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Reconsidering time: understanding the "Lying Flat" movement from social media use among China's Gen Z

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Abstract. The idea that the pace of life is speeding up has been explored in academia. Various cultural movements and practices (both online and offline) have emerged in response to this condition. Recently, China's "Lying Flat" movement, in which people refuse to participate in a culture of overwork and over-achievement, has drawn attention, yet few studies have examined participants' temporal perception and pluralistic interpretations through social media engagement. Through interviews with Chinese young adults from 18 to 28 years old, this research investigates individuals' perceptions of modern time and how they interact with related social media content. Findings indicate that Chinese young adults feel the pace of life is faster than in the previous generation. This socio-cultural environment has fostered collective resonance among Chinese Gen Z. Such narration and description are reshaping the "Lying Flat" movement as a constructive and reasonable way to adapt to temporal pressure. Meanwhile, Chinese Gen Z are developing sophisticated digital boundary-setting practices in terms of the usage of ICT. The results of this study suggest that future research should consider personal perception and autonomous choice of people who are engaging with temporal resistance when analyzing the relationship between time and modernity.

Keywords: time, social acceleration, the "Lying Flat" movement, Chinese Gen Z

1. Introduction

As a society, our perception of time varies depending on the situation. Although the the dominant way we perceive time is linear (second, minute, and hour in clock time); people may have different temporal experiences, such as perceiving that time runs faster when interacting with digital products. In order to examine this staggered temporal sense, scholars have attempted to unfold the relationship between time and modern society. Around the discussion of progressive capitalism, digitalization, and modernization, many scholars point out that the advancement in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plays a leading role in transforming how individuals navigate their daily lives and reshaping temporal structures and experience [1-6]. Among them, Rosa [4] has widely applied social acceleration in academia to describe the expediting sense of time.

Under the accelerating context, various forms of resistance have emerged worldwide. For instance, the "Slow Movement" advocates for deliberate deceleration across multiple domains of life, from food consumption to urban planning [6]. This movement attempts to reclaim temporal autonomy in the face of social acceleration and what Hassan [3] terms 'network time' – a temporality characterized by constant connectivity and the erosion of boundaries between work and leisure. While these resistance movements have gained traction in Western societies, similar phenomena have emerged in East Asia, albeit with distinct cultural characteristics shaped by local socioeconomic conditions.

China presents a particularly compelling case to examine temporal resistance movements. Over the past four decades, China has undergone the most dramatic acceleration in human history. Since the economic reform in 1978, China has developed its social economy extremely fast [7]. With this extremely compressed and rapid modernization, China has created a unique temporal structure and time culture, such as Pan [8] describes as a "996" work culture – working from 9 am to 9 pm, six days a week. This intensification of work rhythms and fierce educational and career competition have created unique temporal pressures on Chinese youth.

In response to these pressures, a distinctive cultural phenomenon known as the "Lying Flat" (躺平, Tangping) movement has developed among Chinese Generation Z. The movement first attracted widespread attention in 2021 when an anonymous post entitled 'Lying Flat Is Justice' gained widespread attention across Chinese social media platforms. This philosophical stance emerged as a deliberate rejection of the limitless striving for professional advancement and material acquisition [9]. Instead,

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followers advocate for minimizing ambition and prioritizing personal well-being over career advancement. Examples of these behaviors are giving up stressed work and enjoying preferred things.

Social media use is crucial in shaping the "Lying Flat" movement. Although Chinese digital platforms face restrictions on hosting explicit 'Lying Flat' content, the philosophy continues to spread through coded language, memes, and alternative digital spaces [9]. Not only do they spread "Lying Flat" ideas, but these platforms also provide communities where alternative temporal practices can be validated and reinforced. The engagement of Chinese Gen Z with social media platforms regarding the “Lying Flat” movement illuminates the dual feature of digital technologies. It reveals how digital tools facilitate broader spaces for temporal resistances and alternative practices.

Drawing on the above three aspects - social acceleration theory, social media use, and the “Lying Flat” movement, this research can then reexamine the influence of the "Lying Flat" movement shaped by social media use. This research focuses particularly on Chinese young adults' decision-making progress and movements’ psychological benefits. It is worth noting that the current academic discussion around the "Lying Flat" movement remains divided. Some scholars regard it as a rejection of social responsibility that could undermine Chinese continuous development and personal achievement [10, 11]. Others interpret it as a positive response to excessive social pressures [12, 13]. What remains less explored, however, is how participation in this movement reshapes young people's subjective experience of time and how social media mediates this temporal resistance. As such, this study has three specific objectives:

1. To explore Chinese Gen Z's perception of time in the contemporary era.
2. To investigate how young Chinese adults participate in and engage with the "Lying Flat" movement through social media.
3. To examine Chinese Gen Z's awareness, understanding, and attitude regarding the "Lying Flat" movement.

This paper consists of an Introduction, four chapters, and a conclusion. The Introduction generally examines the theory of social acceleration and the corresponding cultural movement formed in China.

The next chapter (Chapter 1) - the Background - reviews the concepts related to time in the modern era, "Slow Movement," as well as, in far greater detail, the discussion of the "Lying Flat" movement. It finds that although some scholars have conceptualized the "Lying Flat" within the theoretical framework of social acceleration, it is more compelling to investigate the internal perception of individuals who engage in the "Lying Flat" movement with multiple forms, such as online and offline practices as well as the interrelationship.

Then, the second chapter outlines the adopted methodology - a qualitative semi-structured interview, which aims to unpack the research questions of this study. It justifies the reasons for applying qualitative analysis as the primary theory. Then, this chapter explains the use of semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis as appropriate methods for analyzing individuals' experiences regarding their temporal perception of "Lying Flat." Furthermore, it lays out the participants, data collection and analysis process, and how credibility was achieved throughout the project. This chapter ends with several limitations and potential approaches to address. Key findings follow this in Chapter 3.

Finally, Chapter 4 concludes with a discussion that combines the results and reviewed literature. It then concludes with the answers to the research questions. It finds that Chinese Gen Z is experiencing a faster social pace, and they regard the “Lying Flat” movement as a positive approach to counter temporal pressure. Additionally, the specific usage of social media shows sophisticated digital boundary-setting practices among participants. This part also discusses the limitations and implications of this research project, as well as providing direction for future research in the conclusion.

Through tracing how young Chinese adults engage with the “Lying Flat” movement on social media, this study contributes to the understanding of temporal resistance in digital environments. It argues the “Lying Flat” movement can be viewed as a valuable response to the psychological pressure of social acceleration, which challenges the narratives that frame the "Lying Flat" movement as merely negative or regressive.

2. Literature review

This literature review explores how the concept of time has been theorized in relation to modernization, social acceleration, and cultural resistance. While time is commonly understood in terms of its physical measurement—seconds, minutes, and hours—scholars have examined its broader implications within contemporary society through sociological, technological, political, and cultural lenses. This literature review firstly presents key theoretical perspectives on time and speed; then it examines cultural movements that respond to or critique these dynamics; furthermore, it narrows the focus to the Chinese socio-cultural context; and finally, it discusses a recent phenomenon among Chinese Gen Z known as the “Lying Flat” movement. Through a critical reflection on these discussions, this review notices that while existing research have analyzed the “Lying Flat” movement within the theory of social acceleration, it limits the understanding of how social media usage reshapes participants’ inner thoughts about time perception in “Lying Flat”. Therefore, it argues that accelerated temporalities under neoliberal modernization have provoked countercultural responses that reimagine the value of time, particularly among youth in China who are resisting dominant productivity norms.

2.1. Time and speed

Many scholars have focused on the advancement of the military, capitalism, Informationand Communications Technology (ICT), and modernity to reexamine time in the context of a dynamic society. In this section, the following concepts were critically reviewed and discussed: Dromocracy, Time-Space Compression, Timeless Time, and Network Time in order to show the scholars' reflection on time under dynamic social development. This is important because it lays a theoretical foundation and follows the development of modernization and digitalization to map out the concept of the ever-changing integration of time.

