RESEARCH ARTICLE

Examining the Impact of Relational Trust on Preferential Use of Party Media: Based on a Mediating Effect Model of Affective Perception

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ABSTRACT
Relational trust refers to the trust based on the relationship with the party media in this research. By theorizing the concept of media trust, this paper fixed the shortcomings of the existing research on party media preference. This paper uses a mediation model based on affective perception to study how relational trust influences the preferential use of party media. This research collected data through questionnaires to build models (N=1428), and found that relational trust has direct and indirect effects on party media preferential use, the latter is mediated by positive affective perception; while negative affective perception even functioned as a certain disturbing role. Strong relational trust plays a more significant role in this process. The interpretation and theoretical implications of the findings were also discussed.

1. Introduction

1.1. Motivation of the Study

One of the most significant changes in the news ecology over the last few decades has been the shift from a low-choice to a high-choice media environment, which has influenced people's news consumption and media use behavior in at least four aspects (Strömbäck, Boomgaarden, Broda, Damstra, Lindgren, Tsfati, and Vliegenthart, 2022).Firstly, the barriers to entry the public sphere have significantly lowered and the media's professional function as a gatekeeper of information has weakened (Nielsen and Fletcher, 2020; Vos, Heinderyckx, et al., 2015).Multiple news actors in the public sphere - institutional media, platform media, self-publishing media, and government media - have formed a *new news ecosystem* in the digital news field that mixes orderly and disorderly, professional and amateur.(Alhabash, McAlister, Hagerstrom, Quilliam, Rifon, and Richards, 2013; Yalu and Weiming, 2022; Zhian and Min, 2018). Secondly, issues such as alternative media and fake news are also eroding the professional authority and norms of journalism. Information overload, selective exposure, emotion polarization are urgent issues in digital journalism today.Thirdly, traditional media forms are rapidly

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declining, while social media and digital platforms are becoming increasingly important, especially among young people (Gottfried and Shearer, 2016; Newman, Fletcher, Schulz, Andı, and Nielsen, 2020). Last, competition for audience attention is getting more intense, and some studies suggest that convincing the public that traditional media is not trustworthy is a strategy for alternative media when it comes to competition (Jamieson and Cappella, 2008; Ladd, 2012).

China's digital journalism is also adapting and reconfiguring itself in the midst of such technological changes, but with a different model due to its embeddedness in the overall cultural and social structure. While Western studies of digital journalism have focused primarily on a generalized technological reaction, the role of other possible factors in the reconfiguration were ignored. For instance, state is almost as important as independent technology. (Fang and Repnikova, 2022). Repnikova and Fang (2018)argue that the "state" as an external force has deeply influenced the model of digital journalism innovation in China, which is referred to as "The State-Preneurship Model". Two parallel strategies for digital innovation exist under this model (Repnikova and Fang, 2018): one is the state's experimentation with online platforms, such as *ThePaper*, which plays a key role in the digital court of public opinion as a major state-funded digital media project; the other is to expand the reach of party media through public social media platforms. The resurgence of the party media on social media platforms is one of the most significant changes in China's political communication environment over the past decade (Kecheng, 2016). The existing central-level party media, such as CCTV News and People's Daily, have significantly increased their influence, becoming the two most popular WeChat public account, according to data from newrank.cn. In April 2017, the People's Daily WeChat public account published 479 articles with over 47.9 million views and 3.22 million likes, with CCTV News not far behind. The second change is the expansion of the number and reach of party media and the empowerment of e-government through interaction with the public. By the end of 2014, there were some 277,000 government Weibo accounts and more than 17,000 government WeChat public accounts. These accounts are operated by various government and party units such as public security authorities, courts, local party committees and propaganda offices, and the Communist Youth League has increased the representation of social accounts by merging different geographical regions and government departments (Repnikova and Fang, 2018).

Existing research on the resurgence of party media has focused on the sociology of news production, which explores the production side and content of news. Kecheng (2016)provides insight into how the party media has regained dominance on social media platforms.Through interviews with the editorial boards of party media, he argues that the resurgence of party media based on sophisticated news production methods, the use of their own authority, and the input of resources from their superiors(Kecheng, 2016). Other studies have argued that the party media needs to balance its propaganda mission with marketization requirements to construct a stratified communication system. Content analysis has shown that the party media has incorporated some strategies of professionalism and sensationalism to transform its administrative ideas from propaganda to hegemony(Qiang and Yanhong, 2017; Ting and Huipin, 2022).Specifically, party media have borrowed extensively from commercial news content in the process, incorporating some of the strategies of professionalism and using a lot of emotional language to engage audiences.

However, the rise of the party media is an "anti-climax". Historically, the market-oriented reform of the media since the 1980s has left the party media facing a significant decline in revenue and a massive loss of readers(Huailin and Zhongshi, 1998; Liangrong

and Hui, 1999; Stockmann, 2013), party newspapers are gradually slipping from the center of the newspaper system to the edge(Liangrong and Hui, 1999).This is due to public suspicion of the ideologically dominated media.Similar dilemmas have been observed with partisan media in the US and government-controlled media in Russia (Qiang and Yanhong, 2017; Simonov and Rao, 2022).And does the current rise of party media mean that the public is no longer suspicious of such propaganda-oriented media?

The answer to it is somewhat affirmative. Liu (2017) points out that young people are consciously influenced by the content of the propaganda, and they become active actors in the process, acting "as patriotic as they love idols". The study by Repnikova and Fang (2018) also concluded that Chinese netizens participate as thought work collaborators in the process of national digital propaganda. The new propaganda paradigm, led by pro-market, scientific, and high-tech propaganda, is being welcomed by a new generation in China. However, the long-term sustainability of this new type of soft propaganda requires further observation (Mattingly and Yao, 2022).

This research provides a unique perspective on the resurgence of party media by examining it from the audience's point of view. While previous research on this topic has largely focused on the production and content of party media, the audience's preferential use of party media has played an equally important role in the process. Without the preferential use of party media by audiences at the individual level, there would be no macro-social indicators of the party media's popularity, its re-dominant discourse in the news arena, and so on.The perspective of the news receiver is missing from this topic, a long-standing blind spot in media bias research. As with hostile media perception, the preferential use of party media is not a direct effect, but an indirect media effect based on audience recognition, attitudes, and behaviors (Shuhua and yan, 2012).

To address this gap in the literature, this paper introduces trust and affective perceptions into the study. Trust is a key factor in digital journalism, influencing audiences' use of media, moderating media effects, and shaping audiences' political perceptions and preferences (Damstra, Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden, Glüer, Lindgren, Strömbäck, and Tsfati, 2023; Fawzi, 2019; Ladd, 2012; Strömbäck, Tsfati, Boomgaarden, Damstra, Lindgren, Vliegenthart, and Lindholm, 2020). The crisis of trust in journalism is also evident, as technology deeply reshapes people's relationships (Huang Wensen, 2023). The importance of media trust as a building block is becoming increasingly apparent.Moran and Nechushtai (2023) propose "Trust in Journalism as Infrastructure" to theorize the role of trust in the news production process. By considering the audience's trust and affective perceptions, this paper contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the rise of party media.

1.2. Trust and Affection: key concepts

Trust is generally regarded as a prerequisite for media to work (Swart and Broersma, 2022). The functions that the media is perceived to be required to undertake, like social monitoring, are based on public trust. The digital ecosystem is cluttered with information that is difficult to distinguish from the truth, which challenges the public's perceived trust (Pan, 2021). At the same time, some scholars argue that society under Internet empowerment is transforming from a hierarchical to a distributed society (Jiabiao and Junfeng, 2022). Trust needs to be rebuilt around the logic of the media (Guoming and Fang, 2021).

