

Internet Usage and Political Trust in the New Era: Evidence from World Values Survey

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Abstract

Original Research Article

The specific mechanism of Internet influence on political trust is an important policy issue of network governance, and there are insufficient studies to explain its mechanism. Based on the statistical analysis of the 2012 World Values Survey data, this paper finds that traditional media trust plays a mediating role between the Internet usage and political trust. Political interest moderates the strength of the relationship between Internet use and political trust. This paper concludes that internet has some “push effect” versus traditional media in the political communication area. We also find that citizens with higher political interest are more persistent to rumors, which means that they are less likely to “the spiral of silence”. Enhancing the influence of traditional media and the ability to agendas-setting, and cultivating rational citizens through the process of political socialization is an important means of network governance in the new era.

Key words: Internet usage; political trust; media trust; moderate effect.

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INTRODUCTION

With the arriving of the mobile internet era, the use of the network has been continuously expanded, both in terms of content complexity and the status quo of instant messaging tools represented by WeChat in different age groups. In the network environment, the struggle between rumors and de-rumors is constantly being carried out, and the deconstruction or construction of political trust by the Internet is an important policy issue for how to guide the Internet public opinion and enhance the political trust of citizens in the new era.

The existing research shows that the main source of political trust is the two dimensions of culture and institution [1]. For the study of Chinese political trust, according to the interpretation paradigm of culturalism and institutionalism, scholars have found relevant empirical evidence [2, 3]. Some scholars pointed out that due to the particularity of the Chinese media environment, media factors are also an important aspect of the source of political trust [4, 7]. Tsifti proposes that there is a close relationship between media trust and political trust. Media trust is a key factor affecting democratic trust [5, 6]. Media trusted by the public has a more powerful agenda setting capability. May affect the political attitudes and political behavior of citizens [8]. "Use and gratification" believes that the acceptance of information by the audience is active and will be influenced by personal interests [9].

However, the existing research aimed at the deconstruction of political trust by the Internet is mainly a description of “description”. Most of them apply multiple regression models, and the regression coefficient is essentially a “description”. The specific mechanism regression model cannot be presented. What is the specific mechanism of the Internet affecting political trust? Does this effect differ in different populations? This article uses the World Values Survey data from mainland China to explore this issue. The channel of influence of political trust on the Internet can be explained by information from different media forms. Different media forms have huge differences in the flow of information, so there is a completely different impact on political trust.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows, the section 2 discuss the data and variables the section 3 shows the result that the traditional media trust as mediator, and the section 4 is the main results of political interest as moderator, and the section 5 provides a brief conclusion and discussion..

Data and method

The data used in this study comes from the World Values Survey, which surveys the attitudes, values, and other public affairs of residents in mainlan

China. The sample has a good national representation with a total sample size of 2,300. The questionnaire involved three ways of using the Internet, such as mobile Internet access, e-mail and computer Internet access, and clearly stated in the question "Use the following media to understand the national and world events", that is, the political use of the media. The mobile phone and e-mail, computer Internet access three variables extract a common factor, this common factor is named Internet use. With regard to the political trust variable, the degree of trust of the six types of organizations, such as the people's congress, the executive, the police, and the

court, is synthesized. This paper adopts the direct summation method to merge and obtain the political trust of the dependent variable. The mediator variable is traditional media trust, and the questions relate to the news publishing industry and television stations. The adjustment variable is political interest, and the question code is 1-4. In order to facilitate understanding, the coding in the analysis process is transposed. The larger the value, the more interested in politics. Control variables mainly include demographic variables as well as interpersonal trust and authoritative value variables.

Table-1: Variables measurement and coding

Independent variables: internet usage	People understand the national and world events through different channels. How often do you use the following information resources?
V221	Mobile phone
V222	Email
V223	Personal computer
Coding: "Daily" code is 5, "Weekly" code is 4, "Monthly" code is 3, "Less than monthly" code is 2, "Non" code is 1.	
Dependent variables: political trust	How much do you trust the organizations below? Is it trust, trust, distrust, or no trust at all?
V113	Police
V114	Court
V116	CCP
V117	People congress
V118	Administration system
Coding: "very trust" code is 4, "trust" code is 3, "less trust" code is 2, "no trust at all" code is 1, "don't know" code is missing	
Control variables	
Demographic variables	gender v240, age v242, years of education v248, family income v239, labor nature v231, CCP v29, social class v238
Interpersonal trust	V24 "Do you think most people can be trusted, or should you be more careful with others? (1 - most can trust, 2 - the more careful the better)
Authoritarianism	V138 people obey their rulers is not the basic element of democracy? (1 - not the basic element, 10 - is the basic element)
Mediation Variables: Traditional Media Trust	How much do you trust these organizations? Is it trust, trust, distrust, or no trust at all?
V110	News Publishing
V111	TV station
moderate: Political Interest	V84 Are you interested in politics? (1 - very interested, 4 is not interested at all)