2.1.1. Dromocracy

Earlier, the French scholar Paul Virilio and Benjamin H.Bratton defined the new term “Dromocracy” , which integrated the Greek word dromos (speed) and Kratia (rule) to describe a lopsided society where time dominates and shapes the social structure and human interaction [5]. In their conception, the onward process of modernization, such as the evolution of technology, transportation, and communications, shapes power and politics; in other words, to Virilio, speed is power. He argues that people in control of speed have the most power in the dromocratic world, mainly manifested in the military. Meanwhile, Virilio and Bratton observed the influence of speed on both time and space as instant communication collapses space between geographic borders [5], which compressed the communication time that should have been spent and changed people's understanding of the time structure. In the context of this speeding up and ramshackle society, Virilio shows the concern about expanding dictatorship and personal loss of orientation in a “information superhighways” [14], where telecommunication allows things to happen in real-time. Virilio’s conceptualization of time provides a foundational framework for understanding the relationship between speed, technology, and modern society. It serves as a key reference point for this research and other scholarly work on temporality.

2.1.2. Time-space compression

Through critically reflecting on Virilio’s arguments on time and speed, David Harvey mentions another concept, “time-space compression” [2]. While Harvey argues that capitalist dynamics are the vital drivers of acceleration, his notion regarding the altered relationship between time and space aligns with Virilio’s. Harvey applies the term “time-space compression” to describe reconstructed time and space due to the expansion of capitalism embodied in technological advancements such as digital products and faster transportation. Capitalist pressures and the relentless pursuit of speed have forced faster production, transportation, and communication. This acceleration compresses both time and space. As a result, individuals may experience negative perceptions of time, such as anxiety, alienation, and a sense of instability. To expand more on details about individuals’ daily life changes in the context of capitalist control over time, Harvey discusses that the temporal discipline is much more vigorously measured for labour (e.g., 9:00 am-5:00 pm schedule in a factory). Like Harvey, another scholar, Manuel Castells, also examined time in the context of capitalism and modernization, where he focuses on digital networks [1].

2.1.3. Timeless time

“Timeless Time” is a defined term by Castells to discuss time in a network society [1]. According to Castells, “timeless time” is another time driven by real-time technology. He assumes that the chronological and linear way people constantly experience time has been altered and completely disorganized due to the advancement of ICT; digital networks offer people the functions to process events simultaneously or rearrange them. For Castells, time no longer goes from past to present and then future; it becomes a form of eternal present, for example, all the previous digital records are accessible at present. Castells’ arguments regarding “timeless time” once again break with theorists’ understanding of traditional time and point out an interesting timeless feature of contemporary society, providing a more nuanced theoretical perspective for this study. However, his construction of “timeless time” has been criticized by Robert Hassan, who argues that it abstracts time to such a degree that it becomes disconnected from the lived human experience [15]. According to Hassan, Castells’ framework overlooks time is embodied, social, and existential dimensions — how people feel, perceive, and inhabit time in their everyday lives.

2.1.4. Network time

Built on Virilio, Harvey, and Castells, Hassan demonstrates further insights into understanding time and modernity [15]. By analogizing capitalism and networks as two empires, Hassan emphasizes the current situation in which modern society is dominated and controlled by speed, which overlaps with Virilio’s sight. To accurately narrate this temporality, which is changing culture and society, Hassan terms this “network time” [3]; he believes that this kind of time has already transformed into an almost uncontrollable accelerating force, which shapes culture, politics, and limits human agency in modern life. Hassan is concerned with the likelihood of political chaos, social fragmentation and personal psychological distress in accelerating society

[3]. He advocates for people to seek ways to slow down in an accelerating society; This perspective directly informs the significance of this research by highlighting the urgency of understanding cultural responses—such as the "Lying Flat" movement in China—that attempt to reclaim time from the pressures of hyper-speed era.

2.1.5. Time cultures in different regions

If we consider the degree of modernization or industrialization as the key determinant in conceptualizing time and speed, in this setting, some scholars have discovered that distinct temporal cultures emerge across nations and regions [16-20]. Early thinker Edward T Hall framed two conceptual orientations to understand time differences between multiple cultures: monochronic time and polychronic time [17]. According to Hall, the monochronic time system views time as scheduled and arranged, and the United States is a representative subject where time has been regarded as a commodity [17]. In American culture, 'time is money' and 'the schedule is sacred.' Würtz verified the regions to an international sphere; he finds that the monochronic time system is widely accepted in some Asian areas such as Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore [21]. On the other hand, polychronic time refers to viewing time as fluid and flexible; this temporal perception is prominent in some regions, such as Latin America and Africa. This discrepant narration of the two time culture is consistent with the idea of Shome [20]. She points out that speed and time symbolize modern, progressive and orderly in areas where industrialization and ICT are relatively advanced. Conversely, slowness would be viewed as laziness and inertia. These examinations of time on regions and countries are vital for this paper to take a closer look at the Chinese context.

Despite the fact that the above scholars have focused on discussing and interpreting time in the context of modernity from various facets, they share a similar standpoint that time in contemporary society is accelerating, and the consequent psychological impacts on humans should be paid attention to. However, they fail to present the complexity of social time more intuitively and understandably. As Hartmut Rosa argues that modern social acceleration should be viewed as a cumulative outcome of a complex chain of interrelated causes [4]. Therefore, the following section reviews and applies the "Social Acceleration" concept by Rosa [4], who collated and summarized these interleaved arguments and then formally defined and conceptualized social acceleration as a sociological concept. This provides the essential theoretical support for this paper.

2.2. Social acceleration

Engaged with Marxist theory, Rosa suggests a more explicit way to understand social acceleration [22]. By categorizing social acceleration into three dimensions based on functional differentiation: (1) technological acceleration (e.g., faster transport or communication); (2) acceleration of social change (e.g., varying cultural norms, changing social structures); (3) acceleration of the pace of life [4], Rosa highlights the paradox between the first acceleration and the third. Ideally, Marxist predictions of productivity and workers' free time are inversely proportional, since automation brought by progressive technology should liberate employees with more personal time to enjoy life. However, modern lifestyles have become the opposite of this utopian hypothesis; people seem to lose control and agency with their own time. In this setting, Rosa emphasizes that as society speeds up, people may feel disconnected [22]. This sense of alienation results from constantly trying to keep up with the fast-changing society. To diminish these detrimental effects, Rosa suggests that people need to build stronger connections - what he calls "resonance" in the context of "acceleration-society" (p.4).

2.2.1. Adaptable agency

Rosa's arguments regarding the main drive of social acceleration concur with most other thinkers [1, 2-5, 23] that the advancement of digitalization, such as ICT is the principal factor. This is criticized by Judy Wajcman, who challenges the general agreements of social acceleration by focusing on individual agency of media usage [24]. Wajcman questions this technological determinism by overwhelmingly exaggerating the role of ICT. To Wajcman, the representation of ICT, such as mobile phones, could offer users specific functions with both multitasking and entertainment to better manage their personal time [24]. For example, they can obtain relaxation through online gaming and socializing. In this case, the personal autonomy choice embodied in ICT should not be underestimated. What she emphasizes is that the individual agency in operating mobile devices could imply the management of personal time, which affords significant academic support for the hypothesis of this research.

Contrary to Virilio, Rosa's, and Hassan's pessimistic predictions towards social acceleration, John Tomlinson holds a neutral standpoint where he reflects the influence of social acceleration from a cultural view [25]. What Tomlinson contends is that speed has been normalized in everyday life, not only from technological advancement (e.g., transportation and ICT) but also to individuals' habits [25]; for example, people gradually have more expectations of faster responses. He mentions the virtues of social acceleration, such as efficiency in productivity and instant gratification among users. Social acceleration, to Tomlinson, is an integral feature of the modernization process, and people could adapt to it in different ways, to embrace or resist it.

While there are different arguments about the causes and consequences of fast-paced culture, many agree that viewing speed as a principle of human activity is a serious issues that urgently needs to be addressed. Consequently, a cultural initiative called

the “Slow Movement” is gradually being applied to daily life. Therefore, in order to integrate the concept of social acceleration and its corresponding cultural movements, the discussion regarding the “Slow Movement” is provided.

