare for exams. I found that we had so many similarities, and <b>he was like a close friend that I can follow.</b></i>	Supportive Peer
Comments (Comment Modules & Danmu)	<i>P1;P2,P3: I don't wanna build any strong relationships in SWM space. But I like to leave comments. Every time I receive responses from others, these are all positive feedback, and <b>I feel I'm empowered by a group of xuebo(hardworking students)!</b></i>	Role Model
	<i>P5: I only comment on videos that I like a lot. Whenever I get responses, <b>they are all very supportive</b>, and I feel very lucky to connect with a group of people holding similar views.</i>	Supportive Peer
Group Chats	<i>P2: I joined the group chat created by a video creator that I followed. I rarely talk in this group. But checking these discussion threads on Kaoyan(prepare for post-graduate admission examinations), I feel that <b>everyone is super hardworking</b>, and I need to work harder and follow their pace.</i>	Role Model
	<i>P6: When I prepared for kaoyan last year, our group members shared encouraging words every night before we went to bed. They are so <b>kind, supportive, and knowledgeable</b>. I prefer chatting with them to my roommates and close friends on topics of kaoyan.</i>	Supportive Peer

### 6.3.2. Channels and Feedback

When communicators optimize their self-presentations and idealize perceptions to others, the third dimension of building hyperpersonal relationships is characteristics of the channel, and how CMC supports the deliberate construction of people's desirable messages (Walther). In SWM virtual space, community members connect through dynamic CMC channels and center their message exchanges around self-study and individual study goals. Sharing similar pressures and feelings in preparing for exams, students within this virtual community are mindful of their expressions and comments in in-group interactions, and deliberately defend for one another when external critics enter this space (Table 6-4).

Besides exaggerated perceptions to message senders and selected self-presentation as receivers, participants of interviews defend for SWM and consider it as a new study habit. Besides arguing for the legitimacy of SWM, they acknowledge limitations of disclosure of self-study process, for instance, impairment of self-discipline in K-12 student groups, and “fake” study performances within video cameras. However, SWM is not limited to these negative images. Instead, use and potential of SWM videos depend on individual’s intentions and study habits. Current critics upon SWM are mainly around effectiveness and incentives of this new study space. Instead of publicly stigmatizing and complaining about study habits and methods in SWM communities, interviewees explicitly address biased comments from “good students” (P3, P4), and suggest functional employment of this virtual study tool by students(P7). Despite that study space is traditionally defined as quiet and private, Generation Z allows more flexibilities in the composition of a “dedicated study space”. Members within this study-support community share similar perceptions to SWM and SRL, thus they deliberately construct messages that others desire in hyperpersonal CMC interactions of SWM.

**Table 6-4. Participants' comments on external critics to SWM.**

This table is based on in-depth interview responses in this research.

Comments to External Critiques	Interviewees' responses
National-wide negative narratives to the youth and social media	<p><i>P1;P2;P8: In our current social narratives, students are assumed to be lacking self-regulated abilities, especially when they use social media. Despite I agree partially with this statement for K-12 students, university students should not be categorized into this group, especially participants of SWM. Playing these videos are indeed their efforts to increase SRL capabilities.</i></p>
Arrogant assumptions from conservative self-study views	<p><i>P7;P10: For people who never watch SWM before, they may perceive self-study from traditional views- learning is an individual business. However, in SWM, learning can be either individual or a group activity, or both.</i></p> <p><i>P3: I once saw a PhD student's complaints about study habits presented within SWM videos. He even stated that he would never successfully be admitted to his current doctorate program if using study habits in SWM. I do respect that different people have their unique study styles. But it's not fair that he just publicly stigmatized SWM. I may not be as smart as him, but SWM videos are really very helpful for my SRL, especially in COVID.</i></p> <p><i>P4: People who are biased to SWM community, I guess, are those who are not in need of study ambience in their self-study process. It's just a matter of personal preferences.</i></p>
Ignorance of potential benefits in SWM	<p><i>P7: Some people believe that videos like SWM, are fully of tricks, and video creators within cameras just perform their well-planned "fake" study process. However, whenever I don't feel like studying, these videos motivate me to stick with my studies, and I do enjoy watching them. Furthermore, even if streamers' initial incentive was not purely for study, so what? As long as you see it as a study tool, and the results are what you want, that's already enough for us, isn't it? No matter you like it or not, livestreaming is always there. Study streams address positive use of online videos, and they, at least, are better than vulgar and soft porns on social media.</i></p>

