

**The Role of Media: Improve or Impede? The Mediating Effect of
Media Use on the Relationship between Education and Political
Trust.**

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Abstract

Media and education have always been regarded as important factors affecting political trust. Although novel research shows that education level and media usage have a different effect on political trust separately, there is scant research into the mediating effect of media on the relationship between education and political trust. I hypothesize that, among the Chinese, lower education levels lead to the use of multiple traditional media, thereby enhancing political trust. Higher education levels should lead to more social media use, thereby reducing political trust. Based on a moderation and regression analysis using data from the public database called “Internet Users’ Social Awareness Survey”, I find that education has both increased the use of traditional media and social media, and both forms of media reduce political trust. The results are thus not completely in line with the hypotheses. Based on the findings, avenues for additional research are also discussed.

Keywords: China, education, political trust, social media, traditional media

1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction

What is the current situation of Chinese people’s trust in the government? What factors are affecting political trust? This discussion has received widespread attention since the beginning of the 21st century. Since the rise of the internet in China, it has quickly become a platform for people to express their opinions. In various forums and on social media platforms, internet users discuss current political topics and typical events. Various protests emerge on the internet continuously, and the criticism and distrust of the government accounts for a considerable proportion of these protests.

China is the world’s largest media market and has the world’s largest internet population (1.08 billion in 2020). Considering such a vast number of internet users, content with ulterior motives will have a significant impact on Chinese citizens. Therefore, all media content

output and information circulation are operated under the strict control of the Communist Party of China (CPC). Advertisements and notifications are overwhelming, but as long as they do not pose a threat to social stability or involve some politically sensitive content, they will not be banned.

Before China's reform and opening up, traditional media occupied the dominant position in the media market. However, during the past two decades, the social transformation has brought about the emergence of the internet and social media. The emergence of Chinese social media has broken state's absolute monopoly and control over political information and changed the mode and speed of information transmission. Compared with traditional media, social media is highly commercialized. It allows "users to converse and interact with each other; to create, edit and share new forms of textual, visual and audio content" (Selwyn, 2012). Stated differently, people are both receivers and disseminators of information. Accordingly, on such platforms with less government control and censorship, people tend to access diverse political information and conflicting ideas.

There are many studies that specify the role that different types of media play in forming political trust in Western democracies (O'Keefe, 1980; Becker & Whitney, 1980; Ceron, 2015). O'Keefe (1980) suggested that traditional media help people form positive attitudes towards the government. Watching TV programs and reading newspapers are closely related to political support. Becker and Whitney (1980) emphasized the positive correlation between newspaper reading and government trust. Ceron (2015) argued that consumption of news from websites is positively associated with higher trust, while access to information available on social media is correlated with lower trust.

Simultaneously, it is widely acknowledged that education is significant to a series of individual level political attitudes and behaviour. The association between education and political trust is widely studied. Some emphasize the positive effect of education on increasing political trust. Highly educated citizens have repeatedly been demonstrated to be more politically sophisticated and informed (Almond and Verba 1963; Carpini and Keeter 1996; Hillygus 2005; Jennings 1996; Nie et al. 1996; Verba and Nie 1972). This necessary political knowledge accounts for higher levels of trust among the well-educated (Hooghe & Dassonneville, 2011).

Some claim that education reduces political trust, usually due to changes in the political context. It could be the postmodernist values and liberal democratic values in both Western and Chinese societies that lead to a declining respect for authority and distrust of political authority and big government (Inglehart, 1997; Wang, 2016). Corruption also offsets many positive effects of education on political trust (Agerberg, 2009). Hakhverdian and Mayne (2012) further confirmed that in countries with high corruption education has a negative effect because higher educated citizens are more sceptic towards institutions.

For Chinese society in the transitional period from an acquaintance society to a stranger society¹, the effect of education on political trust varies. Especially in the era of rapid development of social media, the relationship between education and political trust is considerably affected. The popularity of the internet and social media has brought increased awareness of civil rights. The public's trust in government is diminishing as Chinese citizens

¹ In traditional Chinese society, interpersonal relationships have woven into a huge and complex network of relationships. Whether by blood or geography, people are more or less related to each other. They communicate through the network formed by "acquaintances". At the same time, they can find shortcuts, transcend the law, engage in fraud. Contrary to the concept of "acquaintance society", "stranger society" refers to rapid development of economy and people's intense work and life lead to indifference and distrust among people in cities.

are acquiring stronger liberal democratic values, which make citizens more critical towards government institutions (Wang, 2005).

