

Resurgence of Party Media in China From the Perspective of Relational Trust Theory

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Research Background: Phenomenon

- 1 Party media overwhelms other market-based media on multimodal social media platforms in terms of number of followers, retweets, comments and other metrics(Fang, 2016).
- 2 Love your nation as love your idol: New media and fan nationalism(Liu, 2017).
- 3 A new type of pro-market, scientific, high-tech, and weakly political propaganda(Brady, 2012).



New News Ecosystem

Low-choice to High-choice (Strömbäck et al., 2022)

- 1 The Internet reconstruct journalism and public sphere(Zhang, 2016a)
- 2 New news ecosystem: multiple & diverse actors(Zhang, 2016b)
- 3 Social media and digital platform's competition for audiences' attention(Long, 2017)

The State-Preneurship Model

The State-Preneurship Model(Repnikova & Fang, 2018)

- Experimentation with online platforms, such as *ThePaper.cn*
- The existing central-level party media, such as *CCTV News* and *People's Daily*, 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 **277,000** government Weibo accounts and more than **17,000** government WeChat public accounts.

The Shift in Propaganda

Soft Propaganda (Mattingly and Yao, 2022)

Long et al	
Sensational Mode Information Model	Grassroots emotional discourse as represented by the People's Daily Professional authoritative discourse represented by Chivalry
Fang et al	
Mature Strategy Leverage Authority Resource Input	Nationalist sentiment stimulation, title manipulation Consciously use their authority status Top-down affirmation and encouragement, and give space to try

Trust and Affect: Two Key Concepts

Trust is generally regarded as a prerequisite for media to work.
Affectivity is a prominent feature of this digital journalism landscape

Relational Trust

Trust Theory: Interpersonal trust vs. Systemic trust

- 1 Niklas Luhmann - Social System Theory: Trust as a mechanism to simplify complexity
- 2 Giddens - Mordernity: Confidence that the individual or system can be relied upon

Trust in China

- 1 Weber: Special Trust
- 2 Fukuyama: Low Trust Society

Relational Trust

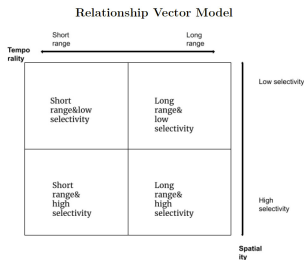
Trust as a functionalized mechanism embedded in social structures and institutions(Luhmann, 1979), is also influenced by the structure in which trust is embedded(Xiang, 2018).

Relational Trust

Relationship is the law of trust generation. (Zhai,2023)

- ① Yang Zhongfang: Focusing on the impact of social change and transformation on trust in China
- ② Zhai Xuewei: Contextualism vs. Individualism

Relational trust: relationship-based trust, often demonstrated through a network of relationships, exists to build trust between the two parties for affective interaction and perception(Chen, 2017; Zhai, 2003).



Affective Perception

- 1 "Emotion" is not only a private feeling, but also a social being, a product of political, social and cultural constructions(Yuan, 2015). The social bonding of people through the sharing of common emotions or emotional experiences(Collins, 2014).
- 2 Party media use pro-people, warm and personal discourse strategies
- 3 The power of emotional communication in the social media environment