In digital journalism studies, a range of underlying normative concepts (authenticity, trust, objectivity, etc.) are undergoing reconstruction and re-examination, and the re-

lationships between them need to be seen in the context and experience of the present. From a functionalist perspective, it has been argued that trust from the public and the media's relational practices regarding journalistic truthfulness are a reciprocal relationship (Wang, 2022).It is believed that through the relational practices of journalistic actors, *truthful journalism* is no longer a solitary ideal of journalism, but has the function of building a good relationship with the public and gaining trust. If the state of truthfulness and trust is achieved, not only can journalism establish a good and sustainable development model and effective professional authority, but audiences can also continue to receive accurate and truthful information and understand the complex world in which they live. From a social constructionist perspective, the legitimacy of journalism as knowledge depends not only on public trust but also on journalistic and legitimation efforts (Cao, 2017; Tuchman, 1978).

Secondly, there has also been widespread interest in technology-influenced mediated trust. Weijia (2020) developed the concept of *trustworthy authenticity* and argues that systemic trust in social media environments is already in jeopardy, while interpersonal trust is opening up new spaces. Jiabiao and Junfeng (2022) argued that trust itself has taken on new characteristics in the process of mediatization. In traditional *human-mediated* societies, people constitute the channel of communication. And as Giddens, 1991 points out, modernity has dissolved traditional relationships and developed a systematic trust in abstract *symbolic signs*. New media technologies imply a mediated trust with new characteristics. From the perspective of imagined affordance, it is argued that platform-based media use technological features to construct distributed trust, while affectivity reshape trust, and that users may form strong affective relationships with technology and project affection onto them, seeing them as *relational entities*(Guoming and Fang, 2021). This is consistent with the tendency towards anthropomorphism in social media noted by other studies (Fang and Wang, 2018).

Affectivity is a prominent feature of this digital journalism landscape, where the Internet serves as the technological backbone of our daily lives, and the "co-existence" established by mass media has been break.Huang Wensen (2023)argued that this has led to a shift in journalistic practices, from rejecting and concealing affectivity to embracing and expressing them, which has been initiated and organized by the internet infrastructure. In the social media era, the connection between individuals and the digital news ecosystem is primarily affective, and digitization and affectivity are closely interrelated(Jiang and Yang, 2023). This affective news ecology is also reflected in the application of emotional strategies by the party media and the experiences of the audience.

Additionally, this paper highlights the limitations of scholars like Wang, who idealize the *truthful journalism* and make two assumptions that are unrealistic. The first premise is that people access the news to gain accurate information about the world and maximize their interests and utility, which still adheres to the assumption of the *Rational Actor* required by traditional objectivity. This assumes informed citizenship and political participation by the press under the premise of a democratic society. The second implicit premise is that people process information thoughtfully. However, research by Swart and Broersma, has demonstrated that audiences on social media primarily rely on tacit knowledge and emotional intuition to assess the reliability of news(Swart and Broersma, 2022). In fact, audiences use media for a variety of gratification, including entertainment, companionship, and other ritualistic needs, in addition to information. Furthermore, some studies suggest that society is shifting from informed citizenship to expressive citizenship, and it remains unclear whether the ideals of informed, normative citizenship based on a democratic society and the reliability requirements for news em-

bodied in journalism are still essential for people's news consumption(Strömbäck et al., 2020).

This paper aims to explore the concept of trust in the party media within a social media context using the framework of *relational trust*. Relational trust is defined as the trust that develops between the audience and the party media based on their relationship. Media trust has been categorized into three types by Shuhua and Yan: role-based, process-based, and institutional-based. However, relational trust cannot be classified into any one of these categories, as it is a functionalized mechanism (Luhmann, 1968) that is embedded in the overall social, institutional, and cultural structure. Relational trust is entrusted by the audience based on the role of the party media and is specific to a particular media outlet. Furthermore, it is a trust that is built upon the relationship between the audience and the party media, which is strengthened by prolonged affective interaction and communication. As a result, relational trust can be considered a process-based trust. In light of these observations, the paper poses the following research question:

RQ: How does relational trust influence the preferred use of party media?

This study aims to investigate the impact of two significant factors, relational trust and affective perception, on the preferential use of party media in the highly selective digital news era. To better understand how individuals navigate the complexities of trust and affection in their media consumption, we employ a model that utilizes affective perception as a mediating variable. In the next section, we will discuss the theoretical framework and concept of relational trust, and present our hypotheses based on the existing literature.

2. Review of Relevant Theories and Literature

2.1. Relational Trust: Theory and Concepts

The link between relations and trust originated from China's indigenous social psychology scholars' response to Western theories of trust. Starting with Weber and Gerth, 1953, which attributes trust in Chinese culture to a particularistic trust, the particularity in trust in Chinese society has received the attention of Western scholars' attention. Fukuyama concluded that Chinese society is a low-trust society due to emphasis on familial blood ties (Fukuyama, 1996), and studies by Kuhn (1990) and Xiang, Yeoh, and Toyota (2013) also reflected. However, it is notable that trust as a functionalized mechanism is intricately linked to the social structures in which it is embedded (Xuewei, 2014). As Xuewei (2023) suggests, trust is an intrinsically missing concept whose stickiness leads to different definitional derivations of trust in different disciplines, cultures, and societies. Therefore, when discussing trust, it is essential to consider both Western scholars, such as Luhmann, Simmel, Granovetter, and Giddens, and Chinese scholars, as Western theories develop based on assumptions about the relationship between individuals and society. For instance, Western culture assumes that individuals enter society based on complete, independent individuals, while Chinese culture assumes individuals enter society based on relationships (Xuewei, 2023). Hence, trust in Chinese culture differs from trust in Western culture.

Relationships are at the core of Chinese culture and the essence of Confucian ethics (Shen, 2019). This view was first proposed by Hu Shi and later elaborated on by Shuming (1987), who explicitly stated that Chinese culture is guanxi-based. Fei, Hamilton, and Zheng (1992) used concept of 'differential order pattern' which further suggests

Relationship Vector Model
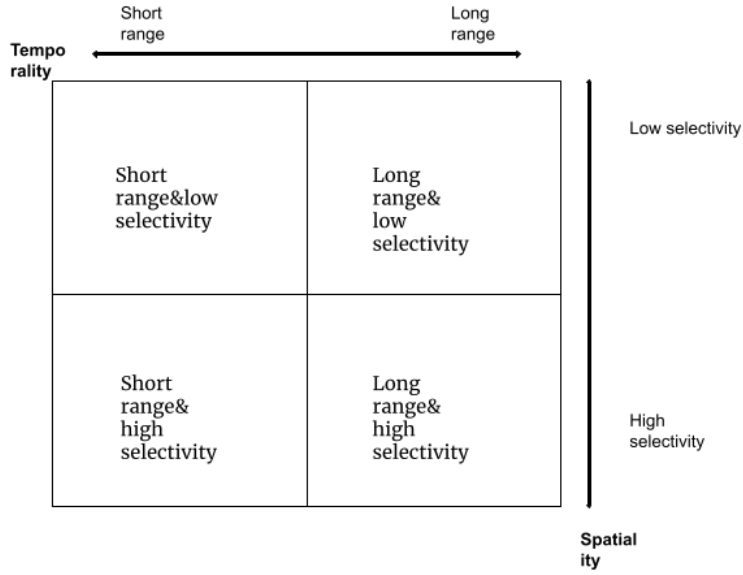
Figure 1. The model uses temporal and spatial nesting to generalize the characteristics of the relations

that Chinese people in vernacular societies derive their own circle of relationships based on closeness and proximity, in line with the internal logic of Confucian ethics. Many scholars have also joined the discussion on the characteristics of relationships. For instance, Bin (2002) argues that relationships have four properties: homogeneity, cumulative, stage hierarchy, and dynamic.Additionally, Huang (1998) proposed a theoretical model of "favor-dignity"(人情-面子), which divides relationships in Chinese society into "emotional relationships", "instrumental relationships", and "mixed relationships". Yang (2001) builds on this model by treating the emotional and instrumental components as two ends of one dimension and highlights the importance of 'obligation' in Chinese social relations. Meanwhile, Xuewei (2014) argues that the core of Chinese relationships is based on 'favor'(人情) and 'power'(权力). Despite differences in the details of the discourse, relationships have a central role in influencing Chinese attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors, as they are an essential aspect of Chinese culture.