Meanwhile, because participants' interactions are mediated in a text-based environment, students pay little attention to physical behaviors in their conversations and use more cognitive resources to optimize their messages. Besides, prior research proved that people use more editing (backspaces, replacements) in drafting messages when they interact with an attractive person than with less attractive personas (Walther, 2007). Similarly, conversations within SWM are moderated mostly in text-based environments, like personal messages, comments, and groups chats. Without extensive cognitive investments to physical behaviours, students have more mental resources to

draft, modify, and optimize messages. Furthermore, they send these well-elaborated texts to their idealized study partners in this virtual space.

Connected via CMC, community members within SWM generate reciprocal interactions and acquire peer support mutually, especially when they study alone at home in this epidemic. The selected self-expression, idealized perceptions to others, and reciprocal influences in CMC channels work together and form a feedback system. In this system, CMC intensifies the dynamic components of the hyperpersonal model, and these optimal expectations, in turn, modify participants' characters and influence their behaviors (Walther). In SWM virtual space, besides dedicated study ambience offered by videos, community members' mutual influence is vital in their self-regulated learning process. In an online learning environment, besides formal course deliveries, students are lack of both customized places to study and supportive peers to prolong their study time. However, due to special educational context, some students in China are reluctant to form study groups and seek support with their offline classmates or friends, especially when they prepare for important exams or study alone at home. Instead, they prefer to seek people with similar minds over the internet to ease their social pressures in offline space, internalize expectations as a member of virtual study space, and modify their behaviours accordingly in SRL process.

Due to extreme competitions in job markets and academic performances, some students are not comfortable to share "real" feelings or study together with potential competitors. Several participants of the in-depth interview share their perceptions of off-line relationships in universities:

"People tend to be more isolated and selfish in off-line space, compared to their interactions on the internet. If strangers ask for my comments to a certain topic on social media, most times I don't mind responding to them and sharing my authentic ideas. However, when I'm offline, I might ignore your invitation if I don't know you. And I'm not comfortable to ask my friends if they want to study together. It's just too many things you need to consider in off-line space." ----P1

"There are some things I don't want others to know, especially things that may distinct me from others. For example, I am learning English, and I enjoy reading original English-written books and so on. But I don't like being seen by others. It's a strange mindset. But I will be very worried if others think I'm working too hard(*neijuan*). Besides, I hate that my classmates are aware of my interests in strange things. I have tried so hard to be similar to others in offline spaces. It's impossible to ignore others' judgements. As long as you work a bit hard, and others

notice that, they just publicly complain that I'm working too hard. But on the internet, especially SWM, everyone is so supportive. I feel I'm more mentally closed with friends I made over SWM than offline environments." ----P5

"I notice an interesting feature of my classmates- they never share real information about their study progress. When you ask them how well they have prepared for an incoming exam, they won't tell you the truth. Mostly they just complain about how bad their preparation has been, and pretend that they have done nothing. However, when the final results come out, their grades are so high. I can only have sincere study-related conversations with strangers on the internet, and these chats will never happen between me and my classmates. I know this is odd. Despite that you have closer relationship with your classmates and meet them every day, when it comes to learning, no one tells the truth." ----P7