It is true that a certain degree of political distrust can enable government agencies to supervise each other and continuously improve their governing and administrative capabilities. However, long-term mistrust towards the government can also have severe consequences. Low political trust is becoming an area of increasing concern for political parties and civil society organizations in many European democracies (David & King, 1997). Hetherington (1998) argued that declining trust is a crucial cause of this dissatisfaction with political leaders. Low trust helps create a political environment in which it is more difficult for leaders to succeed. Addressing this issue will give the Chinese government and media practitioners the insights to adjust their policy-making and propaganda strategies, improving democratic inclusion for the residents of China and contributing to a more nuanced understanding of current implications of political trust.

1.2. Research question

The existent studies analyze either education or media independently and account for their direct effect on political trust. There is, however, scant literature available that addresses the mediating effect of media use. Considering the different media landscapes and fluctuating political trust in current China, this article attempts to fill this gap by investigating whether different media use types mediate the relationship between education and political trust. This project aims to better understand how Chinese citizens form perceptions towards government performance through various media channels. Therefore, in this thesis, I analyze if media use mediates the influence that education has on political trust. If so, this means that media use

has a different impact on public trust towards the government.

Therefore, the main question in this research is, *to what extent do different types of media use mediate the relationship between education and political trust?*

Quantitative methods will be employed to gain insight into predictors of Chinese residents' political trust. I will first analyze the descriptives of political trust, education level, and media use. Second, I will conduct regression analyses of political trust and the other two factors separately. Regression analyses are conducted and the significance of the coefficients is examined at each step. If there is a mediating effect, I will test the media's influence on the direction and strength of the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variable. If not, I will determine whether the direct influence of education on political trust is too strong or because the sample size is relatively small, or for other reasons.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this research, I analyze the status quo of Chinese residents' political trust from the perspective of media use and education. To better understand the concepts mentioned in the introduction, I first describe the concept of political trust, its origins, and contemporary implications. Secondly, I introduce the conceptual model. Thirdly, I present the theoretical achievements of previous research into the interconnection of education, media use, and political trust and develop my hypotheses.

Political trust generally refers to the degree of people's trust in polity, political organizations, government agencies, and state institutions such as the military. Easton (1975) distinguishes two dimensions of people's political support: diffuse support and specific support. Diffuse support refers to the degree of people's support for political values and polity;

specific support is directed to people's perception of decisions, policies, actions, utterances or the general style of government agencies and authorities. In this study, specific support will be adopted to explore people's trust in the incumbent Chinese government, that is, the government under the leadership of President Xi Jinping since 2013.

Considering the importance of political trust to a democratic country and a country in transformation, this paper will analyze the political trust of contemporary Chinese from the perspectives of education level, media usage and the combination of media and education.

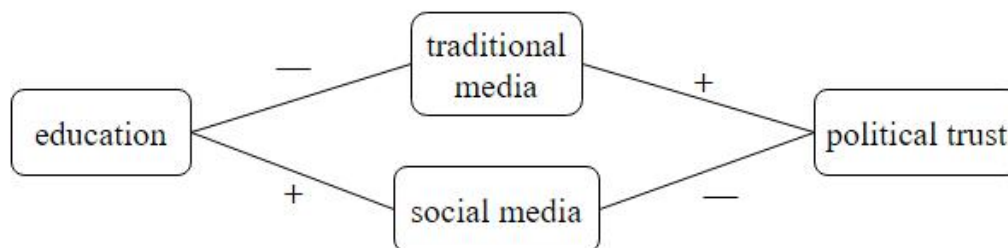


Figure 1 conceptual model

Taken altogether, as depicted in Figure 1, education is an independent variable, and its relationship with political trust is expected to be mediated by media usage. The media use in this article is not broad media exposure or media content. Media use is divided into traditional media and social media. In the Chinese context, traditional media refer to media such as CCTV (the abbreviation of China Central Television), local TV stations, magazines, and newspapers. Social media comprises social applications such as WeChat, Sina Weibo, QQ, and foreign media channels such as Twitter, Facebook, and BBC, etc. People utilize the media to obtain necessary political information and express their views on political, economic, and social issues. The aim of this study is to explore whether the characteristics of information disseminated by specific media affect the relation between individual education attainment

and political trust.