2.3. Slow movement

The emerging ‘Slow Movement’ does not have a fixed definition in academia. A Canadian journalist, Carl Honore, in his book In Praise of Slow, provides a generic introduction and discussion by tracing the history of mankind’s relationship with time and speed in various contexts and regions [6]. According to Honore’s narration, “Slow Movement” refers to a cultural revolution against the notion that faster is always better, which advocates for people to slow down in an increasingly rapidly paced society [6]. He stresses the urgency of slowing down by admitting the predicament of an age dominated by speed, highlighting the importance of those who resist it. As he writes in his book, “while the rest of the world roars on..., these rebels are...making room for slowness” (p.12), referring to individuals who deliberately step back from acceleration to reclaim time and meaning in their lives. However, Honore’s description of “Slow Movement” lacks the combination of practical theories that conceptualize the precondition of acceleration. Therefore, this paper applies the definition by Moira & Kondoudaki [26]; “Slow Movement” refers to “responds to the pressures of the contemporary socio-economic environment, stress, lack of time, the speed of the rhythm of modern life, and the lack of communication and real contact in human relationships” (p.3). In other words, “Slow Movement” can be regarded as autonomous behaviors that slow down, prioritize well-being, and reconnect with the physical world.

2.3.1. Worldwide trend

The emergence of the “Slow Movement” is prevailing globally. As Honore observed, people’s inclination towards slow life is presented worldwide [6]. For example, the Slow Food movement promoted in Italy encourages people to enjoy dining and resist the current fast-food culture. As the slogan of this Slow Food group states: 'A firm defense of quiet material pleasure is the only way to oppose the universal folly of Fast Life’ (p.52). This decade-old movement reflects the individuals’ intentional resistance against the negative impacts of social acceleration. Similarly, another movement called “Slow Fashion,” became popular in the UK. It aims to refuse to quickly replace goods and refuse excessive consumption. This international popularity illustrates a collective initiative and longing to seek practical methods to slow down in an accelerated era.

2.3.2. Social media use among Gen Z

In addition to the feature of universality mentioned above regarding the ‘Slow Movement,’ there are other trendy movements that especially prevail among the young generation (Gen Z) regarding social media use, which raised a heated discussion among scholars. For instance, the NEETs, which refer to a condition that young people who do not work, do not study, and give up stressful employment, have been prevalent in Europe [27]. Through conducting a longitudinal study on young Italian people in terms of their usage on Facebook, Bonanomi and Rosina attempted to analyze and alleviate young generation’s negative attitude towards employment. They believe that being in a status NEETs represents marginalisation and demotivation, which is detriment people’s life quality [27]. Dai expands this European cultural phenomenon to Asian regions [28], where she found that the NEETs group had been integrated and localized to the ‘Low Desire Society’ in Japan [29] and the ‘Lying Flat’ movement in China. Dai points out that these related cultural practices reflect the young generation’s emotional, psychological, and behavioral methods of escaping, giving up, and self-alienation due to various social pressures in a global context [27]. This sheds light on unpacking how young people articulate their distinctive interpretation of applying “Slow Movement” through social media engagement, which intrinsically contributes to this paper’s expanding understanding of people’s spontaneous responses and resistance in the context of social acceleration.

2.4. Critiques on slow movements

It is worth noting that the consequent impacts of the above-mentioned movements that emerged among adolescents remain controversial among scholars. They believe that the purpose or subsequent social practice of slow movement is a kind of “stagnation,” which is negative for society and practitioners [10, 27, 28]. For example, Zheng et al conducted a study and they claim that the mentality associated with the Slow Movement, particularly the sense of personal relative deprivation can negatively impact individuals’ belief in social progress and reduce their motivation for self-improvement [11]. Another thinker, Lindemann [30], offers a critical reflection on the implications of embracing a slower lifestyle. Drawing on observations from the COVID-19 pandemic, she notes that while slowing down may benefit certain groups, such as writers or artists, it can also hinder personal fulfillment and may be seen as an anti-modern stance that resists innovation. These critiques highlight the complexities and contradictions involved in interpreting cultural initiatives like the Slow Movement and underscore the

challenges of assessing their broader social and psychological impacts—an issue that this paper aims to explore in contemporary China.

However, this paper argues that the younger generation may generate a different and more nuanced relief from specific life attitudes. Furlong has argued that research should transcend the established frameworks and stereotypes surrounding the discussion, like NEETS, instead adopting a more holistic interpretation and focus on the psychological or practical behaviors among contemporary youth [31]. Therefore, this research attempts to investigate another emerging cultural phenomenon in China, the "Lying Flat" movement or "Tangping," to enrich how individuals perceive and interact with time and speed in the context of ICT and modernization.

2.5. China's social rhythm

The following section systematically examines China's social tempo through Rosa's framework of three forms of acceleration to combine China's social context with social acceleration.

2.5.1. Technical acceleration of China

The progressive productivity advancement of China demonstrates noticeable consistency with Rosa's framework of the first social acceleration, technical acceleration [4]. As a nation experiencing an expeditious process of modernization and digitalization [32, 33], China has been described as 'the fastest-changing place on earth' [34]. On the one hand, the metamorphic transitions of transportation infrastructure have compressed physical borders. Jin et al. have examined Chinese public transportation over the last 60 years, and they contend that China has formed a comprehensive, modern, and integrated transportation system [35]. Expanding and improving Chinese high-speed rail (HSR) has further enhanced regional accessibility and shortened travel time [36]. On the other hand, the dramatic development of communication technologies further expedites the duration of communication. Scholar Daya Kishan Thussu's discussion of ICT in China [33] provides convincing support. By listing Chinese media industries and comparing and analyzing their impacts on a global scale, Thussu underscores the advanced ICT power of China. In this case, the exceptional technical power of China shrinks and compresses the time and space in society, which coincides with Rosa's consideration of the first aspect of social acceleration [4].

2.5.2. Accelerating social change in China

The acceleration of social change manifests in a monochronic way in how modern Chinese society organizes and perceives time into new structures and norms. For instance, the '996' work regime, which refers to "working from 9 am to 9 pm, six days a week" [37], normalized a work schedule that embodies the changed time culture of China's overwork cultural, as well as an intense pursuit of efficiency and speed. Researcher Pan focused on this vigorously regulated work time among social enterprises and conducted a case analysis under the theoretical framework of social acceleration [8], he found that many personnel showed great 'feelings of helplessness and abandonment' (p. 791), which is by the central concern of alienation by Rosa [4].

Similarly, another internet meme called "Neijuan内卷" or "involution", which refers to the counterproductive pressure to out-compete others in society in terms of employment or education, also indicates fierce competition (Zhang & Li, 2023) and rapidly changing norms. At the same time, Zhang and Ji noticed that a group cohesion among Chinese youth appeared online [38]. Through quantitative research focused on one of China's most prevailing social media platforms, Weibo. They found that many young people created collective social media behavior, such as posting hashtags on Weibo to oppose the pressure and anxiety due to 'involution'. Zhang and Li have expressed worries about the extreme seeking of speediness [13], where relentless work-life schedules continuously strengthen cultures like 'time is money' and 'money-first' (p.56). These varying cultural norms and discourses imply fast social change in the context of modern China.

2.5.3. The speeding life pace of China

Additionally, the acceleration of the pace of life could also be investigated via Chinese citizens' lives. Researcher Cockain conducted qualitative research, gathering ethnographic data on Shanghai's residents [39]. Cockain points out that the residents of Shanghai could experience the acceleration of their everyday life [39]. Meanwhile, they express intense anxiety regarding the 'social acceleration' termed by as Rosa [4] has described it. Moreover, Cockain further analyzed the interviewee's consideration of 'slowing down', where he found that the cost of 'slowdown' is tremendous for residents, which could even abate the connection between individuals and society [39]. Cockain emphasizes is that people are compelled to re-engage with social acceleration to keep pace with the flows of the collective society, which is prone to intensify social acceleration and forms 're-acceleration' (p. 363). His research focuses on a particular region in China to reveal residents' temporal perception regarding social acceleration, which aligns with this paper to discuss China in the context of social acceleration in a broader way.

In this accelerated environment, China, as observed by Dai [28], has also adopted cultural practices similar to the "Slow Movement" in Europe to resist or escape the pressures generated by social acceleration. One subsequent and conspicuous movement among Chinese young people, the "Lying Flat" movement, has captivated researchers' discussion. Therefore, this research will discuss the 'Lying Flat' movement in terms of social acceleration to enrich the personal perception and interaction with temporality.