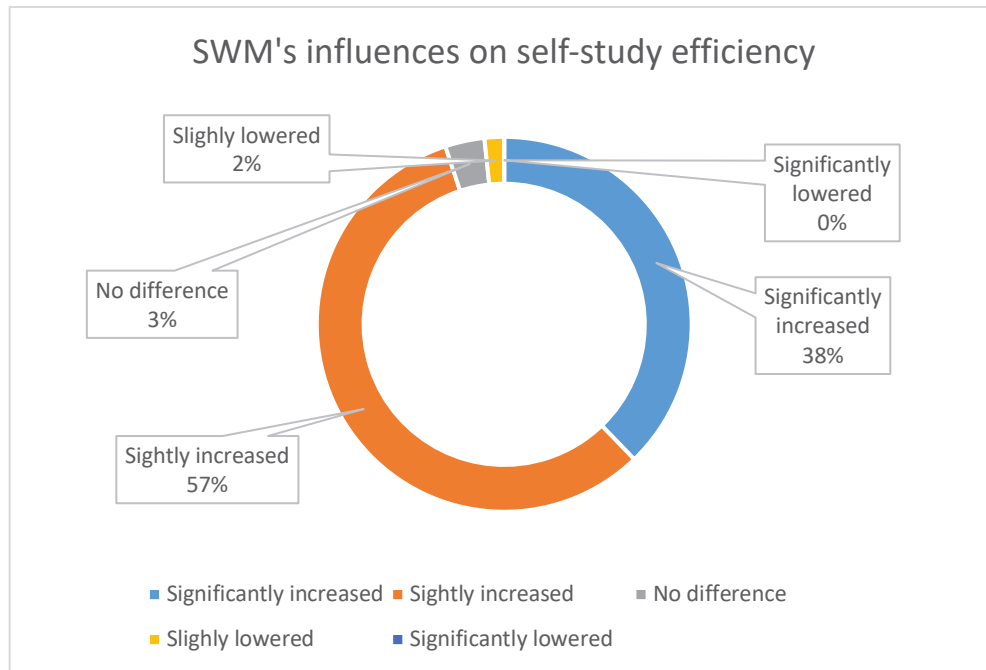
In SWM virtual study space, students engage with others via different CMC modalities, and embrace dynamic interactions, including impersonal, interpersonal, and hyperpersonal. SWM videos, offer an opportunity for students to attain customized study space and productivity tools, and initiate interaction channels with people holding similar study goals or concerns. Meanwhile, students use these videos to meet their dynamic needs or personal preferences. For students using SWM as a task-oriented tool, they perceive text messages (video titles and descriptions) as their simplified task messages, and use these cues to get started. These messages filter out distractive socioemotional factors, and persuade them to convert into a study mode. In this process, environment simulations offered by video content function as dedicated study spaces at home. Similar to an offline study space, like libraries or study rooms, students mentally situate themselves in this space and start their self-regulated learning no matter where they are. These simulated study spaces, for these students, as Generation Z, are superior to traditional offline study locations, because they are embedded with video elements that are scientifically proven to be useful in increasing people's efficiency and time management ability. For students perceiving SWM as a channel for interpersonal communication, they mainly use these interactions with others to get study support, including companionship, motivation, and supervision. In their dynamic interaction methods, *Danmu* has been a main medium to share messages because of its pseudo-synchronicity and embedment with video-playing process. In this information exchange process, students generate impressions and form a shared social identity. Besides



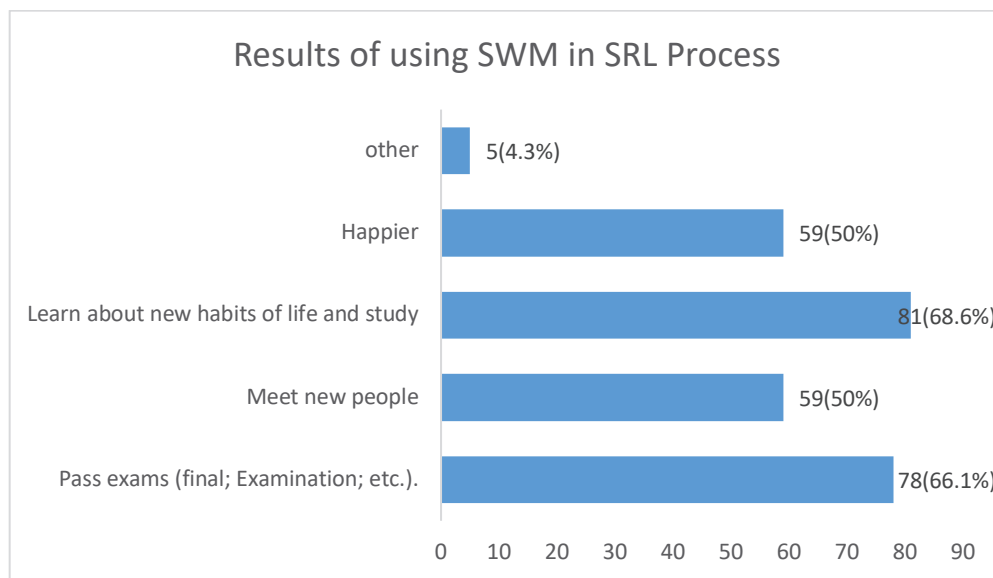
virtual ambience, interpersonal CMC adds an emotional layer of support for students in their SRL process.