This paper utilizes the relational vector theory proposed by Xuewei (2023) as the conceptual basis. According to Xuewei (2023), the theory of relational vectors was developed to overcome the conflict between the local (guanxi/relations) and universal nature of relationships and to have generalizable meaning across different societies. The theory combines spatio-temporal aspects based on the short-range and long-range nature of interactions, and the relational selectivity of spatial interactions due to mobility or otherwise. This leads to the four combinations shown in Figure 1.

The literature from social psychology supports a clear link between relationships and trust. According to the conceptualization of interpersonal trust by Zhongfang and Siqing (1999), different relationships offer different kinds of trust in interpersonal interactions. Relationship operation, as argued by Siqing (1999), is the mechanism by which Chinese people build trust, as relationships imply mutual obligations and a sense of obligation leads people to behave in a trustworthy manner. The reciprocal obligation is the core element of a relationship. Failure to fulfill obligations not only results in condemnation from others but may also lead to the loss of the network of relationships and the social

capital contained in them (Lin, 2006). This paper argues that relationship is the law of trust generation (Xuewei, 2023). Depending on different kinds of relationships, the relational trust built up based on relationships will also have deviations in definition. Specifically, based on the relationship vector theory model, this paper argues that relational trust built on long-lasting, low-selective relationships is more closely linked to 'favor and dignity', while relational trust built on short-lasting, highly selective relationships is more closely linked to institutional constraints. In the context of this paper, such relational trust is more related to the normative constraints inherent in journalistic professionalism than to the party media as an object of interaction of favors and power.

One might question whether Zhai's relationship vector model presupposes human interaction in a real society. Does the theory works under unconventional conditions in a situation where everyone is physically absent, authority is distributed, and the relationship refers to people and abstractions? In response to this, this paper would like to offer the following arguments. In the new technologically-driven world, the relationship between humans and technology, and humans and society, is being subversively reconfigured, and the subject of news producer is being generalized (cha). The widespread anthropomorphism in social media has inspired a re-examination of trust in the social media environment (Fang and Wang, 2018; Weijia, 2020). Just as in virtual spaces, where systemic trust is in jeopardy and interpersonal trust is gaining ground, technology is creating new "relational entities". Governments, media, individuals, communities, and schools, as accounts, no longer have the same unbridgeable distinctions when it comes to establishing relationships as subjects of interaction as they do in the real world. In other words, to interact with abstractions is also to interact with people, and there is room for new developments in relational trust on this basis.

2.2. How Trust Affects Preferential Media Use

Trust is a widely researched concept that is believed to have behavioral effects at both individual and societal levels (Easton, 1965; Gambetta, 1988; Putnam, 2000; Warren and Warren, 1999). Empirical research has demonstrated that trust affects attitudes and behaviors such as civic engagement (Leonardi, Nanetti, and Putnam, 2001), taxation (Batrancea, Nichita, Olsen, Kogler, Kirchler, Hoelzl, Weiss, Torgler, Fooken, Fuller, et al., 2019), and teamwork (De Jong, Dirks, and Gillespie, 2016). Building on this research, we hypothesize that trust also influences people's preferential use of news media.

On a theoretical level, Tsfati and Cappella (2003)'s theory links trust in the news media to audience rationality and utility maximization. The research further hypothesizes that people expose to news to get accurate information about the world, and given the utility maximization assumption and the impossibility of following all news all the time, people must ignore many other stimuli, such as distrustful media. However, this theory, based on the rational person assumption, faces a growing number of challenges. Existing empirical findings suggest that people's motivations for using media are diverse and include seeking diversion, entertainment, social utility, and personal or social identity needs (Blumler, 1979; Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch, 1973; Rubin, 2009; Tsfati and Cappella, 2005). In some cases, people may use media to obtain accurate information about the world, but in other cases, they may use it for purposes other than seeking accurate information. Thus, the level of trust in the media may be less important in certain situations than its use for information and monitoring purposes. Furthermore, needs for recognition, political or ideological preferences and tendency to select informa-

tion consistent with their attitudes may influence their choice of media outlets (Flynn, Nyhan, and Reifler, 2017; Garrett, Carnahan, and Lynch, 2013; Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014; Stroud, 2011). This may lead people to choose media outlets that are consistent with their political views rather than those they would otherwise trust the most. For example, in the United States, liberals tend to trust and use CNN and other media, while conservatives tend to trust and use media such as Fox News. Beyond the individual level, research has shown that news media use is determined by structural and semi-structural factors as well as situational factors (Althaus, Cizmar, and Gimpel, 2009; Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Hartmann, 2009; Norris et al., 2002; Shehata and Strömbäck, 2011; Webster, 2014; Wonneberger, Schoenbach, and Van Meurs, 2011). Systems, types, platforms and the general supply of media content, the context in which people use news media and what are the alternatives, even pages design, among other things, affects media use (Hartmann, 2009; Skovsgaard, Shehata, and Strömbäck, 2016; Tsfati and Cappella, 2003; Webster, 2014). This illustrates the complex link between trust and news media use.

Beyond the individual level, media systems, the overall availability of different types of media, media platforms, and media content, the context in which people use news media and which alternatives, and even media page design all influence media to use (Althaus et al., 2009; Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Hartmann, 2009; Norris et al., 2002; Shehata and Strömbäck, 2011; Webster, 2014; Wonneberger et al., 2011). This illustrates the complex association between trust and news media use.

While general media trust is positively associated with media use (Strömbäck et al., 2020), the different conceptualization and operationalizations of media trust have led to confusion in investigating this relationship. Media trust can refer to the media in a general sense, specific media outlets, the content or subject of media coverage, or journalists, and these different levels of analysis have perhaps led to a lack of clarity in the association between media trust and use. In this paper, we focus specifically on relational trust, which refers to trust in a particular type of media outlets (party media). We assume that in the context of the affective, digital mode of communication in social media, relational trust positively influences the preferential use of the party media. In other words, the higher one's relational trust in the party media, the more one is likely to prefer using it.

2.3. Party Media in China: the Associations Between Affective Perception, Relational Trust, and Cultural Roles

The party media is not only at the core of the state's propaganda system playing an important role in constructing national identity and maintaining ideological security, it also plays a key role in the political and cultural life of Chinese people. According to relevant theory, the image of the Party media as a *relational entity* in social media may have several characteristics that influence people's attitudes, perceptions, and behavior in social media.