2.6. The "Lying Flat" movement

The definition of the "Lying Flat" Movement remains unfixed in academia. As expressed in the words 'lie' and 'flat', the meaning of 'Lying Flat' does not simply refer to a physical posture of being 'lying.' According to Wang and Wang [12], "Lying Flat" presents the "attitude and behavior of young people towards life and the future, adopting a state of no desire, no pursuit, and no resistance" (p.5). This identification signifies the lifestyle state embodied in the practice of "Lying Flat", however, it lacks the recognition of its purpose. Other researchers, Lin and Gullotta [9], observed the individuals' temporal experience represented in "Lying Flat" status; they contend that this emerging cultural practice of "Lying Flat" is concerned with people's malposed perception between society and temporal perception. Therefore, this paper combines these definitions with Zhang and Li [13], who consider that "Lying Flat" refers to the young group selected to give up following the super-fast rhythm of society to escape snowballing pressure. In other words, "Lying Flat" is an attitude and behavior adopted by young Chinese people who attempt to cope with temporal desynchronization and overwhelming pressure under social acceleration.

2.6.1. Online and offline representation

The "Lying Flat" movement has obtained huge online and offline responses and is embodied within Chinese social media and social practice. The emergence of the "Lying Flat" movement started with online discourses. In 2021, the first post advocating for people to "lie flat" was published by a Chinese netizen, entitled 'Lying Flat Is Justice' and the poster states, 'you just lie flat. Lying flat at home, lying flat outside, lying flat like the street cats and dogs ... I choose to lie flat, and I am no longer stressed' [9]. This original post and related online discussions were censored and deleted by the Chinese government since it violated the core social values propagated by the Communist Party of China. Still, its subsequent impacts are aggressively prevalent on many Chinese social media platforms [9] through diverse engagements such as internet memes on Weibo [38]. This trend developed online discourses and has mobilized the "Lying Flat" Movement into an offline social practice. For example, a computer developer from Hangzhou called Jeff gave up on overworking to rest and find his life meaning [40]. The increasing participation of the "Lying Flat" Movement suggests its popularity in modern China, indicating that social media usage has impacted people's decision-making progress in their physical world.

2.6.2. The special generation

Thinkers have multiple interpretations concerning the "Lying Flat' movement in terms of its causes. However, most of them agree that an accelerating social tempo with an increasingly competitive living and working environment is the essential factor that propels people to choose 'Lying Flat' [9-13]. Some scholars have noted that the integral participation and practice of the "Lying Flat" movement by a specific Chinese young generation should not be overlooked [9,13]. The participation of the young Chinese generation born between 1997-2012 has greatly fueled the influence of this movement on the public. According to Zhang and Li [13], this unique age group is distinctive because it has a significant association with China's historical specificity and family. Their parents have just experienced China's "Reform and Opening-Up" and one-child policy, which refers to a family planning policy implemented by the Chinese government to reduce China's booming population [41]. In this case, their parents can create superior living conditions for their children. However, as the cost of living increases, their only choices are to obey their parents, lie flat, or enter fierce social competition. The over-high expectations from their parents lead to various emotional burdens such as anxiety and depression on China's Gen Z. Other researchers [9] focus more on the relationship between mainstream values in Chinese society and subconscious rejection among Gen Z. They argue that contemporary China's social values have given young people excessive responsibilities. The success of young people has been defined as China's success. This overly optimistic ideology from the communist party is comparatively profit-oriented, which has received pushback from Gen Z. Under these various factors, the "lying flat" movement gradually popularized among Gen Z.

2.6.3. Disputed condition

The influence of the 'Lying Flat' movement remains controversial. Lu et al [10]. conducted cross-sectional and longitudinal designs. They predicted that the "Lying Flat" tendency may negatively influence on the young's mental health, such as a lower happiness index. Another study analyzed by Zheng et al [11]. examined the relevance between personal relative deprivation and self-improvement motivations, they indicate that "Lying Flat" is detrimental to public trust in society and hinders self-

improvement. Meanwhile, some Chinese official media repudiate the "Lying Flat" movement, characterizing its anti-aspirational stance as threatening social engagement and progress [42]. However, these discussions have been challenged by supporters of "Lying Flat" Zhang and Li [13], who believe that the above considerations lack observing the embodied emotions of counternarratives to an intense and fast-paced social culture, and argue that the popularity of "Lying Flat" reveals a firm intention to resist pressure and anxiety among Chinese young people. Similarly, Wang and Wang [12] also contend that the choice of being 'Lying Flat' illustrates the rejection of the social acceleration defined by Rosa [4], which reflects the young people's pursuit of a good life. This literature lacks systematic and in-depth investigation into the internal worldviews of participants in the "Lying Flat" Movement, but this "welcome" perspective to the "Lying Flat" Movement provides new insights for this paper to understand its significance in mediating social acceleration.

The above review has critically examined the existing discussion of time in society and connected it with the emerging Slow Movement. Then, it identifies the ongoing social acceleration in China by contextualizing the Chinese context within Rosa's theoretical framework of social acceleration in contemporary China. Focusing on the prevalent "Lying Flat" movement, it recognizes the limitation of current literature's lack of practical and thorough analysis that probes individuals' interior experience when interacting with "Lying Flat." This research will extend our understanding of how Chinese Gen Z forms temporal resistance in digital environments. It will also contribute to the field by examining their social media use regarding the "Lying Flat" movement. Therefore, the following research questions have been proposed, which may contribute to the understanding of individual autonomous choice in the accelerating age.

RQ1: What is Chinese Gen Z's current perception of time?

RQ2: How do Chinese Gen Z participate and engage with the "Lying Flat" movement in terms of social media use?

RQ3: Can the "lying flat" movement be viewed as a positive cultural practice towards social acceleration?

3. Methodology

This study employs a methodological approach that utilizes traditional qualitative analysis. According to Henline-Hall [43] and Pope and Mays [44], qualitative analysis provides rich insights into lived experiences. This method was chosen because it can provide a deeper understanding of how Generation Z in China interprets their temporal experience and social expectations in the context of the "Lying Flat" movement. This methodology allows the researcher to explore the complicated nature of the "Lying Flat" phenomenon - an online social movement. Meanwhile, given that this movement has also been penetrated into young Chinese individuals' physical world and decision-making processes. Therefore, to capture its embodied connotation and personal experience, this methodology combined online social media-based participant recruitment with Zoom in-depth semi-structured interviews. The interviews and coding framework was then analyzed using a thematic analysis [45] can offer insights into how social media discussions reshape physical actions.

3.1. Method

For the following method stage, this study employs semi-structured interviews. According to Adams [46], semi-structured interviews is a approach that combines predetermined questions with the flexibility to explore emerging themes in a given context. During the interview, the researcher can obtain deeper or unexpected but relevant topics through open-ended questions [47]. Moreover, Bordens and Abbott [48] contend that semi-structured interviews to effectively investigate personal meaning-making processes because they allow researchers to capture the nuanced ways individuals interpret and make sense of their experiences. In this way, researchers could explore specific cognitive and emotional connotations of individuals, and analyze the dynamic interplay between personal perspectives and broader social phenomena. This methodological choice aligns with the study's purpose of examining how young Chinese individuals construct and negotiate their temporal perspectives within evolving social and cultural contexts.

Previous research support the effectiveness and applicability of semi-structured interviews in studying social movements and youth culture [49, 50]. For example, Jian and Chan employed semi-structured interviews to examine youth social movements in urban China [49], which indicates how qualitative approaches can effectively capture the meaning of emerging social phenomena. WeiQi et al.'s study applied in-depth interviews on Chinese youth culture and identity formation [50], indicating the significant role of semi-structured interviews in understanding nuanced personal narratives within broader social contexts. This existing research proves that semi-structured interviews can yield rich narratives about participants' engagement with the "Lying Flat" movement as well as their temporal perspectives.

The depth of investigation is achieved through several key measures: (1) Follow-up probes that encourage participants to elaborate on their original responses; (2) Contextual exploration that allows participants to connect their personal experiences with broader social phenomena; (3) Narrative freedom that enables participants to introduce relevant topics not initially considered in the interview framework, which facilitates producing supplementary results. Combined by the above features, this

methodological choice could generate detailed, meaningful, and contextually rich data to reflect participants' subjective experiences [45]. Meanwhile, the implementation of this approach can ensure the quality and depth of research.