The hyperpersonal model of CMC suggests that people selectively present themselves, exaggerate their perceptions to message senders, and embrace reciprocal interactional channels. And these components combine and form a feedback system that intensifies this optimal impression and modifies conversation participants' characters and behaviors. Community members of SWM connect with one another through their salient study goals. With a weak-tie feature of these interactions, communicators are free from pressures in offline social networks, share goals and concerns that they cannot disclose to offline close friends or family members, and acquire relationships that surpass in-person connections. This hyperpersonal relationships offer both role models and supportive peers in students' individual study process, and positively increase students' focus spans and their persistence to study goals. According to survey responses, over 95% of participants reported that SWM's self-study space increased their efficiency (Figure 6-6). Besides successfully passing exams, 69% learn new study habits, and half of the students not only know new friends, but also become happier in this study space (Figure 6-7). Community members share a social identity as hard-working students, carefully constructing their presences and modifying their behaviors to align with expectations in this virtual self-study community.





**Figure 6-6.** An overview of SWM’s influences on self-study efficiency, based on online survey responses collected in this research



**Figure 6-7.** An overview of results of using SWM in SRL process, based on online survey responses collected in this research

However, because students’ salient rationale to join this community is for the purpose of study, they prioritize study over social activities. Hyperpersonal relations within SWM space are supplementary to students, and these students deliberately use

SWM interactions to enhance their individual study process. Thus, after students accomplish their short-term goals, they rarely interact with others as frequently as they used to do in these intensive SRL periods. As for students who failed to achieve their objectives, they either leave this community by not watching SWM, or decrease intimate relationships by turning off *Danmu* and not responding to others' messages in online groups. Mediated by the internet, students' connections within SWM are fluid and undergoing constant impersonal, interpersonal, and hyperpersonal changes. Although university students have different study goals and unique study habits, SWM accommodates their needs with various video types and dynamic interactive levels. As a new study style created by generation Z, SWM and virtual study communities are beneficial for offering fresh solutions in future hybrid learning and the "new normal" in higher educational landscapes after COVID.

## Chapter 7. Implications of SWM for Self-Regulated Learning

### 7.1. Gamified system to enhance online engagement

*Bilibili* is famous for hosting a multi-cultural youth community. This video-sharing platform has introduced multiple strategies to create and maintain a “friendly” environment, including a mandatory account registration exam, a level-based progression system, and a community-shared regulation document of platform etiquette in users’ online presence and interactions. These approaches address the different types of user participation as their core value, filter out “unwanted” voices, and embrace young people’s initiatives on SWM videos in this entertainment-focused platform. Meanwhile, this platform actively built partnerships with universities and promoted online self-study in COVID when students were isolated at home. With diverse niche culture circles, *Bilibili* has become one of the biggest virtual spaces for Generation Z in China to engage with new topics and connect with others beyond off-line social networks. SWM, with its focus on self-study, highlights students’ major activities, and opens a new venue for these students to share personal experience and build connections.