Firstly, the party media is an affectionate 'friend', as argued by Qiang and Yanhong (2017), who states that the party media is powerful in gaining support for grassroots discourse through position shifting. The party media has 'resources', and not only successfully conveys its own views through transformation, but also presents a well-resourced image in daily life through website design, media convergence , news reporting and editorial rights, and other aspects, as discussed by Kecheng (2016). Additionally, the party media is a "big sister" that can be emotionally confided in, and establishes an intimate

"personal relationship" with the audience through emotional means, as shown by some researchers who have studied the night talk column of the People's Daily, among others (Kecheng, 2016; Yanhong and Qiang, 2017).Moreover, the party media is considered as professional media due to its accuracy in terms of news and information, which comes from its professional authority as a media organization (Qiang and Yanhong, 2017). Party media are "power holders" . On the one hand, party media gain public support by consciously using their own authority and interpreting official information(Qiang and Yanhong, 2017); The mouthpiece often plays the role of "final word" in controversial events, and this is only a side manifestation of the political power it possesses. Importantly, the party media is inner group to some extent. From the perspective of relational theory, when faced with conflicts between circles, the persuasive power of being one's own is strong for the public in the relationship, even if deciding who is inner people varies greatly between audiences with different identities. Thus, the party media does not exist as a static subject of interaction but rather interacts with the public on social media as a multiplicity of identities, which are consciously invoked for different purposes in different contexts. In the technological environment of social media, such behavior is rationalized.

In this study, we distinguish two types of relational trust that are based on the characteristics of party media as a *relational entity*: strong relational trust and weak relational trust. Strong relational trust is based on the professional and objective role of the party media, while weak relational trust is based on the sincere and relatable role of the party media. These concepts are not entirely new, as Granovetter (2017) and Chinese scholars have previously discussed strong and weak ties in social networks and relationships. However, some scholars have criticized the continuum of trust from deep to shallow as it ignores the importance of interest in addition to affect in Chinese relational trust. To address this criticism, we adopt Zhai's proposed relationship vector model to classify relational trust. In this model, strong relationship trust refers to low-choice, long-range assured relational trust, while weak relationship trust refers to high-choice, short-range loose relational trust (Xuewei, 2023).

Affective perception is examined as well in this context. In social sciences, affections are explicitly placed within social relations: affections are the way people interact, constructing power relations and social order (yua). As Holmes (2004) points out, affections are fundamentally relational and social. According to Yuan and Zhao, relationship are central to understanding affectivity, and affections are phenomenologically intentional in that they are produced and have intentional objects, called *affective carrier*. Affective expressions are considered speech acts that locate the self in relation to others, and affection is viewed as an action with an intended purpose that unfolds in a relationship (Reddy and Reddy, 2001). Based on the affective social constructionist perspective, a series of theories and concepts have been developed, including feeling rules, emotional management, emotional display, and emotional expression. Social power influences people's emotional expression and emotional management through feeling rules (Hochschild, 1983). Yuan and Zhao (2020) further pointed out that new media technologies reshape people's affective experiences and change the rules of affective expression, thereby reshaping the power relationship.

This paper utilizes the concept of affective perception to measure audience emotion, which has been previously used by scholars (Zhou, Ni, and Li, 2018). However, prior studies have mainly operationalized affective perception as a purely quantitative concept, ignoring its relational dimension. As highlighted by Yuan (2021), there exists a dichotomy of *emotional expression-emotional experience* in affectivity research, where affective expression is considered inadequate in reflecting the full, subjective affective

experience. To address this limitation, Yuan (2021) proposes a practical framework that views affectivity as an act of consciousness(Solomon, 2008), focusing on the reconstruction of social relationships in shaping the media. In this paper, affective perception is defined as the audience's perception of affectivity, which is not limited to purely intimate feelings, nor is it entirely socio-culturally constructed. It is a dynamic creation of the individual in the context of the logic of socio-cultural habitus.

Previous studies on affectivity in party media-audience relationship on social media can be classified into two groups. The first group examines how party media's emotional strategies respond to the technological affordance of social media. Kecheng (2016) argues that emotional appeals are one of the key factors that determine how well content spreads in the new media environment. Berger (2011); Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013) also suggest that emotionally charged messages on social media are more likely to be shared and spread faster than neutral, unemotional messages. The second group investigates how party media can wins popular support through sensationalism (Qiang and Yanhong, 2017). However, such research tends to overlook the impact of party media as a social power on emotions. As Flam (2004) argues, the direction of the flow of affection is related to social hierarchy, with positive affection flowing upwards and negative ones flowing downwards. In the Chinese political arena, positive affections are often encouraged. Perry (2002) suggests that the Chinese Communist Party's success in the revolution was due in part to its skill in emotional mobilization. Yang contends that the state actively shapes the rules of affectivity in cyberspace, encouraging positive affections and discouraging negative ones. The term *positive energy* was selected as one of the Top Ten Internet Buzzwords of 2012 by the editorial board of magazine *Yao Wen Jiao Zi* . It refers to the power and emotion that drives and inspires people to pursue a better life, to be optimistic and hopeful, and to make their lives happy and fulfilling. In November 2013, during an inspection tour in Shandong, President Xi Jinping called on Party committees at all levels to unify their thoughts and actions with the central decision-making and deployment, and to gather strong positive energy to comprehensively promote reform and opening up policy. As a result, *positive energy* has become ubiquitous in Chinese society, from political propaganda to school education, from commercial advertising to family conversations. Therefore, it is believed that affective perception in the relationship between party media and audiences can also be placed in such a context, where it is catalyzed as positive and proactive by external factors.

Based on the above discussion, this paper proposes two sets of research hypotheses and corresponding models.
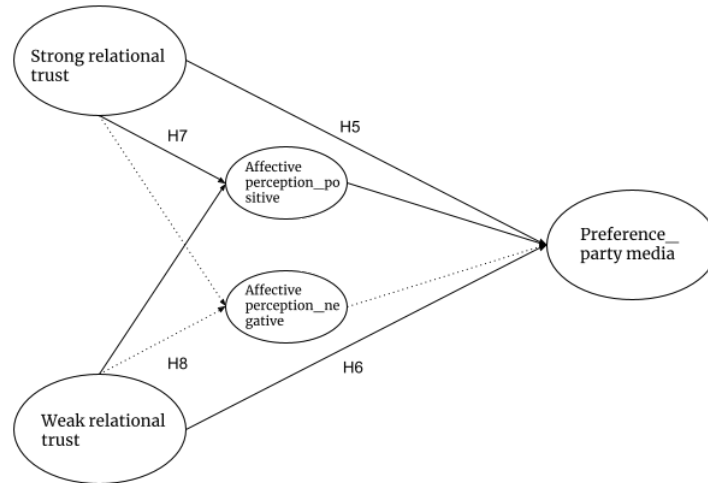
- *H1: Relational trust positively influences affective perceptions.*
- *H2: Relational trust positively influences party media preferences.*
- *H3: Affective perception positively influences party media preferences.*
- *H4: Affective perception is the mediating variable.*

H1&2&3&4The corresponding research model(Research Model I)is shown in Figure 2.