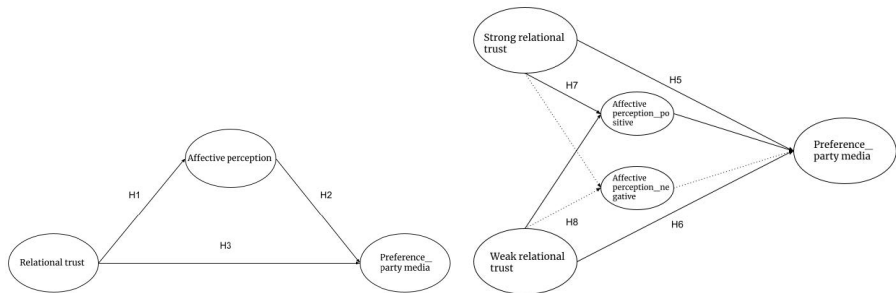
Concepts

- Trust in Chinese culture is not only an emotional practice arising from long-lasting interactions, but also a relational practice oriented to the utilitarian interests of those in power in social relations.
 - Weak relational trust: audience trust in party media with high choice and short range
 - Strong relational trust: audience trust in party media with low choice and long range
- The analysis of emotions is actually embedded in specific power relations and social structures(Yuan, 2020). The direction of the flow of emotions is related to social rank, positive emotions flow upward, negative emotions flow downward, and groups with higher social rank have more power to express negative emotions(Flam, 2004).
 - Positive affective perception: audience's positive emotional perception of party media
 - Negative affective perception: audience's negative emotional perception of party media
- Party media preference: Preferential use for party media

Research Questions

- 1 RQ1: Why do people have party media preference?
- 2 RQ2: What kind of party media trust is party media preference based on?
- 3 RQ3: What are the paths by which relational trust in party media influences party media preferences?

Hypothesis



Process

- 1 Interview
- 2 Survey (sample: $N=1428$)
- 3 Data analysis

Statistics

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Numericalization	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

Statistics

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

Statistics

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

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

Statistics

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		

Regression

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) $t = 846.585$

Regression

Table 6. Regression of Relational Trust on Affective Perception

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

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

Regression

Table 7. Regression of Relational Trust on Party Media Preference

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

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

Regression

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*** (0.0170)	0.348*** (0.0173)	0.0739*** (0.0133)
Relational Trust	-	-	√
Gender	-	√	√
Education	-	√	√
Political Affiliation	-	√	√
Constant	0.190*** (0.0223)	0.199*** (0.0469)	-0.0301 (0.0318)
Observations	1438	1424	1424
R-squared	0.239	0.263	0.672

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

Regression

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*** (0.0281)	0.616*** (0.0282)	-0.0196 (0.0571)	-0.0401 (0.0567)
Weak Relational Trust	0.273*** (0.0299)	0.280*** (0.0302)	-0.0775 (0.0606)	-0.0619 (0.0606)
Gender	-	✓	-	✓
Education	-	✓	-	✓
Political Affiliation	-	✓	-	✓
Constant	0.0724** (0.0132)	0.119*** (0.0264)	0.587*** (0.0267)	0.804*** (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

Regression

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

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

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

Regression

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*** (0.0185)	0.812*** (0.0193)	0.300*** (0.0289)
Negative Affective Perception	0.00511 (0.0164)	0.00706 (0.0167)	0.0179 (0.0144)
Strong Relational Trust	-	-	✓
Weak Relational Trust	-	-	✓
Gender	-	✓	✓
Education	-	✓	✓
Political Affiliation	-	✓	✓
Constant	0.114*** (0.0174)	0.107*** (0.0354)	-0.0104 (0.0311)
Observations	1438	1424	1424
R-squared	0.579	0.581	0.689

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

Bootstrapping

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

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

Research Results

- 1 Emotional perception mediates the path of relational trust-party media preference
- 2 Positive affective perception is the true mediating variable of trust between the two relationships, while negative affective perception plays almost no role
- 3 Strong relational trust relies more on positive affective perceptions, while weak relational trust relies relatively less on positive affective perceptions.

A Relational Trust Perspective

The meaning of media trust

- 1 Highly selective media environment, the importance of media trust
- 2 The complex connection between media use and media trust
- 3 Complex motivations for media use

Operationalization of trust

- 1 Trust itself is an intrinsically missing concept(Zhai, 2022)
- 2 Media trust suffers from a chronic lack of conceptualization and operationalization(Strömbäck, 2020)

Emotional Strategies

- 1 Emotional flow and power structures in media systems
- 2 Audience perspectives on emotional journalism

Insufficient Research

- 1 The survey sample is a convenience sample
- 2 The study is a one-time data (one-shot)
- 3 The effect of potential control variables on the study results was not considered
- 4 There is a large heterogeneity within the party media, and the approach to relationship practice varies

Thank you! contact and any information:
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