When we discuss strategies for higher education to adapt to the post-COVID “new normal”, students’ presence and engagement in both in-class and after-class time deserve much attention. While universities implement hybrid programs and initiatives to engage with incoming students, young people’s practice in their after-class time provides practical lessons for academic institutes to consider and improve in the process of course design and policy making. For instance, considering that in-coming students have little knowledge of school regulations, a mandatory course and exit tests before students take courses are beneficial to expose them to necessary resources and policies. Meanwhile, instead of imposing strict rules on students, a gamified mindset and interactive programming grounded in senior students’ experience are helpful to nurture a reciprocal relationship among students, thus encouraging their presence and sense of belonging in a new environment.

## 7.2. Customized environment simulations to generate study ambience

SWM videos are delivered and presented in different forms and with dynamic content types in *Bilibili*. However, despite various modalities, video creators incorporate multiple video components to generate customized study atmospheres, integrate time management tools to introduce scientific study strategies, and address well-being in students' SRL process. Born as Generation Z, university students in 2010s and 2020s in China normalize their use of new media, and they approach COVID remote learning with a positive attitude and integrate generational habits into their self-regulated learning at home. In SWM, both uploaded and live videos are used to set up a dedicated virtual space for the audience to filter out distractions in both physical and mental environments. Besides real-time self-study environments in videos, the interfaces in *Bilibili* also increase the sense of immersion for viewers through various elements, including statistics of current views, flying *Danmu* on videos. Similar to a traditional library, SWM places students into these virtual alternatives to offline study rooms and adds human noises in their video-play interfaces.

Educators in higher education have proposed hybrid learning options to accommodate students' new study habits in post-COVID times. However, despite evolutionary changes to curriculum and assessments, students' success and accomplishments in remote learning mostly depend on their ability to be self-regulated learners, especially when they study alone at home. However, coming from different demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds, students' ability in SRL differs widely. While some students acquire sustainable study habits from prestigious high schools or well-educated family members, young people from low-income households may never have access to a dedicated study space at home. Furthermore, with the normalization of digital devices and the internet, people's understandings and perceptions of "an appropriate study space" have displayed tremendous generational differences. Most people from generations born before digital natives define "study rooms" as "quiet and private"; whereas Generation Z approaches "study space" through a more flexible lens: a mentally stable state would suffice to constitute a self-study setting, regardless of physical places and scenarios.

SWM, with its environment simulations in videos and interactive elements in video-playing interfaces, offers a sense of immersion and introduces highly customized study ambience to viewers. In “self-study display” videos, students either watch/document each other’s study sessions or join a muted Zoom meeting to virtually enter a community-shared dedicated study space. “Environmental simulation” videos go a step further, and allow students to build “tangible” connections with well-decorated study spaces and fictitious settings when studying at home. Moreover, some creators even weave time management tools into interactive videos, add instant feedback loops, and create role-playing video games to facilitate students’ SRL process in their uploaded SWM videos.

Higher education remains rooted in rigid, traditional structures; thus, it is at risk of being left behind in favor of expanded access, greater flexibility and tailored learning (Jaleniauskiene & Juceviciene, 2015; Dewitt, 2021). In order to accommodate students’ tailored needs in post-COVID hybrid learning, apart from reforms on course content and assessments in higher education, study ambience and engagement in both in-class or after-class time are of great importance to enhance students’ SRL. Besides an alternative to offline study rooms in COVID, SWM proposes a new study space and virtual self-study style for university students. A virtual replication of traditional libraries, gamified study sessions, and personalized study settings are instrumental to increase the accessibility and flexibility of student access to both in-class engagement and after-class SRL.

### 7.3. Dynamic CMC Channels to accommodate students' Study Needs

Besides playing SWM videos as background music, university students initiate different CMC in their individual study process. From impersonal, interpersonal, to hyperpersonal, Generation Z incorporates dynamic CMC relationships to enhance their SRL and acquire study support. In impersonal CMC, students use SWM as their cues to start SRL sessions. With an immersive environment set-up and task-oriented messages, they filter out distractive factors in both offline and mental environments, and prolong durations regardless of viewers' locations or scenarios. In interpersonal with dynamic interactive channels, students receive companionship, motivation, and supervision from virtual study-support community members. These peer supports add an emotional layer to these study spaces displayed within SWM videos. With the weak-tie feature of these connections, some participants attain hyperpersonal relationships that they rarely acquire in offline scenarios, especially in social contexts where competition is inescapably stressfully in terms of both job markets and academic performances.