To maintain methodological rigor, several measures have been applied. The data analysis framework adopts thematic analysis for data interpretation and meaning-making. Supported by NVivo software which enables systematic and thorough coding of interview transcripts. The coding process allows for exploring predetermined theoretical frameworks and remains open to potentially emerging themes and patterns. When discussing "Lying Flat," participants might begin with their social media engagement and then transit and share how this ideology has influenced their career choices or daily routines. The researcher can probe these connections more deeply and encourage participants to reflect on the relationship between online discourse and their lived experiences. As Bjørnholt [51] note, this approach yields rich data by providing guidance while leaving room for participants on their narratives own terms.

3.2. Participants

This study involves human participation and therefore has obtained ethics approval. Given that this is a minor thesis project, it has followed Morse's suggestion that the sample size should be considered by including the scope of the study [52], the nature of the topic and the research design. I determined that 10 interviews with young Chinese adults would be a valuable and manageable sample size for this study in order to collect data and process analysis.

In order to allow for constructive data, participants needed to meet the following two criteria: (1) Chinese adults who born from 1997 to 2006; (2) people who possess at least a basic understanding of the "Lying Flat" movement within the Chinese socio-political context. To gather the sample size (N=10) designed for this study, a digital poster containing essential information about the study was created and disseminated online following ethical approval. This poster was published on two prominent Chinese social media sites, Little Red Book and Weibo. The reason for choosing these two platforms is that (1) both have numerous active users; (2) the average age of users on both platforms ranges from 18 to 32 years old [53, 54]. This is consistent with the scope of planned interviewers for this study. In total, there were six females and four males; for reasons of ethics principles and privacy, the interviewees were encoded in numerical order from 1-10 (see Table 1).

Table 1. Participants general information

Number	Gender	Age	Language Interviewed
1	Female	24	Chinese
2	Female	24	Chinese
3	Male	25	Chinese
4	Male	26	Chinese
5	Male	23	Chinese
6	Male	24	Chinese
7	Female	25	Chinese
8	Female	24	Chinese
9	Female	28	Chinese
10	Female	25	Chinese

3.3. Data collection and analysis

Each interview consisted of 15 open-ended questions (see Appendix) with a time consumption of around 30 minutes. All interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese to ensure participants could express themselves naturally and without linguistic barriers. Considering the authenticity and cultural context of the participants, this paper analyzed the original Chinese transcripts for coding and theme development. In total, approximately 80,000 words of transcribed content were generated.

This study then employed thematic analysis (TA) to detect and categorize themes. Terry et al [55]. point out that TA is a constructive method for identifying themes in qualitative data. Furthermore, this paper utilizes both inductive thematic and deductive thematic analysis. The inductive analysis allows original themes to emerge from collected data, and the deductive analysis involves identifying patterns according to the study's theoretical framework [45]. Therefore, the combination of the two can provide an in-depth and comprehensive interpretation of the data. This deductive process was implemented by using predetermined theoretical categories derived from the theoretical framework of this paper such as speeding up life pace, digital technologies. In this way, this paper can evaluate how existing frameworks could explain the "Lying Flat" phenomenon while remaining open to new insights that might extend or challenge current understanding.

The analysis began with familiarization to obtain a general understanding of all transcripts. Next, initial codes were generated using the original Chinese transcripts to avoid meaning ambiguity due to different languages and cultural expressions. Once themes were identified, they were translated into English to ensure that the final analysis maintained both linguistic fidelity and academic clarity. During the coding process, the collated texts were coded as 'speeding up' to describe participants' experience of time and related reasons, such as acceleration social tempo and the popularity of ICT (See Table 2).

Table 2. Summary of coding

Theme	Sub-Themes	Codes
Perception of changes in time	Identify	Speeding up
	Cause	Accelerating social tempo
		ICT
	Consequence	Anxiety
		Isolation
		Pressure
		Insomnia
		Confusion
Understanding of "Lying Flat"	Recognition	Personal choice
	Consequence	Soothed
		Guilty
		Temporal antidote
	Causes	Social environment
		Social media promotion
		Family expectation
		Family financial support
	Status	Completely immerse
		Partial engagement

3.4. Limitations

This designed study has several limitations. Firstly, qualitative methodology may lead to relatively subjective data conclusions. Yadav [56] has pointed out that as qualitative research relies on the researcher's interpretation based on participants' personal experience, this may create a degree of subjectivity that may affect findings.

Secondly, the data sample size (N=10) is comparatively small due to the time constraint of a minor thesis project, which may not sufficiently represent the generalizability of its findings and conclusions. Therefore, it is suggested that future research could collect more data sources to enhance the robustness and applicability of the results.

Thirdly, the study's reliance on linguistic translation presents a potential risk of misinterpretation. Given that the context has been situated in China and all the participants are Chinese-speaking volunteers, there is a chance that the transcription and interpretation may have ambiguities or inaccuracies. During the data analysis, cultural and linguistic nuances may not always be preserved when converting responses from Mandarin to English. This challenge is well-documented in cross-language qualitative research literature. Van Nes et al [57]. highlight that translation in qualitative research involves linguistic conversion and cultural interpretation, where meanings can be lost or altered. Especially, the concepts specific to Chinese cultural contexts often lack direct English equivalents [58]. To mitigate these issues, this study implemented several measures. According to Temple and Young [59], the initial coding should be conducted in the source language, allowing themes to emerge from the original Chinese expressions before translation. I maintained a reflexive translation journal documenting challenging terms and concepts, particularly those related to the "Lying Flat" phenomenon's unique terminology. Moreover, to enhance credibility, this paper adopted member checking recommended by Guba and Lincoln and [60], which involves selecting participants to verify that English translations accurately represented their original meanings and intentions.

Fourthly, the recruited participant group mainly consisted of students, which may limit or bias the data. Considering that their lived experiences may be constrained regarding career development and societal engagement, further research could expand participants with various social backgrounds to get a more comprehensive understanding within the context of the "Lying Flat" movement.

4. Findings

Drawing from semi-structured interviews with ten Chinese Generation Z participants (aged 18-27), this section had outlined key findings about their experiences with time perception, social acceleration, and the Lying Flat' movement. Through rigorous coding and analysis, accelerated time perception in Chinese society, social media as platforms for temporal discourse, "Lying Flat" as temporal resistance, and reconstructing time through alternative practices have been analyzed. These themes illustrate how young Chinese adults experience, negotiate, and resist dominant temporal structures in China.

4.1. Accelerated time perception in Chinese society

Interview data revealed that all 10 participants consistently experienced a profound sense of temporal acceleration in their daily lives. The table below shows how participants describe contemporary time (See Table 3). This acceleration manifested through multiple dimensions that align with Rosa's framework of social acceleration [4], including technological acceleration (e.g., participants as the witnesses of advanced communication technology), acceleration of social change (e.g., rapidly evolving and changing norms), and faster daily routines (participants feel less personal time during everyday life).

Table 3. Description of current time

Participant Number	Representative Quote
1	"relatively fast"
2	"undoubtedly fast-paced"
3	"time is very fast"
4	"constantly accelerating and being compressed"
5	"time passed very quickly"
6	"getting faster and faster"
7	"it is getting faster"
8	"is very fast"
9	"time is passing faster and faster"
10	"seems to be getting faster"

4.1.1. ICT as a factor

When considering what factors may fuel the pace of life, 9 participants agreed that the emergence of ICT, such as mobile phones and computers, is a major ingredient that drives acceleration. They regarded the usage of ICT as directly impacting temporal perception. As participant 3 replied, "The emergence of electronic products, for example, not only smartphones, but also desktop computers, or tablets. These electronic products will affect people's perception of time" (Volunteer 3). His examples indicate that digital communication technology would directly influence how people experience time.

Another participant agreed with him when he pointed out that fast and efficient communication technology is an important reason for his accelerated life, he added that this seemingly expeditious connection makes him feel empty and alienated, "I feel that the reason for my acceleration is inevitably related to the Internet technology or the popularity of our mobile terminals or mobile devices...I feel that it has lost some of its potential meaning or it has lost some connection" (Volunteer 4). This description further identifies the relationship between communication technology and the sense of time.

Drawing on the above findings, volunteers acknowledged that the universality of ICT could influence people's recognition of time, and it has been viewed as a driving factor that accelerates their personal time.