- *H5: Strong relational trust positively influences party media preferences.*
- *H6: Weak relational trust positively influences party media preference.*
- *H7: Positive affective perceptions can act as a mediating variable between strong relational trust and party media preferences, and positive affective perceptions can act as a mediating variable between weak relational trust and party media preferences.*

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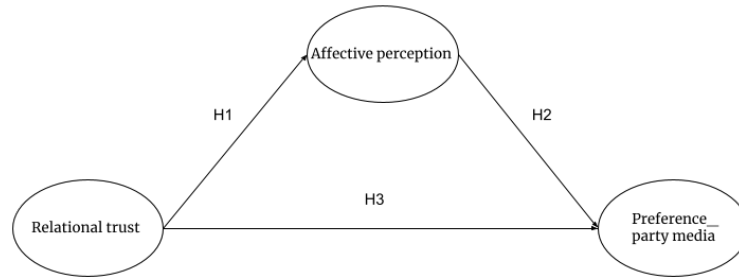
(a) Research Model I

(b) Research Model II

Figure 2. Research Model

- *H7a: Strong relational trust positively affects positive affective perceptions.*
- *H7b: Weak relational trust positively influences positive affective perceptions.*
- *H7c: Strong relational trust positively influences party media preference.*
- *H7d: Weak relational trust positively influences party media preferences.*
- *H7e: Positive affective perception positively influences party media preference.*
- *H8: Negative affective perception cannot be used as a mediating variable between strong relational trust and party media preference, and negative affective perception cannot be used as a mediating variable between weak relational trust and party media preference.*

The corresponding research model (Research Model II) is thus shown in Figure 2:

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The empirical data for this study were obtained by questionnaire. On the one hand, the research team publicly posted the questionnaire on social media platforms and invited respondents to fill it out. On the other hand, the research team recruited 10 investigators on campus, who were responsible for distributing a certain number of questionnaires and were paid a certain amount of money at the end of the survey, expanding the

sample size and diversity to a greater extent. Before distributing the questionnaires, in order to better design the questionnaire, researchers adopted a legit sampling method and conducted pre-interviews with 13 respondents around party media use and affective perceptions, with an average interview time of 30 minutes.

The questionnaire was self-administered and divided into five sections measuring affective perceptions, strong relational trust, weak relational trust, party media preferences and demographic information. Questionnaire collection was conducted through the qualtrics (https://www.qualtrics.com/) platform. Respondents were selected through convenience sampling and snowball sampling. 2141 questionnaires were sent out and 1424 valid samples were retrivaled, with a valid sample rate of 66.5%. The study used StataMP17 statistical software for data analysis, research hypothesis testing and model analysis.

3.2. Conceptualization

3.2.1. Affective Perception

Affective perceptions were measured with reference to the Positive and Negative Affect Scale developed by Watson and Clark and International Generalized Positive and Negative Affect Scale Short Form (I-PANAS-SF)developed by Thompson. Divides affective perceptions into two types of affective perceptions: positive affective perceptions and negative affective perceptions. It was measured using a 5-point scale, where 1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly agree". Positive affective perceptions included "I feel inspired when I read the party media" "I feel strong when I read the party media" "I feel more positive when I read the party media" and "I feel enthusiastic when I read the party media", with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.942. Negative affective perceptions included "I feel nervous when I read the party media" " "I feel angry when I read the party media" "I feel sad when I read the party media" "I feel anxious, When I read the party media ", with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.911.

3.2.2. Relational Trust

Relational trust consists of two variables, strong relational trust and weak relational trust, with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.936.

(1) The measurement scale of strong relational trust was designed independently, referring to the dimension of media relations practice proposed by Wang, and consisted of four questions: "I trust the Party media because it is sincere" "I trust the Party media because it is transparent ", and "I trust the party media because it is authoritative" "I trust the party media because it is approachable". The options were graded on a total of 5 levels, with scores from 1 to 5 assigned in order from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with higher scores indicating a stronger sense of strong relational trust in the party media among the users tested. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this variable was 0.886.

(2) The measure of weak relational trust refers to the "Subjective Evaluation of Urban Residents' Quality of Life" scale (Hu Rong, 2011), which consists of four questions: "I trust the Party media because it can provide professional information" "I trust the party media because it gives me better knowledge of social and public affairs" "I trust the party media because the editors and reporters have professional knowledge and competence" "I trust the party media because it is objective and unbiased". There were five levels of options, ranging from strongly disagree to

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strongly agree, with higher scores indicating a stronger sense of weak relational trust in the party media. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this variable was 0.893.

3.2.3. Party Media Preference

The measure of party media preference was based on a self-designed scale consisting of four questions: "When choosing media to read news, I would prefer the party media" "When choosing media to read news, I would care more about the party media" "When choosing media to read news, I like the party media" "When choosing media to read news, I would pay more attention to the party media". There are five levels of options, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with higher scores indicating a stronger sense of preference for the party media. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this variable was 0.927.

3.2.4. Control Variables

The demographic variables for this study included four question items: gender, education, age and political status in order to control for confounding factors present in the study.

4. Data Analysis and results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

In this paper, descriptive statistics and numericalization of the basic conditions of the questionnaire respondents are shown in Table 1. In terms of gender, there are more female respondents in this survey; in terms of education, the survey is dominated by those with undergraduate/college education levels; in terms of political affiliation, there are more members of the Communist Youth League in this survey. In the follow-up study, the above variables were treated as control variables.

4.2. Correlation Analysis of Variables

Table 4 (see Appendix, below) examines the factor analysis of the model. Aggregate validity reflects whether the measures of a variable are highly correlated with each other, and the main measures are Factor Loading and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The results showed that all factor loadings were greater than 0.6 and the AVE values of the variables were above 0.5, which met the discriminant criteria, indicating that the intrinsic quality of the measurement model was acceptable and the convergent validity met the requirements. Table 5 The AVE square root judgment method was used to test the discriminant validity indicators of the model. The correlations between positive affective perception, negative affective perception, strong relationship trust, weak relationship trust and party media preference and other variables were all lower than the AVE square root values, which showed that the indicators all had good discriminant validity.

Table 2 shows the correlation coefficients between the relational trust variables, from which it can be seen that there is a strong ($\rho > 0.5$) and significant ($p < 0.01$) correlation between strong relational trust and weak relational trust. Table 3 presents statistical

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Numbericalization	Frequency	Portion (%)
gender	male	426	29.92
	female	846	59.41
	nonbinary	22	1.54
	confidential	130	9.13
education	Elementary or below	7	0.49
	Junior high	27	1.9
	High School/Junior College	138	9.69
	Bachelor's degree/college	1044	73.71
	Master's degree and above	208	14.61
Political Appearance	mass	391	27.46
	CYL Member	768	53.93
	CPC Member	232	16.29
	other	33	2.32

Table 2. Relational Trust Correlation Coefficient Matrix

Variables	Means	Standard Deviations	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Sincerity	3.851	1.052	1.000						
Transparent	3.663	1.130	0.805***	1.000					
Authoritative	4.197	0.863	0.606***	0.563***	1.000				
Affinity	3.752	1.042	0.733***	0.708***	0.552***	1.000			
Professional	4.017	0.950	0.669***	0.631***	0.630***	0.565***	1.000		
Public	4.087	0.906	0.646***	0.610***	0.634***	0.584***	0.727***	1.000	
Competent	4.035	0.906	0.595***	0.583***	0.583***	0.551***	0.672***	0.671***	1.000
Objective	3.814	1.052	0.762***	0.766***	0.575***	0.704***	0.682***	0.677***	0.649***

*** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$

information on strong relationship trust, weak relationship trust, positive affective perception, negative affective perception and party media preference, including the mean, standard deviation, reliability and number of terms. In terms of the means, the relationship trust, positive affective perception and party media preference are all strong and the negative affective perception is weak, and the average level of weak relationship trust is higher than that of strong relationship trust. In terms of correlation coefficients, there were strong ($\rho > 0.5$) and significant ($p < 0.01$) correlations between the study participants' positive affective perceptions, strong relational trust, weak relational trust and party media preference.