A unique feature of students' interactions within SWM is the fluidity of dynamic CMC modalities. And this flexibility of student participation via impersonal, interpersonal, and hyperpersonal modes increases the accessibility and applicability of SWM as a new study style. If students prefer a traditional quiet space, they can turn off interaction channels and only use SWM as a task-oriented tool; if they expect positive emotional peer-support, interpersonal CMC channels, like *Danmu* and online groups, offer a space to attain role models and share empathy among hard-working students; if students encounter interpersonal interaction challenges in offline space, SWM, as a virtual study-support space, filters out social pressures and opens up a channel allowing conversations that are rarely attainable in offline settings. Although some students rarely actively participate in these interactions and post few comments, checking students' activities and interactions in their study intervals still inspires them and positively facilitate their individual study process.

Although people outside the SWM virtual study community have shared their doubts and concerns about students' motivations and the effectiveness of this study habit, participants of both online surveys and in-depth interviews have benefited from SWM and planned to use this virtual space in their future self-regulated learning after

COVID schooling. Born into environments of digital devices, Generation Z's daily life is intertwined with the internet. Instead of serving as a supplementary resource to offline operations, mobile phones and the internet have been a necessary virtual infrastructure for all daily activities. Because Generation Z is situated in a technologized social reality, a complete banishment of the internet and social media is no longer the exclusive and best way to constitute a self-study space, although it seems to be an easy solution.

University students' innovative approaches to SRL in SWM demonstrate how they positively use technologies to facilitate their self-study sessions. In my data collection of users' interactions within SWM video interfaces, students explicitly shared their personal study goals and dreams that they rarely disclose in off-line relationships and social networks. Besides, in both online surveys and in-depth interviews, students use SWM per their individual needs and preferences, and acquire support and connections that surpass traditional offline assistance. In this virtual study space, students not only acquire a tool to increase their efficiency, but also address self-care and receive motivation and energy that they rarely notice in traditional study spaces.

To incorporate this positive energy into post-secondary contexts in a post-COVID time, universities can implement an alternative dedicated study space in virtual space, featuring both customized study ambience and anonymously flexible interactions. Furthermore, with incorporation of community agreements and reward systems, students' online presence and interactions will be escalated in this newly established virtual environment. As an interviewee explicitly expressed in her response-

"SWM, as a new study tool, exists for a solid reason, and its prevalence in COVID is not from nowhere. It all depends on how you use these videos. I don't care about video creators' intentions and external doubts from these "study experts". Indeed, it's not wrong to both pursue study goals and gain followers simultaneously, right? While high education addresses knowledge mobilization these days, SWM for me, is students' pioneered step to induce new study styles. As a procrastinator, any time I play SWM, I know it's my cue to start doing things, or I will never open my books until the very last minute. ----P7

## 7.4. Limitations and Future Work

Due to the limited time and resources, although I have collected the 200 most popular SWM videos on *Bilibili*, and recruited over 100 university students to participate in this research, the quantity of both video samples and human population is still relatively small and limited for a versatile investigation into a worldwide popular self-study phenomenon. Besides, although I briefly mentioned paralleled virtual self-study initiatives in different regions and proposed the universal relevance of learners' similar pressure regardless of educational systems, my main focus was on Chinese university students and their use of *Bilibili* for SRL. It would be beneficial to increase the data population and compare students' use of SWM videos in different demographic contexts. By doing so, more scientific statistics will help validate findings of this research, testify to the effectiveness of SWM videos, and increase the adaptability of suggestions that I proposed in prior chapters.

Moreover, I intentionally invited active SWM participants who were self-identified as university/college students in China to participate this research, and excluded K-12 student groups. Due to China's unique K-12 education system, these students' access to digital devices and the internet is closely monitored and regulated by teachers and parents. Although some SWM videos are indeed uploaded and used by K-12 students in *Bilibili*, I narrowed my scope and focused on SRL of university student groups. However, by considering participants of SWM from different ages, sexes, and ethnicities, further research can expand the human population, and explore how SWM influences students' individual study processes from different groups.