Table 4. Physical and psychological effects of accelerated tempo reported by participants

Effect	Frequency	Description
Sleep disturbances	3/10	Insomnia, disrupted sleep patterns, difficulty falling asleep
Anxiety symptoms	10/10	Panic attacks, persistent worry, racing thoughts
Pressure	10/10	Overwhelming pressure concerning study, career, and family expectation
Isolation	3/10	Feeling isolated

4.1.2. A temporal compression from schooling to working

Ten participants described intense time pressure during the transition from school to work environment. They expressed experiencing a sense of endless urgency, perceiving an obligatory and immediate transformation from study to employment, leaving no space for relaxation. Table 4 (See Table 4) details the physical and psychological effects described by participants in an accelerating social environment. As Volunteer 8 stated: "Especially now that I am about to graduate, I need to work seamlessly immediately after graduation, all my classmates were very anxious because they had to find a job or get into graduate school" (Volunteer 8). This compressed change in the identity of a student to an employee implies the accelerated social norms in the context of modern China.

Another Participant 2 shared a similar experience with a friend regarding the compressed time from schooling to career, she described "he is very anxious to find a job, he must think that I should quickly submit 1 million resumes, I should quickly get a job" (Volunteer 2). The faster transformation from campus to the company has been normalized into young Chinese adults' social values, and already produced negative mental feelings such as anxiety mentioned by Participant 2.

This extension and intensification of time have directly affected participants' personal lives and perception of time. Rosa's assertion that accelerated social change is mutually intensifying people's life speed [4] was reflected in participants' reports of how the mandatory seamless transition from education to employment increasingly constricts temporal perception indicating that China is undergoing a noticeable process of social acceleration.

4.1.3. Cross-generational temporal conflicts

The research found significant differences in temporal perspectives between participants and their parent generation. This frequently leads to cross-generational conflicts. The parent generation formed temporal orientations centered on continuous progress, achievement, and material accumulation due to having experienced China's rapid economic development. Participant 9 clearly articulated this generational difference: "My parents' generation worked very hard. They believe young people should strive more, work overtime more, and fight for the future. But I think life is not just about work; I value quality of life and personal time more. Every time we discuss this topic, we have disagreements" (Volunteer 9). It can be seen that the way different generations view life creates conflict in how they regard and interpret time.

Participant 2 expressed more specific experiences of conflict: "Our traditional older generation still has a lot of complaints about just lying at home and not working, they don't fully support me doing so" (Volunteer 2). This implies the potential dilemma of the "Lying Flat" movement, which has not been fully understood as a positive resistance towards social acceleration.

This cross-generational conflict highlights a broader socioeconomic conditions may also shape temporal orientations. Given that participants' generation (Gen Z) is growing up in relative material comfort, they appeared more willing to question the underlying temporal logic that prioritizes productivity and achievement above all else.

4.2. Social media as platforms for temporal discourse

Social media emerged as a complex and contradictory force in participants' temporal experiences. While digital platforms often intensified their acceleration experience, participants also described how these same platforms provided spaces for temporal resistance and alternative temporal practices.

4.2.1. The paradox of social media use

6 Participants described a paradoxical relationship with social media use. The use of social media accelerated their experience of time through constant notifications, information overload, and social comparison, while simultaneously providing spaces where alternative temporal orientations could be explored and validated: "On one hand, it allows us to quickly access information and learn about things happening around the world; on the other hand, it makes me feel very empty, so it becomes very fast and it is accelerated again" (Volunteer 4). This type of contradictory experience in social media use shows that digital platforms serve as a dual role in altering people's experiences.

Participant 9 mentioned how social media influences her perception of time: "I often come across content about slow living and 'Lying Flat' on Xiaohongshu. These contents make me reflect on my lifestyle. Although scrolling through social media wastes a lot of my time, it's also through these platforms that I've started to think about the value of time and how to better utilize it" (Volunteer 9). In this setting, the convergence of opportunities provided by social media and the individuals' agency consists of the complicated role of ICT in reshaping people's understanding of time.

This finding suggests that digital platforms function as contested temporal territories where accelerated temporality has been discussed, challenged, and reconsidered.

4.2.2. The dissemination and evolution of "Lying Flat" discourse

10 Participants detailed how the "Lying Flat" philosophy has been spread through social media platforms. Due to internet regulation and social stigmatization, the ways of discussing "Lying Flat" have become subtle and diverse: "Initially, the term 'Lying Flat' was very popular online, but later, due to certain reasons, content directly discussing 'Lying Flat' was restricted. But now people use more euphemistic expressions, such as 'Buddhist-style living' to express similar ideas" (Volunteer 4). The transformation of narrative discourses indicates the prevalent dissemination and increasing popularity of the idea of "Lying Flat."

Volunteer 10 added: "Discussions about 'Lying Flat' on social media are no longer as radical as they were initially. They focus more on pursing a more balanced life under realistic conditions, such as finding a balance between work and life, reducing material desires, and enjoying simple living" (Volunteer 2), indicating the evolving meaning and understanding of the "Lying Flat" movement among the young generation.

This evolution reflects how the "Lying Flat" movement has transformed from simply passive resistance to a more pragmatic life philosophy. It also demonstrates how social media reshapes and disseminates the movement's ideas.

4.3. Collective resonance and offline mobilization

The third theme this study verified is a collective resonance generated from participants when interacting with social media related to the "Lying Flat" movement, and this has gradually mobilized into different forms of offline practices (See Table 5).

4.3.1. Collective identity formation

This resonance is first reflected in the akin definition and understanding of the "Lying Flat" movement; they consider that the "Lying Flat" movement refers to a selective life attitude in order to alleviate social pressure such as excessive work and over-achievement, as participant 3 noted, "It is more about the satisfaction of your current situation. You don't need to do anything extra" (Volunteer 3). Furthermore, most participants (8/10) described experiencing a moment of recognition and resonance when encountering "lying flat" content online. Volunteer 4 articulated profound alignment, perceiving his choice to "lie flat" as no longer socially deviant or alienated. He said: "a big reason is that I feel a kind of emotional or mental resonance, which makes me feel that my current state is not an isolated case" (Volunteer 4). This collective perception that emerges in the young people not only reflects the similar dilemma faced by young people in China, such as social pressure but also reveals the recognition of the effective role of the "Lying Flat."

4.3.2. From online to offline

Interestingly, the "Lying Flat" movement seems to have been deeply integrated into the daily norms of Chinese society. From Table 5, it can be seen that although there was less online engagement with the content on social media, all participants were mobilized by this resonance from online peers and integrated into social practice with different forms. Interviewee 10 stated, "everyone will spontaneously discuss online and offline...everyone will tend to discuss this common topic" (Volunteer 10), indicating the transition into normalized daily discourse.

Table 5. Pathways from online engagement to offline action

Stage	Description	Frequency	Representative Quote
Initial exposure	First encountering "lying flat" content online	10/10	"I first saw the term on social media and was immediately and virally spread." (Volunteer 1)
Passive consumption	Reading/watching content without participation	9/10	"I just read others' posts without commenting." (Volunteer 3)
Active engagement	Commenting, sharing, creating content on social media	1/10	"I will comment and encourage people who feel confused when 'Lying Flat'." (Volunteer 2)
Offline application	Implementing ideas from online communities	10/10	"I just go sleeping, or shopping, or city walk, started practicing the 'do nothing'. " (Volunteer 9)
Advocacy	Encouraging others to question temporal norms	6/10	"I now openly discuss my 'lying flat' philosophy with colleagues." (Volunteer 7)

Each participant has various forms regarding the practices of "Lying Flat." For example, participant 1 would read books and go shopping; participant 2 would go travel; and participant 9 chose to stay at home and relax by browsing short videos. From

these behaviors it can be seen that the “Lying Flat” movement has transcended from online discourse to physical social practices. These multiple behaviors reveal that “Lying Flat” represents a optimistic living conditions or attitude.

4.4. “Lying Flat” as temporal resistance

The research found that participants did not view “Lying Flat” as simple passive withdrawal or laziness, but understood it as active resistance against mainstream temporal structures. This resistance manifested through reclaiming temporal autonomy and rejecting externally imposed rhythms and expectations.

4.4.1. Reclaiming temporal agency

Ten participants consistently framed their engagement with the “Lying Flat” philosophy as a reassertion of personal agency over their time. This was not described as laziness but as a deliberate reclamation of decision-making power regarding how their time should be allocated. Participant 4 described his personal understanding: “‘Lying Flat’ is not about doing nothing, but about following what I love and interested. What I want is to be able to decide how to use my time, rather than being forced by society or other external factors” (Volunteer 2). The redefinition of “Lying Flat” reflects its subjective initiative in attempting to control personal time.

