

Relationship Between Political News Using and Online Political Participation: Roles of Political Trust and Political Interest

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Abstract: In order to explore the impact of political news use on college students' online political participation and its mechanism, this study conducted a questionnaire survey and data analysis on 420 college students. The results show that the political news using can positively predict college students' online political participation, and political trust mediates this relationship; The moderated mediation model shows that political interest moderates the relationship between the political news using and online political participation, that means, the higher the political interest, the stronger the impact of the political news using on online political participation.

Keywords: political news using, online political participation, political trust, political interest.

1. Introduction

The development of Internet technology has provided new channels for citizens' political participation, which has gradually become an important part of political life. College students participate in political life in the online public space through various ways such as likes, comments, forwarding, voting and suggestions. In terms of technical development, the rapid development of mobile Internet and the continuous enrichment of smart phone applications, and the increasingly complete network infrastructure, which provide feasible support for college students to access political news anytime and anywhere. In terms of social psychology, the political news using is an influential factor of political trust, political interest and other related variables, but the study of its specific mechanism still needs to be in-depth. The college students are the hope of national development and national rejuvenation, it is of great significance to guide this group to standardize political participation.

1.1. Political news using and online political participation

According to the theory of use and satisfaction, the use of media is a means for individuals to meet specific needs, especially to meet people's social or political tendencies and human interaction. The meta-analysis of youth groups shows that the political use of digital media (such as reading online news, etc.) will have a positive impact on political participation [1]. The empirical study found that reading newspapers, watching TV, listening to radio and receiving political information online are

positively correlated with political trust and political participation [2-4]. In addition, empirical research shows that online duration [5] have a positive impact on online political participation. Therefore, this study proposes Hypothesis 1: Political news using can positively predict college students' online political participation.

1.2. Political trust as a mediator

Political socialization refers to the process in which individuals play a subjective and dynamic role, integrate various social political views and public opinions, analyze various political relations, and form independent political views and political behaviors that react on social politics. After citizens become adults, political socialization will enter a stage of consciousness and continuity. During this period, political communication has become the main way and source for individuals to obtain political information. Empirical research shows that the political use of micro-blog will enhance college students' capability-based political trust in the government [6]; News use is positively correlated with political trust [7]. Thus, the political news using is an important factor affecting political trust.

Citizen participation is based on mutual trust between individuals and governments. Empirical research shows that there is a correlation between individual political trust and political participation. There is a positive correlation between political trust and individual institutionalized political participation [8,9] and policy participation [10]. In addition, compared with offline political participation, online political participation has both the functional characteristics of providing information products and strengthening actors, and presents an intermediary mechanism of "Internet use - political psychology - political participation". Therefore, this study proposes Hypothesis 2: Political trust would mediate the relationship between political news using and online political participation.

1.3. Political interest as a moderator

According to the theory of media effect, the influence of media on individual emotions, attitudes and behaviors through information dissemination will be subject to the differential intervention of various social factors such as the subject, media and environment. Political interest is a key variable that affects the effect of media. Empirical research also found that the higher the public's political interest, the stronger the willingness of online political participation [11]. The political interest of Chinese netizens has a significant reinforcing and regulating effect on the relationship between their microblog use and the political knowledge [12]. Therefore, this study proposes Hypothesis 3: Political interest would moderate the relationship between the political news using and online political participation, that means, the higher the political interest, the stronger the impact of the political news using on online political participation.

To sum up, the hypothesis model of this study is shown in Figure 1.