2.1. The effect of education on media use

There is some research relating education level to media usage, and researchers have already confirmed the power of education as a predictor of media behaviour (Self, 1988). Anderson (2018) found out that the internet is the preferred platform for obtaining news information among college-educated individuals. Those who have not graduated high school or did not go to college after graduation are more dependent on television for their news needs. Education is positively correlated with more media exposure (Poindexter & McCombs, 2001). Exposure to varieties of media outlets, especially for people from lower socioeconomic status, can predict the degree to which people can accept different ideas (Wurff, 2011). Some studies further explored the relationship between education level and information preference. The results manifested that interest in politics, education and knowledge positively influence the incentives to search for attitude-consistent and counter-attitudinal information (Chaffee et al., 2001; Garrett, 2009; Knobloch-Westerwick and Meng, 2009). Their general view is that better-educated, more interested or more knowledgeable people are exposed more to a variety of news media. Selection of counter-attitudinal articles was more likely among them.

Although there is not abundant research conducted in the Chinese context, some scholars have touched upon the relationship between education and media. Chen & Shi (2001) discovered that well-educated citizens are more likely to have daily news consumption and have greater exposure to political messages than individuals with less education. Chan and Fang (2007) focused on the use of the internet and traditional media. Their results indicate that the internet plays a prominent role among young educated people in Hong Kong.

Educated young groups are generally enthusiastic adopters of the internet. Kennedy (2009) concluded that citizens at the highest levels of education are more resistant to traditional political propaganda and tend to have lower levels of political support. The reason is that well educated citizens are capable of examining alternative sources of political information and examine domestic party propaganda from a more objective and critical perspective.

Every media has its own audience group. Based on the 40th China Statistical Report on Internet Development, as of March 2020, people with junior high school education or above accounted for 41.7% of the total number of Chinese internet users. According to this report, Sina Weibo has become the primary platform for college students to express their social and political opinions. Although it does not prove that there is a causal relationship between social media and higher education, we can assume that the two are connected. Because social media is more used by young people, most of the young people in China today have received higher education. Because of lower price and easy access, traditional media has become the first choice of many people with low social level and low education level. Taking into account China's network firewall² and the fact that the majority of the negative news about the government is circulated on social media, the first hypotheses are formed:

Hypothesis 1A: Higher educated citizens are more likely to employ social media.

Hypothesis 1B: Lower educated citizens are more likely to employ traditional media.

2.2. The effect of media use on political trust

The research on the relationship between media use and political trust originated from

² The Great Firewall of China is the combination of legislative actions and technologies enforced by the country to regulate the Internet domestically. People in China are heavily dependent on VPN to connect to foreign applications and websites. Due to the complicated procedures and the need for certain English proficiency in this process, few people can use VPN stably to connect to the external network.

Western academic circles. The current research on the influence of media use and public government trust is mainly divided into two theoretical approaches.

Researchers proposed contrasting theories about media effect on political trust (Aarts, Fladmoe & Strömbäck, 2012). On the one hand, the “media malaise theory” proposed by Robinson (1976) suggested that traditional media like television has caused people to form negative political attitudes, such as political indifference, political alienation, political cynicism, and political distrust. Robinson (1976) believes that television news focuses on negative reports, especially the criticism and politics of government departments and politicians because of media commercialization competition. Patterson (1994) also pointed out through a longitudinal study of media content that journalists mainly focus on reporting campaign strategies, personal characteristics, and government failures and focus the public’s attention on political conflicts, making individuals uncomfortable with government officials and government agencies.

On the other hand, O’Keefe (1980) tested Robinson’s hypothesis of “media malaise theory” but the results are contrasting to the aforementioned theoretical viewpoint. In his view, traditional media helps people form a positive attitude towards the government system. Watching TV festivals and reading newspapers are closely related to political support (O’Keefe, 1980). Becker and Whitney also emphasized a positive correlation between newspaper reading and government trust (Becker & Whitney, 1980). The most representative theory that explains these empirical findings is the “virtuous circle theory” proposed by Norris (2000), which stipulates that the availability of political information provided by the media increases the trust among users who have access to contents, while it has no influence on

indifferent citizens that are reluctant to follow political news. The consumption of news media will promote democracy and the exposure to political news will produce a virtuous circle of trust in institutions (Avery, 2009; Norris, 2000).

Apart from traditional media, the role of social media in conveying political news and values cannot be underestimated. Based on a cross-sectional analysis, Ceron (2015) explored the different trust levels caused by different sources of information. He ascertained that news consumption from websites increase political trust, while access to information available on social media is related to lower trust. Because news consumption from institutional and news media websites will foster political trust due to the overall prosystem bias of these sources (Hermida, Lewis, & Zamith, 2014, p. 492).

The use of different media types has different effects on government trust, but not all media use will weaken government trust. The use of printed media is positively correlated with government trust. Research by Moy and Pfau (2000) found that reading the printed media will enhance people's political sophistication, thereby enhancing their trust in the government. TV news watching and radio listening are negatively related to government trust. This is closely related to the frequent exposure of unknown negative political news in TV and radio programs, which may reduce the legitimacy of government actions and affect people's political perceptions.