Further, due the nature of online recruitment, only active and "successful" members of the SWM responded to my research invitations. Passive participants of this virtual self-study space are difficult to reach and connect via the internet; for instance, students who only watch videos and leave no comments, members who give up SWM halfway through their SRL are impossible to identify. This may result in sample bias, and little improvement can be implemented if this research is purely conducted over the internet. An SWM trial in offline course deliveries can be useful to alleviate the sample bias in this research, and help explore different applications of this study style in higher education operations.



A fundamental assumption of this research is the normalization of the internet, especially among Chinese university student groups. However, people from different demographic and socioeconomic groups may have different access to the internet. Therefore, this research cannot compare students' self-study activities between villages and urban cities. Strategies on how to improve students' SRL in different technological contexts also deserve further investigation.

Last but not least, because this research only looks into Chinese university students' practices in SWM videos on *Bilibili*, the adaptability and applicability of this new study habit deserves further investigation. As the dominant learning culture in China is closely related to the exam-based social selection system, students' major study activities and their final grades from different exams are interconnected with Chinese students' future socio-economic statuses and their competitiveness in job markets. Thus, instead of critical thinking, Chinese students' individual study practices are limited to the preparation for different exams, and their productivity in this process. Further, with the versatile censorship programming of *Bilibili*, only "appropriate" and "positive" images and comments are allowed in this website; thus, students who do not follow the *Danmu* regulations are prohibited from participating in this online community. Although students build different connections around the topic of "self-study", their "imagined" virtual community on *Bilibili* is under ongoing regulation. With these special features of *Bilibili* and China's exam-based learning cultures, SWM videos and young people's learning practices are restricted in terms of its "efficiency" and "effectiveness"; thus, it may require careful research when being adopted to higher education.

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## Appendix. Online Survey

### Virtual Study room on social media

--- “Study with me” videos on *Bilibili* among Chinese university students

1. Do you know “study with me” videos on *Bilibili*?
  - a. Yes-----to the 2<sup>nd</sup> question
  - b. No-----survey finished
2. What is your gender?
  - a. Female
  - b. Male
  - c. Prefer not to answer
3. What is your age?
  - a. 15-18
  - b. 18-25
  - c. 25-30
  - d. 30+
  - e. None of above options
4. Your majors in universities/colleges?
  - a. Art and Social Sciences
  - b. Sciences
  - c. Pure Art
  - d. Business
  - e. Law
  - f. Other. (please offer answers)
5. What video types have you watched on *Bilibili* related to “study”? (multiple choices)
  - a. “Study with me” vlogs
  - b. “Study” Livestreaming videos
  - c. Study motivation videos
  - d. Knowledge videos
  - e. Others. (please offer answers)
6. How did you know “study with me” videos?
  - a. Browsing *Bilibili* recommended videos
  - b. Friends’ recommendations
  - c. Other social media platforms like *weibo*, *douban*, etc.
  - d. Others. (Please offer answers)
7. When do you want to watch “study with me” videos? (multiple choices)
  - a. Regular basis
  - b. Preparing for exams or certificates
  - c. Summer/winter breaks; Weekends
  - d. others. (Please offer answers)
8. Where do you watch “study with me” videos? (multiple choices)
  - a. Dormitories in universities/colleges
  - b. Libraries
  - c. Self-study Rooms

