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The Impact of People's Daily Douyin Use on Political Trust and Political System Support: An Empirical Study in China

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ABSTRACT

The rapid proliferation, low access barriers, and decentralisation of new media have facilitated a competitive environment in the age of burgeoning technology. In this context, the Chinese Communist Party-backed People's Daily and other mainstream official media have leveraged short video platforms like Douyin to disseminate and reinforce ideological discourse. The People's Daily Douyin account aims to propagate Chinese socialist principles within the virtual cultural sphere. However, the impact of this dissemination on political trust and support among the Chinese population remains underexplored. Drawing on agenda-setting and system justification theories, we developed a conceptual framework encompassing the variables of People's Daily Douyin, parasocial relationships, nationalism, political trust, political system support, and collectivism. The relationships between these variables were examined through partial least squares structural equation modelling. Data from 417 Chinese participants, recruited through snowball sampling, were analysed using SPSS 27 and Smart PLS 4.2.0 software. The findings supported five direct hypotheses and revealed the strongest positive association between People's Daily Douyin use and nationalism. Additionally, the moderating effect of collectivism on the relationship between People's Daily Douyin use and parasocial relationships was confirmed. The study concludes by discussing its implications, acknowledging its limitations, and offering recommendations for future research.

Keywords: Nationalism, parasocial relationships, People's Daily Douyin, political system support, political trust

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INTRODUCTION

With the rapid advancement of the Internet era, social media platforms built on Web 2.0 technology have significantly enhanced the integration of individuals into social networking systems, facilitating communication and information exchange (Shodiyev, 2022). Short videos have become

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a prominent feature in citizens' daily lives among these new communication mediums. In this context, People's Daily, a news outlet sponsored by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), exemplifies this trend (Zhang et al., 2023). Communication effects on Chinese mainstream media, particularly on the Douyin platform, are often measured by data indicators such as shares, comments, and likes, focusing on content characteristics and their impact on audience engagement (Chen et al., 2021). People's Daily has consistently utilised this platform, posting short videos daily to engage its audience (Wang, 2020). Given the increasing political significance of People's Daily's Douyin account, the present study investigates its impact on political trust and political system support, exploring the roles of parasocial relationships and nationalism. The study is grounded in system justification theory and agenda-setting theory, providing a robust theoretical framework for understanding these dynamics.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A quantitative research methodology was opted for. Scales to measure the study variables were adapted/adopted from past literature. We used Questionnaire Star software version 1.2 to develop the questionnaire. The questionnaire was posted in the People's Daily Douyin comment area and forwarded to People's Daily Douyin WeChat, QQ group, WeChat Moments, and Weibo. Douyin only operates in China, and "People's Daily" has 160 million followers (Qu, 2022). The sample size of 385 for the target population was determined using the calculator.net website. However, a total of 417 responses were collected. The snowball sampling approach was used to collect data. The questionnaire was available in both Chinese and English.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To test the significance of the relationship, bootstrapping 417 cases with 5,000 samples was conducted. Table 1 presents the results of direct and moderating relationships in structural path analysis.

This study examines the usage of the "People's Daily" Douyin account by the survey group, focusing on how individual cognitive characteristics of the audience influence the effectiveness of communication. It explores the cognitive aspects of political communication effectiveness and relevance, highlighting their significance. The analysis revealed that increased use of the People's Daily Douyin account leads to heightened parasocial relationships and nationalism. Our findings indicate that a stronger parasocial relationship enhances political trust, while increased nationalism positively affects support for the political system. The study also confirmed a moderating effect of collectivism on the relationship between People's Daily Douyin use and parasocial relationships, although this effect was negative. These unique findings within the Chinese context offer significant practical and theoretical insights.

Table 1
Structural model assessment

	β-value	*t*-value	*p*-value	Standard deviation	Confidence interval (5%)	Confidence interval (95%)
PDDU ⟶PSR	0.337	6.363	0.000	0.040	0.522	0.680
PSR ⟶PT	0.393	7.139	0.000	0.061	0.054	0.294
PDDU ⟶NTM	0.557	12.498	0.000	0.045	0.466	0.640
NTM ⟶PSS	0.391	7.756	0.000	0.050	0.291	0.488
CTV*PDDU ⟶PSR	-0.165	5.557	0.000	0.043	-0.258	-0.094

Note. PDDU = People's Daily Douyin use; PSR = Parasocial relationship; PT = Political trust; NTM = Nationalism; PSS = Political system support; CTV = Collectivism

CONCLUSION

This research explored the impact of "People's Daily" Douyin usage on political system support and political trust by reviewing existing literature and conducting quantitative survey research. It developed a hypothesis model based on institutional legitimation theory and agenda-setting theory, proposing five key hypotheses. Data was collected from users of the "People's Daily" Douyin account through a questionnaire survey for empirical analysis. The study highlights the importance of content, stressing that video creators must be aware of the potential impact of their content on users. Future research should investigate the effects of communication and the role of short videos in shaping public opinion, thereby providing deeper insights into how such media influences audience perceptions and public attitudes.

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