4.3. Direct Effect Analysis

To verify the research hypothesis, this paper conducted step-wise regression through StataMP17, using multiple regression analysis, and finally built out the mediating effect model. In the regression results, confidence levels of 99%, 95% and 90% were taken to obtain significance levels of ***, ** and * respectively. If the coefficients were not

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficient matrix of study variables

Variable name	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number of Terms	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Positive affective perception	15.523	3.644	4	1.000				
Negative affective perception	10.197	4.172	4	−0.071***	1.000			
Strong relational trust	15.462	3.548	4	0.813***	−0.080***	1.000		
Weak relational trust	15.953	3.325	4	0.754***	−0.091***	0.839***	1.000	
Party media preference	15.076	3.949	4	0.754***	−0.049	0.786***	0.766***	1.000

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

significant, it means that the independent variables could not effectively predict the dependent variable. The regression tables can be found in the appendix7.2.

4.3.1. Research Model I Direct Effects Analysis

From Table 6, it can be seen that the relationship trust of the research subjects is positively correlated with the perception of emotion (β=0.403, p<0.01), that is, the stronger the relational trust felt by the research subjects reading the party media, the stronger the affective perception, supporting Hypothesis H1. From Table 7, it can be seen that the stronger the relational trust felt by the study participants in reading the party media, the stronger the preference for the party media, supporting hypothesis H2. From Table 8, it can be seen that the affective perception of the research subjects is positively correlated with the party media preference (β=0.0739, p<0.01), which means that the stronger the research subjects' affective perception of reading the party media, the stronger their preference for the party media will be, supporting hypothesis H3.

Through direct effects analysis, this paper verifies Model 1 and research hypotheses 1-3 shown in Figure 2, and answers research question two, that party media preference is built on the basis of relational trust in party media, and relational trust will influence audience's party media preference through emotional perception. The specific paths are shown in Figure 3.

4.3.2. Research Model II Direct Effects Analysis

From Table 9, it can be seen that the strong relational trust felt by the research subjects is positively correlated with the positive emotion perception (β=0.616, $p < 0.01$), that is, the stronger the strong relational trust felt by the research subjects reading the party media, the stronger the positive affective perception, supporting hypothesis H7a; the weak relational trust of the research subjects is positively correlated with the positive affective perceptions were positively correlated (β=0.280, p<0.01), i.e. the stronger
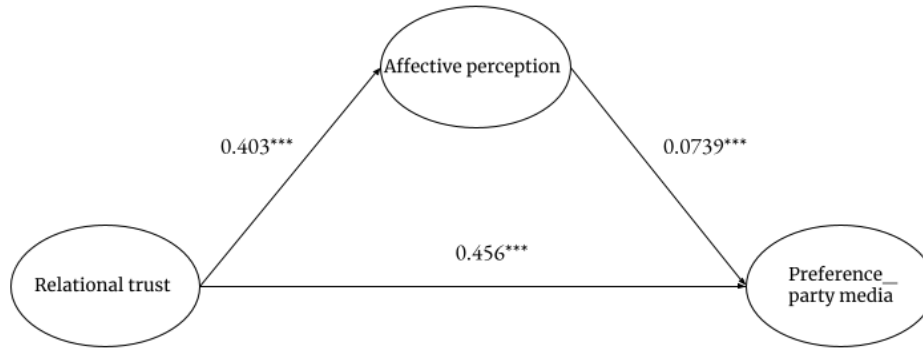
Figure 3. Study model I coefficients

relational trust and the weak relational trust felt by the research subjects reading the party media, the stronger the positive affective perceptions, supporting hypothesis H7b.

From Table 10, it can be seen that the strong relational trust of the research subjects is positively correlated with party media preference (β=0.342, $p < 0.01$), i.e. the stronger the strong relational trust felt by the research subjects reading party media, the stronger the preference for party media, supporting hypothesis H7c; the weak relational trust of the research subjects is positively correlation (β=0.359, $p < 0.01$), i.e. the stronger the weak relational trust felt by the research subjects reading the party media, the stronger their preference for the party media, supporting hypothesis H7d;

From Table 11, it can be seen that the positive affective perceptions of the research subjects were positively correlated with party media preference (β=0.300, $p < 0.01$), i.e. the stronger the positive affect felt by the research subjects reading party media, the stronger their preference for party media, supporting hypothesis H7e.

Meanwhile, as shown in Table 9, Table 10, and Table 11, there is no significant correlation between strong relational trust and negative affective perceptions of the research subjects (β=-0.0401, $p > 0.1$); weak relational trust was not significantly correlated with negative affective perception (β=-0.0619, $p > 0.1$); and negative affective perception was not significantly correlated with party media preference (β=0.0179, $p > 0.1$), supporting hypothesis H8.

By splitting the direct effects of affective perceptions, this paper validates model 2 shown in Figure 2. The path of trust can be more clearly seen after splitting affective perceptions into positive and negative affective perceptions, i.e. both relational trust and systemic trust act mainly through positive affective perceptions to party media preferences. The specific paths are shown in Figure 4.

4.4. Mediating Effect Analysis

In order to conduct the mediating effect analysis, this paper uses the Bootstrap automatic sampling technique to test the effect of mediation, with a sample size of 2000 and a confidence interval of 95%. . Considering the first type of error rate and statistical power of the model, the sampling method adopted in this paper is the relatively better bias-corrected nonparametric percentile method(Pituch and Stapleton, 2008).
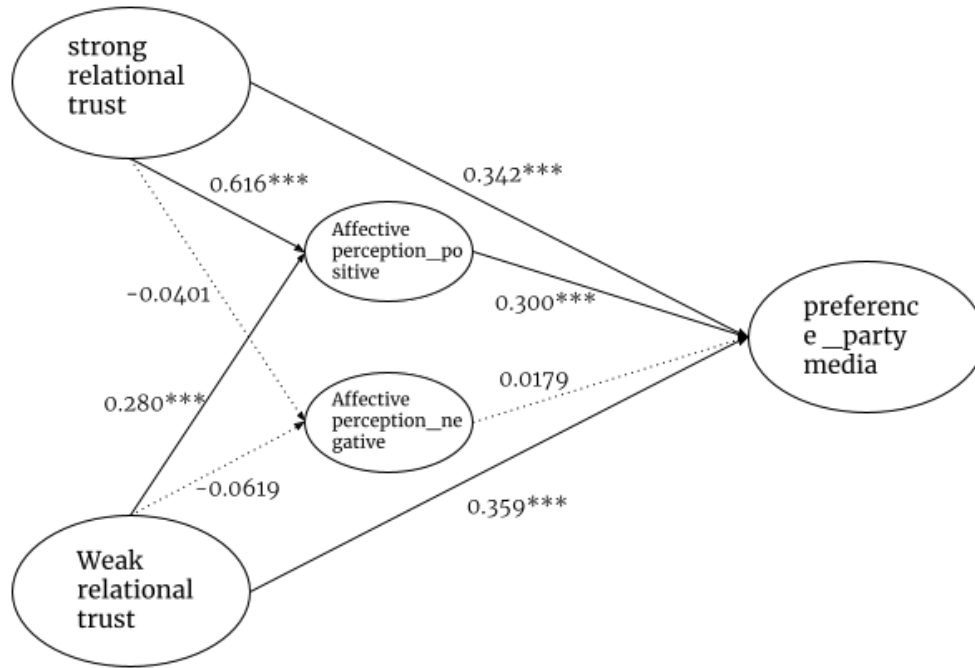
16

Figure 4. Study model II coefficients

4.4.1. Analysis of Research Model I Mediating Effects

This paper verified the mediating effect of affective perception in Model I. The results are shown in Table 12. The direct effect of relational trust on party media preference is significant, and the indirect effect of relational trust on party media preference through affective perception is also significant (β=0.0298, $p < 0.01$). It can be considered that affective perception acts as a mediating variable between relational trust and party media preference, with a mediating effect ratio of 6%, and hypothesis H4 holds.