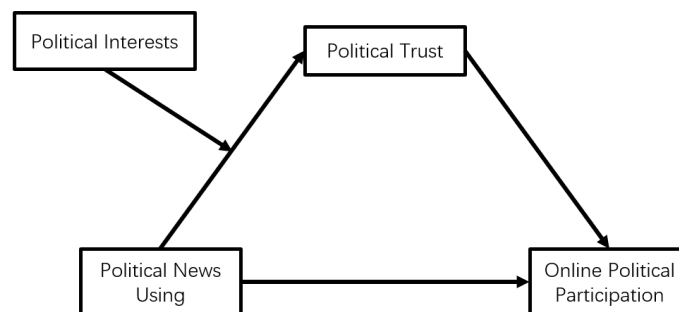


Figure 1. The assumptive mediated moderation model.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

420 questionnaires were distributed through convenient sampling method and 361 valid questionnaires were obtained after eliminating blank and systematic responses, with an effective rate of 85.95%. Participants included 226 males and 135 females; 289 from cities and 72 from rural areas. The age of subjects is between 16 and 35 years old ($M=21.22$ years old, $SD=3.07$ years old)

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Political news using

The survey scale on the political news using in the "Social Awareness Survey of Internet Users" initiated by Ma Deyong et al. is adopted. The questionnaire consists of five questions. Use the 5-point Likert scale form to measure: 1="hardly used" to 4="almost used every day". The Cronbach's alpha coefficient α for this scale was 0.72.

2.2.2. Online political participation

The online political participation measurement scale developed by Zhang Mingxin et al. [6] is adopted. The questionnaire consists of six questions. Use the 5-point Likert scale form to measure: 1="never" to 5="many". The Cronbach's alpha coefficient α for this scale was 0.87.

2.2.3. Political trust

The political trust scale prepared by Shi Qingxin et al. [13] adjusted the content of the original questionnaire for college students. The questionnaire consists of five questions. Use the 5-point Likert scale form to measure: 1="very disagree" to 5="very agree". The Cronbach's alpha coefficient α for this scale was 0.93.

2.2.4. Political interest

Using the scale prepared by Zhang Mingxin et al. [14] The questionnaire consists of three questions. Use the 7-point Likert scale to measure: 1="very disagree" to 7="very agree". The Cronbach's alpha coefficient α for this scale was 0.87.

2.3. Control and test of common method deviation

All questionnaires in this study were filled in anonymously, and Harman single factor test was used to statistically test the common method bias. The results showed that there were 5 factors with characteristic roots greater than 1, and the cumulative variation explained by the first factor accounted for only 31.63%, less than 40%, so there was no serious common method bias.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis

Correlation analysis is the prerequisite for exploring the causal relationship between variables. This study involves multiple variables such as political news use, online political participation, political trust and political interest. The correlation analysis results between the main variables and demographic variables are shown in Table 1. The correlation between the main variables is significant.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis results of each variable

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1 PNU	2.43	0.64	1			
2 OPP	2.39	0.89	0.43***	1		
3 PT	4.37	0.69	0.17**	0.25***	1	
4 PI	4.94	1.23	0.35***	0.44***	0.19***	1

Note. N = 361. * $p < .005$, *** $p < .001$. PNU= political news using; OPP= online political participation; PT= political trust; PI= political interest. The same below.

3.2. Testing for the mediating effect of political trust

According to the hypothesis, it is predicted that political trust plays a mediating role between the political news using and online political participation. Therefore, we use model 4 of PROCESS macro to test. As shown in Table 2, the political news using has a significant predictive effect on online political participation ($B=0.49$, $t=9.07$, $p<0.001$). In addition, the political news using has a significant direct predictive effect on political trust ($B=0.21$, $t=3.21$, $p<0.001$), and political trust has a significant direct predictive effect on online political participation ($B=0.16$, $t=3.86$, $p<0.001$). Therefore, political trust plays a partial intermediary role in the relationship between the political news using and online political participation. Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 were supported.

Table 2. Testing the mediation effect of political trust

Forecast variables	OPP			OPP			PT		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>
PNU	0.45	0.05	8.47	0.49	0.05	9.07***	0.21	0.07	3.21***
PT	0.16	0.04	3.86***						
R^2		0.22			0.19			0.03	
F		50.13			82.18*			10.28	

3.3. Testing for the moderating effect of political interest

According to the hypothesis, predicting political interest can adjust the indirect impact of political news use on online political participation. Therefore, we use model 7 of PROCESS macro to test. As shown in Table 3, political interest has a significant predictive effect on political trust ($B=0.17$, $t=3.12$, $p<0.005$); After putting political interest into the model, the product of political news use and media literacy has a significant predictive effect on political efficacy ($B=0.23$, $t=3.15$, $p<0.005$), indicating that media literacy can play a regulatory role in the prediction of political news use on political efficacy.