- d. Laboratories
  - e. Home
  - f. Others. (Please offer answers)
9. How do you interact with others in online self-study community? (multiple choices)
- a. Video Comments
  - b. *Danmu* (Overlaying video in time commentary system)
  - c. Other social media groups (eg: WeChat groups)
  - d. Following one another in other social media platforms. (eg: WeChat Friends)
  - e. Others (Please offer answers)
10. why do you want to watch “study with me” videos? (multiple choices)
- a. get companionship
  - b. gain supervision through peer pressure
  - c. due to curiosity
  - d. acquire motivation
  - e. seek study community
  - f. learn others’ study style
  - g. learn new knowledge
  - h. others. (Please offer answers)
11. What are your takeaways from online self-study? (multiple choices)
- a. Successfully pass exams and tests
  - b. Know new friends
  - c. Know new study and life styles
  - d. More happy
  - e. Others (please offer answers)
12. Is “study with me” helpful to increase your study efficiency?
- a. Yes, it improves my efficiency tremendously.
  - b. Yes, it somewhat improves my efficiency.
  - c. Makes no difference.
  - d. No, it somewhat decreases my efficiency.
  - e. No, it decreases my efficiency tremendously.
13. Have you planned to video/livestream your study process?
- a. Yes, I have videoed my study process and uploaded it to the internet
  - b. Yes, I want to video my study process, yet have not done it yet.
  - c. No, I just want to watch it.
14. If you want to participate interviews in this research, you will be offered a “thank-you” gift valuing 5 cad dollars. This is a first-come-first-serve opportunities. If you want to accept this invitation to interviews, please leave your preferred contact information. I will contact you as sone as possible for the schedule of the interview.

## 社交媒体上的虚拟自习室——以哔哩哔哩平台“study with me”视频为例

1. 您听说过哔哩哔哩上的“study with me”视频吗？
  - a. 是（跳转至第二题）
  - b. 否（问卷结束）
2. 您的性别
  - a. 男
  - b. 女
  - c. 不回答
3. 您的年龄
  - a. 15-18
  - b. 18-25
  - c. 25-30
  - d. 30+
4. 您的大学/学院专业
  - a. 人文学科
  - b. 理工学科
  - c. 纯艺术学科
  - d. 商科
  - e. 法学
  - f. 其他（请填写）
5. 您在哔哩哔哩上看过哪些与“学习”相关的视频？（多选）
  - a. “study with me”视频日志
  - b. 学习直播（陪伴学习）
  - c. 激励视频
  - d. 科普视频
  - e. 其他（请填写）
6. 了解“study with me”的途径？
  - a. 哔哩哔哩视频推荐
  - b. 朋友推荐
  - c. 新闻报道
  - d. 社交媒体推荐（微博；豆瓣；等）
  - e. 其他（请填写）
7. 何时选择播放“study with me”视频或直播？（多选）
  - a. 日常观看
  - b. 备考
  - c. 寒暑假；周末

- d. 其他 (请填写)
- 8. 何地观看“study with me”视频或直播? (多选)
  - a. 高校寝室
  - b. 图书馆
  - c. 自习室
  - d. 实验室
  - e. 居家
  - f. 其他 (请填写)
- 9. 与“云自习”学友交流方式? (多选)
  - a. 视频评论
  - b. 弹幕
  - c. 社交媒体群组 (例: 微信群)
  - d. 社交媒体好友 (例: qq好友)
  - e. 其他 (请填写)
- 10. 为何观看“study with me”视频或直播? (多选)
  - a. 得到陪伴
  - b. 寻求监督
  - c. 好奇
  - d. 得到动力
  - e. 寻找学习社区
  - f. 请教学习方法
  - g. 学习新知识
  - h. 其他 (请填写)
- 11. 参与“云自习”的收获? (多选)
  - a. 通过考试 (期末; 考证; 等)
  - b. 认识新朋友
  - c. 了解新的生活学习习惯
  - d. 更开心
  - e. 其他 (请填写)
- 12. 您认为, “云自习”对学习效率的提升?
  - a. 非常大
  - b. 有一定效果
  - c. 没什么区别
  - d. 有些降低
  - e. 大幅度降低
- 13. 考虑过自己录制或直播学习过程吗?
  - a. 有, 已尝试



- b. 有，未尝试
  - c. 无
14. 如果您有意愿参与深度采访，您将获得价值 5 加元的小礼物一份。如果您想接受本次采访邀请，请留下您的首选联系信息。如果您不感兴趣，可以将此问题框留空。这是一个先到先得的机会。由于空间有限，将仅联系选定的参与者进行深度访谈。我会尽快与您联系，安排时间。

非常感谢您参与这项研究。祝您生活一切顺利。