Participant 7 told how he regained temporal autonomy through the “Lying Flat” philosophy: “I feel that 'Lying Flat' has given me a sense of freedom and relaxation. Now I focus more on the present and the quality of life, looking for things that truly make me feel satisfied and happy.” (Volunteer 7)

This finding interprets “Lying Flat” as a way of evading exorbitant social responsibility and expectations. It suggests that the movement represents a sophisticated critique of temporal structures that alienate individuals from their own time.

4.4.2. Reconstructing time through alternative practices

During the “Lying Flat” status, participants chose alternative practices to reconstruct their time. Several participants described making deliberate career choices prioritizing temporal autonomy over status or income. These choices were framed as liberation from oppressive temporal structures: “I gave up a high-paying internship job at a big company. My sleeplessness and quality of life has improved a lot” (Volunteer 5).

Meanwhile, participants described developing practices of mindful disconnection from digital technologies to create protected temporal spaces. These practices included creating technology-free zones in their homes. Participant 10 said: “I sometimes detach myself from the digital world. I go try my favorite perfume or red vine” (Volunteer 10). It can be seen that people are reconstructing time through various behaviors.

This finding suggests that young Chinese adults are willing to reclaim temporal autonomy, representing participants’ attempts to counter the acceleration of time in everyday life. Rather than being passive victims of temporal compression, they actively create alternative temporal structures that allow for different qualities of experience.

4.4.3. Redefining success and progress

Interview data revealed another significant aspect of temporal resistance when participants interacted with “Lying Flat.” They consciously redefine notions of success and progress. Rather than accepting linear career advancement and material accumulation as the primary measures of a well-lived life, participants described adopting alternative metrics centered on well-being, meaningful relationships, and personal fulfillment: “When it comes to finding a job, I just look for one if I can find one. If I can’t find one, I will see if there is anyone in my family who can introduce or arrange something. I don’t really want to work hard on my own, what I want is just maintain physical and mental health” (Volunteer 9).

Volunteer 3 shared a similar point from his observations of friends: “I think many young people now, including myself, are rethinking what true success is. It’s no longer simply pursuing material things and status, but focusing more on personal growth and life experiences. For example, being able to develop according to one's interests, having time to travel, learning new skills—these are more valuable to me than a stressful job” (Volunteer 2).

This type of redefinition reveals a fundamental challenge to the contemporary time culture of constant acceleration in Chinese society. Participants refused to regard higher productivity as more personal worth; in this way, they created space for alternative ways of experiencing and valuing time.

4.5. Summary of findings

The findings consider that the engagement of Chinese Generation Z's in terms of the "Lying Flat" movement represents a sophisticated form of temporal resistance against social acceleration and its subsequent pressure. Participants were not as escaping or withdrawing from society, instead, they actively reconstruct their relationship with time through reflective views and concrete practices. Moreover, this study points out that despite digital usage accelerated individuals' perception of time, it provides opportunities for users to reflect and obtain the collective resonance. Cross-generational conflicts highlight the specific historical reasons for different temporal value, meanwhile, it also shows the current situation where mainstream society cannot fully accept the idea of "Lying Flat."

These findings argue that the "Lying Flat" movement should not be utterly understood as a regressive rejection of progress. Young Chinese adults are not losing ambition but reclaiming their time agency, which represents a significant cultural shift with potential implications for understanding contemporary time within the framework of social acceleration.

5. Discussion

This study has explored how Chinese Generation Z perceives time in the context of social acceleration, how they engage with the "Lying Flat" movement through social media, and whether this movement represents a positive cultural response to temporal pressures. The findings reveal complex interactions between social acceleration, digital technologies, and emerging forms of temporal resistance among young Chinese adults. This section interprets these findings by combining broader theoretical frameworks of social acceleration and maps out their implications for understanding contemporary temporal experiences in China.

5.1. Reinterpreting time in the context of social acceleration

The experiences described by participants strongly align with Rosa's conceptualization of social acceleration [22]. Their narratives reveal all three dimensions of acceleration identified by Rosa: technological acceleration (manifested in constant digital connectivity), social change acceleration (reflected in rapidly evolving career expectations), and the daily routines compression (evident in the "996" work culture). This thesis identifies Rosa's framework in China's social context. By observing and analyzing Chinese Gen Z, it highlights how social acceleration is experienced and negotiated within the unique Chinese socioeconomic and cultural context.

China's compressed modernization process has created a distinctive temporal landscape. As Harvey [2] theorized in his concept of "time-space compression", capitalist dynamics drive acceleration and reshape temporal experiences. This compression has occurred at an unprecedented pace in China, compressing socioeconomic development that took centuries in Western nations into a single generation. Participants' experiences reflect this intensified compression, with many describing extreme work pressures and a pervasive sense that time is increasingly scarce and controlled.

Built on Judy's view [24] of adaptable agency concerning the usage of ICT, this study underscores significant agency in how young Chinese adults navigate accelerated temporality. While participants acknowledged feeling overwhelmed by temporal pressures, they also described their sophisticated strategies developed for temporal autonomy. This finding challenges the previous perspectives of viewing individuals as passive acceleration victims. It finds there are spaces for temporal resistance and alternative temporal practices within highly accelerated societies.

The findings also reveal a distinctive aspect of temporal experience in contemporary China: the tension between temporal orientations (emphasizing sacrifice for future collective progress) and individualist temporal orientations (prioritizing personal well-being and present experience). This tension is shown in the cross-generational clash, where their parents' temporal orientations shaped by China's reform era and conflicts with their children's desire for temporal autonomy. Indicating that the temporal orientations are based on individual preferences and are shaped by broader historical and socioeconomic conditions.

5.2. "Lying Flat" as a constructive response to temporal pressures

The findings suggest that "Lying Flat" represents a constructive response to unsustainable temporal pressures. Participants consistently described their engagement with "Lying Flat" not as passive resignation but as an active reclamation of temporal agency. Their deliberate effort is to establish more sustainable and meaningful relationships with time.

The "Lying Flat" movement shares important similarities with other temporal resistance movements, such as the Slow Movement described by Honoré [6]. The "Lying Flat" movement and the Slow Movement both demonstrate rejection of viewing speed as progress. They both advocate for slowness, a reduction in today's speeding-up pace of life. However, the "Lying Flat" movement emerges from Chinese specific socioeconomic conditions and cultural context. Additionally, the "Lying Flat"

performs as a more comprehensive stance or chosen behavior toward life, work, and success. This differs from the Slow Movement, which often focuses on specific domains, such as food or urban planning.

This study also distinguishes "Lying Flat" from similar phenomena like the NEET movement in Europe or the "Low Desire Society" in Japan [28]. These movements are often characterized by withdrawal from social participation. However, through observation on participants' deliberate engagement with society, this paper identifies that the "Lying Flat" involves a negotiation of temporal values and practices.

The findings suggest that "Lying Flat" enables three forms of positive temporal reconstruction: (1) reclaiming decision-making power over personal time allocation, (2) establishing healthier boundaries between study or work and personal life, and (3) creating space for alternative temporal experiences focused on presence and meaning rather than productivity and achievement. These reconstructions represent not a refusal of social participation but a more sustainable life mode of engagement that prioritizes well-being and meaningful experience.

5.3. Digital paradox: social media's dual role in temporal experience

This study reveals the contradictory role of social media in shaping temporal experiences among Chinese Generation Z. On one hand, digital platforms intensify experiences of acceleration through information overload. This aligns with Virilio's concept of "dromocracy" [5] where digital technologies blur the boundary between physical distances and speed up traditional temporal rhythms. On the other hand, the usage of social media affords spaces where alternative temporal orientations can be explored, validated, and reinforced.

This finding challenges simplistic views of digital technologies as purely accelerating forces or potential tools for deceleration. Different from what Rosa [4] has argued that the social acceleration may be driven by ICT, this paper suggests that social media usage functions as contested temporal territories. In this way, dominant temporal norms in China are simultaneously reinforced and challenged. Despite regulatory constraints under political ideology, participants described how the movement adapted through alternative expressions such as memes, which demonstrates the resilience of digital temporal resistance in highly controlled environments.