The theories and empirical studies mentioned above are all conducted within Western media systems and politics. In different political and social environments, the media plays different roles, leading to different trust level. Therefore, to discuss the relationship between media use and political trust in China, it is necessary to explain the Chinese media context in

the transition period. In authoritarian China, the function of traditional media and corresponding management system is different from that in the West. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the state politicized and organized the production of media information through institutional norms, monopoly of property rights, and control of production processes, making mass media important for publicizing national policies, mobilizing public support, and shaping people's political attitudes (Dong, 2011). It is strictly controlled in various aspects such as administration, personnel, and editorial policies. Some are even regarded as government agencies' publicity and extension of the ideological realm. For a long time, traditional media have been an essential tool for the Communist Party of China to promote political trust (Shen, 2003). The most important function of traditional Chinese media is to serve the country's political requirements and spread the government's positive image (Sun & Chang, 2001). They set up topic frames, portray government images, and act as gatekeepers of public opinion, thereby effectively enhancing citizens' political trust.

The economic reforms in the late 1980s promoted the market-oriented transformation of the media system. To meet the needs of the market and the audience, media has also changed from a single publicity and mobilization function to satisfying both publicity and information dissemination, entertainment, and other needs. In the late 1990s, the rise of the Internet led to changes in the concepts, models, and publicity effects of the traditional media industry. At the beginning of the 21st century, China's accession to the World Trade Organization accelerated the exchange and integration of domestic and foreign communication industries. Although market forces have promoted the Chinese media's comprehensive reform, the mass media is

still under strict state surveillance. While facing the market competition, the media must also complete the publicity tasks assigned by the state (Chen, 2009).

Chinese researchers also tap into the relation between traditional media and political trust. Shen and Guo (2012) address the dynamics of traditional propaganda and its persuasive effects, and suggest that news use in general, and television news viewing in particular, was positively associated with political trust. In comparison, some believed that Chinese government's intention to cultivate popular political support through media propaganda in the post-Tiananmen era has not achieved corresponding results (Chen & Shi, 2001). Chen and Shi (2001) also discovered that perpetual exposure to party propaganda has diminishing returns, generating distrust and reducing support for the regime. Wilkins and Bates (1995) conducted a study on the relationship between traditional media use and political distrust of Hong Kong residents in political transformation. The results showed that people who watch TV regularly would have lower levels of trust in the Chinese government because Hong Kong TV broadcasts negative reports on the Chinese central government which have affected the public's recognition of the government.

Concerning social media in China, with the widespread internet, local Chinese scholars have also paid attention to the influence of social media on political trust (Zhang & Liu, 2014; Zhang & Dai, 2014). Zhang and Liu (2014) pointed out that the more people have access to overseas media online, the more frequently they participate in public affairs online, the lower their level of political trust will be. Social media and the internet have produced a "crowding effect" on traditional media's political communication effects (Zhang & Liu, 2014). Others further investigated the mediating effect of social media and political trust. They found that

online communication and interaction negatively affect government performance evaluation and authoritarian values, positively affects political efficacy, and indirectly affects political trust. Since the influence of government performance evaluation and authoritarian values is stronger than political efficacy, the overall effect of social media on political trust is negative (Zhang & Dai, 2014). Kang and Zhu (2020) also demonstrated that political trust is lower for groups with higher education levels and greater media accessibility outside governmental propaganda than for their less-informed counterparts. It can be seen that the influence of media use on political trust is more complex and diverse, and further research is needed.

Based on these arguments, the second hypothesis is put forward:

Hypothesis 2A: Traditional media use leads to more political trust.

Hypothesis 2B: Social media use leads to less political trust.

2.3. The effect of education on political trust

Education has always been considered to positively affect political attitudes and behaviour in Western societies (Nie et al., 1996; Schlozman et al., 2012; Verba et al., 1995). The sorting function of education elucidates that higher education provides access to more privileges and priorities, and these in turn facilitate expression of trust in the system (Campbell, 2009; Nie et al., 1996). Some believe that schools have a positive socialization effect on young people, enabling them to form positive attitudes towards interpersonal communication. Therefore, the trust level is directly proportional to the level of education (Huang, Van den Brink, & Groot, 2011). Among them, higher education is the most important factor in the formation of individual trust (Knack & Keefer, 1997). Individual's ability to detect and control risk will increase with the improvement of their education level, which will also increase their trust

level to a certain extent (Putnam, 2000). Considering the incidental effect of education on daily life, if one has received higher education and obtained access to better housing and job opportunities, it facilitates the expression of trust (Huang et al., 2011). This education gap in political trust was also addressed by Bovens and Wille (2010), their results showed that the lower educated have a propensity to be very distrustful and cynical towards politics and politicians, whereas the higher educated are more positive about political institutions.