2. Analysis of Model II Mediating Effects

Since none of the direct effects in Model II regarding negative affective perceptions were significant, and their indirect effects were otherwise insignificant, the negative affective perceptions in the model were discarded, and the final model was derived as shown in Figure 5.

Based on this model, this paper verified the mediating effect of positive affective perceptions, and the results are shown in Table 7.3. The direct effect of relational trust on party media preference is significant, and the indirect effect of strong relational trust on party media preference through positive affective perception is also significant (β=0.311, $p < 0.01$), and it can be considered that positive affective perception acts as a mediating variable between strong relational trust and party media preference, with a mediating effect ratio of 36%; the direct effect of weak relational trust on party media preference is significant, and the indirect effect of weak relational trust effect on party media preference through positive affective perception was also significant (β=0.363, $p < 0.01$), and it can be considered that positive affective perception acts as a mediating variable between weak relational trust and party media preference with a mediating effect ratio of 40%, and hypothesis H7 holds.
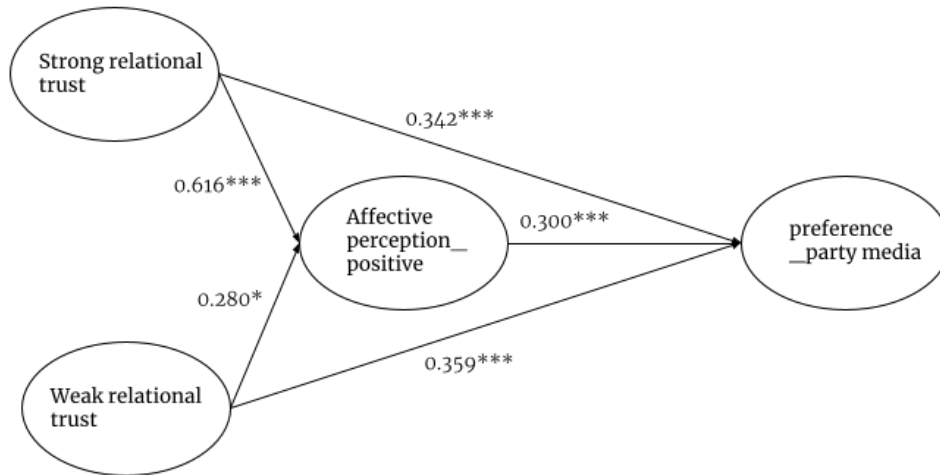
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Figure 5. Fixed Research Model

4.5. Model Test

To verify the robustness of the model, this paper adopts the heteroskedasticity assumption for the direct effects analysis and conducts robustness tests. The regression tables are shown in appendix 7.2. After the robustness test, the hypothesis coefficients in this paper are all significant at least ** (p<0.5) and pass the robustness test.

5. Conclusion & Discussion

This paper explores the association between relational trust in the party media, affective perceptions and party media preferences. It was found that there was a significant positive correlation between relational trust in party media and party media preference (β=0.456, $p < 0.01$). Overall, the more people trust the party media, the more they prefer to choose to consume the party media, which is consistent with the theoretical hypothesis of this paper. Our empirical study supports the strong positive correlation between relational trust in the party media and preferential use.

Secondly, we find that emotional perceptions play a mediating role in the path of relational trust influencing party media preference, i.e. relational trust in party media influences preference for party media through emotional perceptions, and there is a partial mediating effect in this process(6%).

Further, we find that positive affective perceptions are the true mediating role in this process, while negative affective perceptions do not have a significant mediating effect and even have a disruptive effect on the mediating effect of overall affective perceptions. Also, the mediating effect of affective perceptions was more significant in strong relational trust (0.616***) than in weak relational trust (0.280*). This is consistent with our theory. Therefore, we can assume that affective interactions and audience's affective perceptions play a role in guiding preferential use after party media building relational trust with audiences in the social media environment, and this role may vary somewhat under different relational trusts.

The u concept of relational trust overcomes to some degree the rupture between attributes, processes and institutions (Shuhua and Yan, 2015). In addition to the attributes

of the party media, the overall process of audience interaction (i.e. historical culture), the media market and the political structure all constitute possible explanations behind this issue.

One of the most scholarly aspects of Chinese political culture is how the relationship with authority is perceived. Some studies derive many peculiarities of Chinese politics from this foundational relationship. Pye (1992) has pointed out that the *father* is a symbolic image of authority in Chinese family upbringing. Chinese people internalise the role of *father* in their family socialisation from an early age, and as a result, in their political and social life, they continue to seek or strive to become such a *father* i.e. patenrnalistic authority, and the consequent formation of a patriarchal Chinese political authority(Fang, 2013). The family was fundamental in the construction of the Chinese political system and intertextualised with it in its subsequent development. The ethical character of the central government took precedence over the political, and governmental decrees were seen as ethical, authoritative advice or expectations rather than commands(Weber and Gerth, 1953). For Weber, the obedience of "serving father and obeying brother(事父从兄)", which originated within the family, formed the template for all kinds of private relationships and social groups outside home, while all private relationships outside of kinship were restricted because of distrust, and prevented all credit and the operation of commerce.

The guanxi-based culture explains the dichotomy between "public" and "private" in China. Chinese culture has always been confronted with the paradox of the *public-private dichotomy*(Pye, 1992; Pye, Pye, et al., 2009), which has led to the fact that Chinese obligations are always directed towards specific people who are close to them, rather than developing an obligation to do something (sachlichen) in a sacred cause (Sache). Thus, although the Chinese are in various interpersonal groups with close ties, their relationships manifest themselves in a very private and personal rather than public way, lacking a genuine community (Gemeide)(Weber and Gerth, 1953). This also leads to uncertainty in Chinese private relationships, with a strong sense of insecurity brought about by suspicion of relationships. When insecurity develops to a certain extent, "reunification" and "return to unity" becomes a powerful desire for many(Pye et al., 2009). As Maffesoli points out, in post-modern society, the intimate and sensual tribe formed by the warmth of individuals echoes people's life instincts, and people create a new *co-presence* through selective affinity. This is perhaps the similarity between Chinese and Western civilizations under the change of technology (Maffesoli, 2017). The difference is that Pye et al. (2009) argues that this insecurity promotes the desire for centralisation, and that the insecurity and uncertainty in relationships makes the grand unification a source of security.

To a certain extent, this explains the difference between state-society relations in China and the West from a cultural perspective, with the state and society appearing in China as isomorphic , which also explains people's relational dependence on the party media. Since the founding of the state, the media has appeared as the mouthpiece of the party(Winfield and Peng, 2005), and although the market-oriented reforms of the media since the 1980s have somewhat impacted the public's trust in the party media, most of the public's suspicion of the party media has been based on specific reports and has not shaken the legitimacy of the party media. The close relationship that the public has consciously formed with the party media is not only a result of a cultural genetic desire for security, but also a choice made by the public in the media market structure under this state-society isomorphic relationship.