The findings also reveal sophisticated digital boundary-setting practices among participants. Rather than completely detaching from digital technologies, they described developing mindful approaches to technology use. This type of use allows them to benefit from connectivity while protecting temporal autonomy. These practices included scheduled digital detoxes, technology-free zones for social media use. Such practices represent a form of "digital mindfulness" that neither embraces acceleration nor completely withdraws from digital participation.

This relationship with digital technologies extends Hassan's [3] concept of "network time". It highlights how individuals can develop practices and mitigate the accelerating effects of digital connectivity. While Hassan emphasized the overwhelming nature of network time, this study suggests that young adults are developing particular strategies for navigating digital temporality in ways that preserve agency and well-being.

5.4. Generational shift in temporal values

While the Chinese reform era shapes the parent generation and tends to prioritize hard work, material accumulation, and future-oriented sacrifice, Generation Z participants emphasize on present well-being, work-life balance, and quality of experience over quantity of achievement. This shift reflects broader changes in Chinese society. As China has achieved remarkable economic development, younger generations who have grown up in relative comfortable material environment, pose the question of whether continued acceleration and achievement-oriented striving represent the optimal path forward. This questioning is not merely personal but reflects deeper concerns about the sustainability of the Chinese development model and its impact on individual and collective well-being.

The cross-generational conflicts described by participants disclose how temporal orientations are sites of negotiation where broader social values and priorities are contested. According to the description of participants, their (Gen Z) parents pay more attention on higher career advancement, economic ability, and social status. Whereas Chinese Gen Z purse temporal autonomy, meaningful experience, and sustainable lifestyles. This kind of generational disagreements reflects fundamental tensions within Chinese society, which reveals the transformation from a development-focused model to the tendency of life quality and sustainability.

The findings underscore that this generational shift may have significant implications for China's future. As Generation Z increasingly influences in Chinese society, their altered temporal orientations may reshape social norms and time cultures. Despite some people may view this shift as threatening Chinese continued development, it may alternatively represent an evolution toward more humane temporal structures.

5.5. Theoretical implications and contributions

This study makes several contributions to the theoretical understanding of time, social acceleration, and digital societies. It extends Rosa's [4] social acceleration theory and examines how acceleration is experienced and resisted in a non-Western context with distinctive historical and cultural characteristics. The findings suggest that the fundamental dynamics of social acceleration may be similar across societies. It manifests how individuals respond to specific cultural, historical, and socioeconomic conditions. This paper contributes to understanding the relationship between digital technologies and temporal experience. By highlighting the paradoxical role of social media as an accelerating force and platform for temporal resistance, it challenges technological determinism views of technology's impact on time. It suggests a more complex relationship that digital technologies create both constraints and opportunities for temporal agency. Meanwhile, this thesis offers insights into how resistance movements emerge and evolve in digital environments. The "Lying Flat" movement demonstrates how digital platforms can facilitate the spread of alternative temporal orientations even in contexts of alternatives face regulatory constraints. This suggests that digital environments may also provide important spaces for imagining and practicing alternative temporal structures. This research contributes to understanding youth movements in accelerated societies. By positioning "Lying Flat" not as mere withdrawal but as constructive temporal resistance, this paper offers a framework for interpreting similar movements globally. This framework emphasizes how such movements often represent sophisticated critiques of dominant temporal structures and attempts to create more sustainable and meaningful temporal practices.

These theoretical contributions have practical implications for understanding contemporary Chinese society and similar accelerated contexts worldwide. They suggest that the challenges of social acceleration require not merely technological solutions or individual coping strategies but also deeper consideration of the temporal values and structures. The "Lying Flat" movement points toward balancing achievement with well-being, productivity with presence, and progress with sustainability.

6. Conclusion

As Chinese society continues to evolve, the discussion about the "Lying Flat" movement become more prominent. This study explored how Chinese Generation Z individuals negotiate their relationship with time through the "lying flat" movement, with particular attention to the mediating role of social media. Through semi-structured interviews with 10 participants, it revealed the complex interplay between social acceleration and temporal resistance, as well as the constructive significance of "lying flat" as a response to mainstream temporal norms. The findings suggest that "lying flat" is not simply social withdrawal or an abdication of responsibility, but a conscious response to unsustainable temporal pressures. Participants described their experiences of temporal compression brought about by social acceleration and how they used social media to find resonance, validation, and practical guidance. Particularly, the usage of social media reveals a sophisticated digital boundary-setting practices among participants, which expands the understanding between individuals' agency and role of ICT. "Lying flat" as a form of temporal resistance allowed participants to regain partial control over their time but not completely disengage from socioeconomic structures. This middle position enables participants to maintain economic viability while still practicing core values of temporal autonomy. This indicates that temporal resistance need not be an all-or-nothing choice but can be a spectrum of adaptive strategies that allow individuals to create more sustainable rhythms of life within an accelerated society.

6.1. Theoretical contributions and practical applications

This research makes several contributions to the understanding of social acceleration theory, digital temporality, and emerging cultural initiatives. By contextualizing Rosa's social acceleration theory into the Chinese context, this study demonstrates how acceleration manifests in a different cultural environment. Meanwhile, it maps out how specific socioeconomic conditions shape a nuanced form of resistance. The research argues that temporal resistance advocated by individuals is not merely a rejection of mainstream temporal culture. Instead, they should be considered as an active construction of alternative temporal experiences. The examination of the "Lying flat" movement in China in this paper provides a framework for reevaluating new temporal values and practices. Furthermore, the study reveals the complex role of social media where it not only functions simultaneously as a driver of acceleration but also a space for creating temporal resistance. This duality extends the current scholarly perspective that views digital technologies as a direct reason for accelerating life pace. Finally, the findings point practical implications for multiple stakeholders. The results suggest that the "Lying Flat" phenomenon reflects as a reasonable response to unsustainable and overwhelming time cultures. Therefore, it is recommended that policymakers should pay more attention to the individuals' internal appeal behind this social phenomenon. Policymakers should consider how to create more balanced social environments that alleviate the extreme pressures driving young people to "Lying Flat". The research indicates that workplaces that value work-life balance and temporal autonomy may be more successful in attracting and retaining Gen Z employees. Flexible work arrangements and respect for temporal boundaries may be more effective than traditional career advancement incentives.

6.2. Limitations and future research directions

Despite this study provides valuable insights into the understanding of the “Lying Flat” movement among Chinese Gen Z, there are several limitations. This section lays out limitations of this study and potential strategies for future research to address them.

The sample size (N=10) was relatively small and participants all mostly students, which may not fully represent the diverse experiences of Chinese Gen Z when considering the “Lying Flat”. At the same time, the research relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Moreover, given that the “Lying Flat” movement is an emerging cultural phenomenon, therefore, its long-term impacts and evolution remain to be further observed. It is suggested that future research could conduct longitudinal studies tracking “Lying Flat” participants over time, particularly how they negotiate temporal autonomy across different life stages; Future studies also could compare engagement with “Lying Flat” among young people from different socioeconomic backgrounds or social identity, and explore how class, geography can influence temporal resistance practices. In this way, study could investigate connections and differences between the “Lying Flat” movement and other global movements. In an increasingly accelerated world, the “Lying Flat” movement reminds us of the importance of temporal autonomy and the necessity of rethinking how we value time. By understanding “Lying Flat” as a constructive response to social acceleration rather than simple withdrawal, we gain better insight into young people’s efforts to seek creative ways to reclaim control over their time, to find meaning and balance in a fast-paced society.

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Appendix

Interview questions

1. Please introduce yourself and talk about what did you do today?
2. What do you usually do in your spare time nowadays?
3. How did you spend your time when you were a child?

4. How do you feel the differences?/ How do you experience or perceive current social pace?
5. When and how do you know the new words of “lying flat” or “tangping” appeared in recent years?
6. What is your understanding or definition of “lying flat”?
7. What you think is the main reason of this phenomenon?
8. Are you now in a situation of “lying flat”? If not, please specify.
9. How do you engage with the contents related with “lying flat” on social media? Any sharing or comment?
10. What makes you attracted in those content on social media?
11. How do you feel when you saw those content? Support or dislike?
12. Whether the description or promotion or backlash of “lying flat” on social media have an impact on your choice?
13. Do you think there are any advantages or disadvantages of the choice of “lying flat”?
14. Do yo feel guilty or relax when you chose to “lying flat?
15. Are there any peers you know who choose to “lying flat”? Please describe.