Sources: the 2012 World Values Survey

The traditional media trust as mediator

Table 2 is a multiple regression and mediator analysis based on the World Values Survey, and control variables included.

Model 1 in table 2 shows that the Internet uses a negative predictive effect on trust in traditional media while controlling other variables. The Internet's reporting value is diversified, and the heterogeneity of various mediatics is very obvious. Because its anonymity is the channel for many citizens who are dissatisfied with reality, "keyboard man" is the name for this group. Using media trust to return to political trust,

the regression coefficient is 2.298, $p < 0.001$, traditional media trust can be considered as an important source of political trust. The media represented by CCTV and People's Daily bear the important responsibility of propagating the party and government's major policies and drawing a blueprint for economic and social development. They can respond to the public's concerns to a certain extent and guide the socialist core values. Therefore, trust in television and the press and publication industry can be an important source of political trust. Finally, core independent variables and mediation variables are included. The results show that the coefficient of political trust in the Internet has

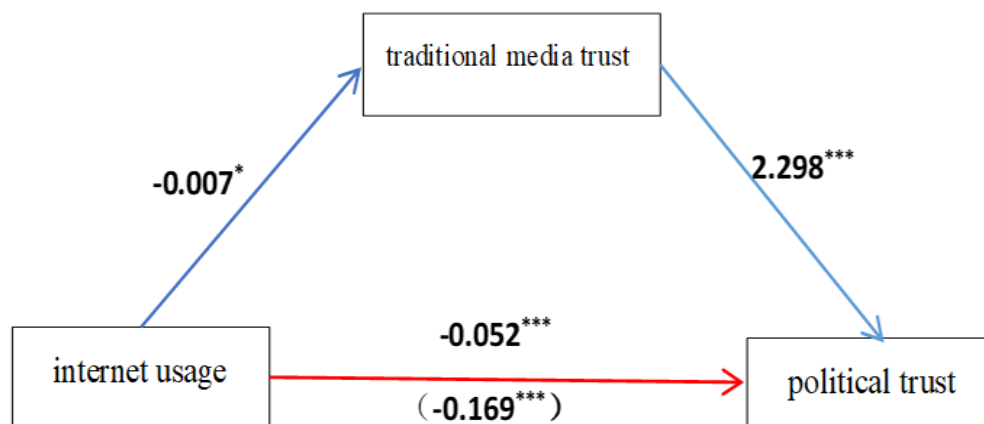
changed from -0.169 to -0.052, and both coefficients are significant at 95%. This has important public policy implications, namely, by enhancing the trust of traditional media, it can significantly reduce the disintegration of Internet use on political trust. Remind

the government in the process of network governance, should establish the "positional thinking" of political communication, and strengthen the influence and agenda setting ability of traditional media such as TV stations.

Table 2: Internet usage and political trust: the traditional media trust as mediator

	(1) Political trust	(2) traditional media trust	(3) Political trust	(4) Political trust
Internet usage	-0.169** (0.078)	-0.007* (0.015)		-0.052** (0.070)
traditional media trust			2.298*** (0.094)	2.296*** (0.094)
age	0.003 (0.002)	0.001* (0.000)	0.002 (0.001)	0.001 (0.002)
female	-0.003 (0.009)	-0.007 (0.009)	0.012 (0.039)	0.012 (0.039)
Education years	-0.008*** (0.001)	-0.008*** (0.001)	-0.017*** (0.006)	-0.015*** (0.006)
Family income	-0.015 (0.027)	-0.015 (0.027)	0.108 (0.124)	0.120 (0.124)
Party member	0.034** (0.016)	0.034** (0.016)	0.094 (0.072)	0.101 (0.072)
Subjective class	0.081*** (0.026)	0.081*** (0.026)	0.193* (0.117)	0.196* (0.117)
Interpersonal trust	0.008 (0.009)	0.008 (0.009)	0.214*** (0.039)	0.211*** (0.039)
Authoritarianism	0.039** (0.016)	0.039** (0.016)	0.320*** (0.074)	0.317*** (0.074)
Constant	0.616***	0.616***	2.378***	2.423***
N	2300	2300	2300	2300
R ²	0.040	0.040	0.250	0.251
adj. R ²	0.036	0.036	0.247	0.248