In order to understand the essence of the interaction between media literacy and political efficacy, media literacy was divided into high media literacy group and low media literacy group by adding or subtracting one standard deviation from the average value. The mediation effect value and 95% Bootstrap confidence interval of the two groups of subjects' political efficacy between the political news using and national identity are shown in Table 4.

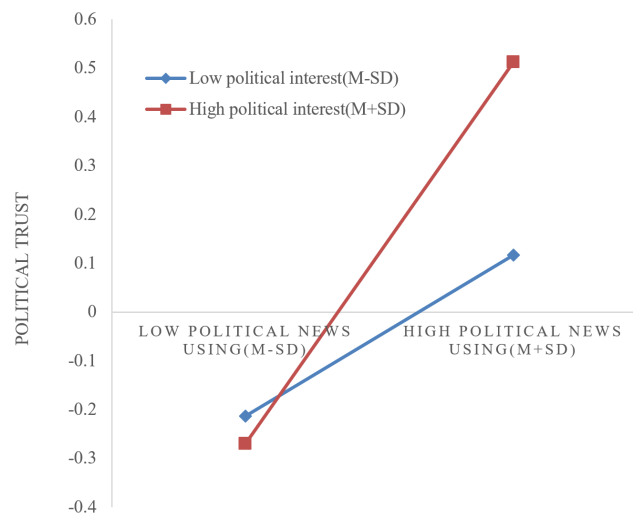
Table 3. Testing the moderated mediation effect

forecast variables	PT			OPP		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>
PNU	0.17	0.07	2.36*	0.45	0.05	8.47***
PT				0.16	0.04	3.86
PI	0.17	0.05	3.12**			
PNU × PI	0.23	0.07	3.15**			
R^2		0.07			0.22	
F		9.40***			50.13***	

Table 4. The mediation effect of political trust of college students with different political interests

PI	Effect	Boot <i>SE</i>	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
<i>M</i> -1 <i>SD</i>	-0.01	0.02	-0.04	0.02
<i>M</i>	0.03	0.01	0.00	0.05
<i>M</i> +1 <i>SD</i>	0.06	0.02	0.02	0.10

Further simple slope analysis shows that (Figure 2), for the subjects of the low political interest group (*M*-1*SD*), the political news using has a significant positive predictive effect on political trust; For the subjects of high political interest group (*M*+1*SD*), the positive prediction effect is stronger. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

**Figure 2.** Political interest moderates the relationship between political news using and online political participation.

4. Discussion

This study explores the process and mechanism of the influence of the political news using on online political participation, and analyzes the intermediary role of political trust and the regulatory role of political interest. First of all, the main effect test found that the political news using could positively affect online political participation. The findings show that increasing the frequency of political news use can help improve the level of college students' online political participation. It is worth noting that some studies also pointed out that we should strengthen the review of political news released by We-media and other channels. Secondly, the intermediary analysis found that political trust played

an intermediary role in the influence of the political news using on college students' online political participation. This discovery reveals the influence mechanism of the political news using on online political participation. Therefore, improving the level of political trust through various ways, such as openness of government affairs, simplification of administration and decentralization, will help to improve the level of online political participation. Finally, the moderated intermediary model found that the influence of college students' political news use on online political participation was regulated by college students' political interest. Political interest is crucial for citizens to master political knowledge. Therefore, we can attract more college students to participate in political life by strengthening political education, carrying out political activities and other similar activities.

Limited by the research conditions, this study also has deficiencies. Firstly, this study is a cross-sectional study, unable to draw the exact causal relationship between variables. Secondly, this conclusion comes from the college students, and whether it is applicable to other groups is uncertain. In addition, the data collected in this study are from the subjective reports of the subjects, so there may be errors. In future, qualitative research, experimental research and other ways can be considered to improve.

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