In fact, new media platforms do provide the public with an abundant choice of information sources. However, due to the homogenisation of information (Jun, 2020)and the

proliferation of self-publishing (Fang, 2022) the public actually has very limited choices. The diverse landscape created by technology objectively limits the field of choice for users instead, replacing people's desire for diversity through quantity and leaving the public mired in self-satisfaction and losing the desire to explore new areas. The media of the liberal market dimension, on the other hand, face a tightening of the space for development (Jun, 2020). This externally constrained media market structure likewise constitutes the logic behind the preferential use of party media.

There are definitely some shortcomings in this study: Firstly, the survey sample in this paper is not drawn from a random sample, but from a convenience sample. This poses some challenges to the validity of the study. Also, as the study is a one-shot study, inference of causality still requires multiple data points over time. Secondly, the impact of potential control variables on the findings is not considered, for example, audience personality may have a significant impact on perception of emotion. Finally, there is considerable heterogeneity within the party media (Fang, 2019) and different approaches to relational practices, and this study only focused on the party media community in a general sense. Future research could focus more on specific party media organisations.

Notes on contributor(s)

- Ruomeng Liu: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data Curation, Writing-Orinigal Draft, Writing-Reviewing and Editing

- Qinuo Yang: Methodology, Data Analysis, Writing-Reviewing and Editing

- Wen Wang: Writing-Reviewing and Editing

- Xuwei Yang: Writing-Reviewing and Editing

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7. Appendicies

7.1. Factor Analysis

7.2. Direct Effect Regression

7.3. Mediating Effect Test

Table 4. Factor analysis

Variable	Factor	Loading	CR	AVE
Positive affective perception	Encouraging	0.9	0.943	0.804
	Inspiring	0.877		
	Enthusiastic	0.889		
	Positive	0.921		
Negative affective perception	Nervous	0.722	0.913	0.726
	Anxious	0.864		
	Angry	0.898		
	Sad	0.911		
Strong relational trust	Sincere	0.898	0.893	0.678
	Transparent	0.868		
	Affectionate	0.819		
	Authoritative	0.694		
Weak relational trust	Professional	0.82	0.89	0.671
	Objective	0.877		
	Teamwork	0.763		
	Public	0.812		
Party media preference	Choice	0.855	0.926	0.758
	Cares	0.855		
	Likes	0.869		
	Pays attention	0.903		

Table 5. Model Validity

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(1) Positive Affective Perception	0.897			
(2) Negative Affective Perception	-0.071 (1.847)	0.852		
(3) Strong Relational Trust	0.813 (1.064) $t = 804.740$	-0.080 (1.065) $t = -75.369$	0.823 $t = 774.921$	
(4) Weak Relational Trust	0.754 (0.915) $t = 823.862$	-0.091 (0.915) $t = -99.364$	0.839 (0.915) $t = 915.564$	0.819 (0.915) $t = 894.207$
(5) Party Media Preference	0.754 (0.906) $t = 831.968$	-0.049 (0.906) $t = -53.866$	0.786 (0.906) $t = 867.102$	0.766 (0.906) $t = 846.585$

Table 6. Regression of Relational Trust on Affective Perception

	(1)	(2)
VARIABLES	Affective Perception	Affective Perception
Relational Trust	0.409***	0.403***
	(0.0184)	(0.0190)
Gender	-	√
Education	-	√
Political Affiliation	-	√
Constant	0.644***	0.913***
	(0.0295)	(0.0588)
Observations	1438	1424
R-squared	0.256	0.272

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 7. Regression of Relational Trust on Party Media Preference

	(1)	(2)	(3)
VARIABLES	Party Media Preference	Party Media Preference	Party Media Preference
Relational Trust	0.484***	0.486***	0.456***
	(0.00917)	(0.00957)	(0.0109)
Affective Perception	-	-	√
Gender	-	√	√
Education	-	√	√
Political Affiliation	-	√	√
Constant	-0.00598	0.0373	-0.0301
	(0.0147)	(0.0297)	(0.0318)
Observations	1438	1424	1424
R-squared	0.660	0.664	0.672

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 8. Regression of Affective Perception on Party Media Preference

	(1)	(2)	(3)
VARIABLES	Party Media Preference	Party Media Preference	Party Media Preference
Affective Perception	0.360***	0.348***	0.0739***
	(0.0170)	(0.0173)	(0.0133)
Relational Trust	-	-	√
Gender	-	√	√
Education	-	√	√
Political Affiliation	-	√	√
Constant	0.190***	0.199***	-0.0301
	(0.0223)	(0.0469)	(0.0318)
Observations	1438	1424	1424
R-squared	0.239	0.263	0.672

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 9. Regression of Two Types of Relational Trust on Two Types of Affective Perception

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
VARIABLES	Positive Affective Perception	Positive Affective Perception	Negative Affective Perception	Negative Affective Perception
Strong Relational Trust	0.628***	0.616***	-0.0196	-0.0401
	(0.0281)	(0.0282)	(0.0571)	(0.0567)
Weak Relational Trust	0.273***	0.280***	-0.0775	-0.0619
	(0.0299)	(0.0302)	(0.0606)	(0.0606)
Gender	-	√	-	√
Education	-	√	-	√
Political Affiliation	-	√	-	√
Constant	0.0724**	0.119***	0.587***	0.804***
	(0.0132)	(0.0264)	(0.0267)	(0.0530)
Observations	1438	1424	1438	1424
R-squared	0.692	0.690	0.006	0.036

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 10. Regression of Two Types of Relational Trust on Party Media Preference

	(1)	(2)	(3)
VARIABLES	Party Media Preference	Party Media Preference	Party Media Preference
Strong Relational Trust	0.537***	0.527***	0.342***
	(0.0318)	(0.0318)	(0.0355)
Weak Relational Trust	0.428***	0.442***	0.359***
	(0.0338)	(0.0340)	(0.0338)
Positive Affective Perception	-	-	√
Negative Affective Perception	-	-	√
Gender	-	√	√
Education	-	√	√
Political Affiliation	-	√	√
Constant	-0.00183	0.0398	-0.0104
	(0.0149)	(0.0297)	(0.0311)
Observations	1438	1424	1424
R-squared	0.660	0.665	0.689

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 11. Regression of Two Types of Affective Perception on Party Media Preference

	(1)	(2)	(3)
VARIABLES	Party Media Preference	Party Media Preference	Party Media Preference
Positive Affective Perception	0.822***	0.812***	0.300***
	(0.0185)	(0.0193)	(0.0289)
Negative Affective Perception	0.00511	0.00706	0.0179
	(0.0164)	(0.0167)	(0.0144)
Strong Relational Trust	-	-	√
Weak Relational Trust	-	-	√
Gender	-	√	√
Education	-	√	√
Political Affiliation	-	√	√
Constant	0.114***	0.107***	-0.0104
	(0.0174)	(0.0354)	(0.0311)
Observations	1438	1424	1424
R-squared	0.579	0.581	0.689

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 12. Bootstrap Test of Mediation Effect in Model 1

	(1)
Mediation Path	Relational Trust → Affective Perception → Party Media Preference
Indirect Effect	0.0298***
	(0.00550)
Direct Effect	0.456***
	(0.0142)
Proportion of Mediation Effect	6%
Observations	1424

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 13. Bootstrap Test of Mediation Effect in Model 2

	(1)	(2)
Mediation Path	Strong Relational Trust → Positive Affective Perception → Party Media Preference	Weak Relational Trust → Positive Affective Perception → Party Media Preference
Indirect Effect	0.311***	0.363***
	(0.0383)	(0.0339)
Direct Effect	0.560***	0.547***
	(0.0468)	(0.0433)
Proportion of Mediation Effect	36%	40%
Observations	1424	1424

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1