Notes:*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1 ; missing value replaced with mean ; Sources: the 2012 World Values Survey



Note: Direct effect coefficients for Internet use in parentheses

Fig-1: The mediating effect of traditional media trust

The Political Interest as a Moderator

Based on "use and gratification," the hypothesis proposed in this paper argues that political interest regulates the strength of the relationship between Internet use and political trust. In order to verify whether political interest has a regulating effect, this paper uses hierarchical regression to construct a models.

Table 3 is the hierarchical regression model. First, Internet use and political interest return to political trust at the same time. Secondly, interactive items of political interest and Internet use are constructed. Finally, Internet use, political interest and interaction items are simultaneously included in the model to observe the changes of coefficients in different models. The statistical results show that Internet use has a negative effect on the existence of political trust, and political

interest has a significant positive effect on political trust. The coefficient of interaction between Internet use and political interest is 0.435, $p < 0.1$, indicating that political interest regulates the strength of the relationship between Internet use and political trust. The deconstructive role of the Internet in political trust has declined as political interest has increased. Compared with citizens who are not interested in political interests, the deconstruction of the Internet is even smaller for citizens interested in politics. The regulating role of political interest can be interpreted from the perspective of political socialization. Citizens interested in politics have mastered the basic political participation skills in the process of political socialization, established relatively sound political

knowledge, have a comprehensive understanding of the political system, and have certain discriminating power for political phenomena. Therefore, when there are obvious political rumors on the Internet, unfounded criticism of the government, and emotional political criticism, this part of the citizens can rationally judge and evaluate, and avoid falling into the whirlpool of people. On the contrary, citizens who are not interested in politics lack such ability and lack the awareness of screening and evaluating the complicated and diverse political news in the network ecology. They tend to believe that such groups are very likely to fall into the "silent spiral". The Internet has a stronger deconstruction of political trust.

Table-3: Internet usage and political trust : the political Interest as a moderator

	(4)	(5)
	Political trust	Political trust
Internet usage	-0.160**	-0.346***
	(0.077)	(0.130)
Political interest	0.481***	0.388***
	(0.072)	(0.089)
Internet usage # Political interest		0.435*
		(0.246)
age	0.002	0.002
	(0.002)	(0.002)
female	0.053	0.053
	(0.044)	(0.044)
Education years	-0.036***	-0.036***
	(0.006)	(0.006)
Family income	0.081	0.073
	(0.137)	(0.137)
Party member	0.106	0.099
	(0.080)	(0.080)
Subjective class	0.331**	0.330**
	(0.130)	(0.130)
Interpersonal trust	0.235***	0.236***
	(0.044)	(0.044)
Authoritarianism	0.423***	0.429***
	(0.082)	(0.082)
Constant	3.646***	3.681***
<i>N</i>	2300	2300
<i>R</i> ²	0.075	0.077
adj. <i>R</i> ²	0.071	0.072

Notes : *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$; missing value replaced with mean ; Sources: the 2012 World Values Survey

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In the era of mobile internet, the role of the Internet in political trust is an important public policy issue. Most of the existing researches describe the deconstruction of the Internet and lack the explanation of specific mechanisms. The study found that traditional media trust has a mediating role between Internet use and political trust, and the "push effect" of the Internet on traditional media political communication. Political interest regulates the strength of the relationship between the Internet and political trust, that is, the Internet has less erosion of political trust than citizens who are not interested in politics. Compared with the public with low political interest, it is less likely to fall into the "the spiral of silence", so the deconstruction of political trust by the Internet is less intense. The public opinion work in the new era requires traditional media such as newspapers and TV stations to strengthen their ability to guide public opinion, strengthen "positional thinking," and respond to public concerns in a timely manner.

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