Education not only endows people with the ability to understand politics, but also a more critical vision and the ability to evaluate the performance of political institutions rigorously. When facing the destruction of democracy, the more educated are inclined to support and defend core democratic values and principles (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002). For instance, the higher educated are more likely to assess accurately their particular country's overall respect for human rights compared to their less educated counterparts (Anderson et al., 2005). Accordingly, higher educated individuals are more likely to acquire the necessary skills to judge political institutions based on objective criteria, such as performance and process, rather than the general public image shaped by the media.

These critical visions and values have led to lower political trust in specific contexts. Research shows that rising levels of education have been responsible for declines in various forms of political support observed in many advanced industrial democracies over the past half-century (Inglehart 1999, 245–56). Under most circumstances, the role of such values is usually more pronounced in the context of corruption. When corruption is high, educated and politically sophisticated citizens are as likely as low-educated citizens to feel resignation and distrustful with regard to formal political institutions (Agerberg, 2009). Hakhverdian and

Mayne (2012) put forward the norm-inducing function of education that the higher educated are more likely to be morally troubled by lacking institutional quality in a corrupt society. Their liberal values, including equality and tolerance, grow with years of schooling. Therefore in a corrupt society, higher educated individuals express less political trust than in a society with low levels of corruption. Furthermore, Van der Meer and Hakhverdian (2017) conducted a cross-national study and alleged that political trust includes satisfaction with democracy and confidence in the political system. Among higher educated citizens, corruption and macroeconomics have a more significant negative impact on political trust.

As mentioned above, political trust and education are negatively correlated in more corrupt countries because individual values of autonomy and self-expression are more activated in industrialized countries (Ugur-Cinar, Cinar, & Kose, 2020). This reasoning also applies to China. Research carried out by a Chinese scholar demonstrates that, while the Chinese government managed to maintain a sustained period of rapid economic growth, the public's trust is diminishing as citizens receive tertiary education and acquire stronger liberal democratic values, making them more critical toward government institutions (Wang, 2016). This leads to the third hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: The higher educated express less political trust than their lower educated counterparts.

From the information and hypotheses presented, this study aims to test the following general hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4: Lower educated citizens use more traditional media, which leads to higher political trust.

Hypothesis 5: Higher educated citizens use more social media, which leads to lower political trust.

3. Data and Measurement

3.1. Data set

Quantitative data from the “Internet Users’ Social Awareness Survey” conducted in 2018 is used to test the hypotheses. The survey was mainly targeted at Chinese internet users who can access the internet via various approaches, such as mobile phones, computers, TV.

Starting in 2012, some Chinese researchers began to collect internet users’ political attitudes through online questionnaire surveys. In 2018, the researchers summarized previous experiences and organized a survey team to adopt online questionnaire surveys. At the same time, they posted answer links in online communities such as Questionnaire Website, Weibo, and WeChat. They invited internet users to answer voluntarily. This survey includes more than 40 essential questions and several sub-topics, mainly covering the following modules: (1) Basic information such as gender, age, hometown, income, political affiliation, education level, occupation. (2) Media use such as channels and frequency of obtaining information, media credibility, political expression. (3) Psychological traits such as “Big Five personality traits,” “Authoritarian Personality,” cognitive needs and cognitive habits. (4) Social attitude such as happiness, social trust, social satisfaction. (5) Political attitude such as ideology, values, national identity, political trust.

Investigators collect questionnaire data through social media and website through three main channels: WeChat, Weibo, and questionnaire. WeChat is an application that provides

instant messaging services. In addition to chat communications, users can also use the “moments” function to post pictures, videos, network links, etc. In the survey, investigators posted a link to the questionnaire in WeChat group chats and “moments” to attract participants; Sina Weibo is an information sharing and communication platform that provides entertainment and leisure life services to the public; There are two ways to collect samples on Sina Weibo. One is to attract respondents to voluntarily answer the questions by sending answer links to Weibo users by several members of the survey team every day; the second is to use the promotion function of Sina Weibo. The questionnaire link is used for promotion and publicity, attracting respondents to answer the questions voluntarily; Questionnaire Website (www.wenjuan.com) is a company specializing in online questionnaire surveys. The website has more than 4 million registered users. Researchers send questionnaire links to registered users through the website, and users choose whether to answer the questions or not. In return, the participants will receive points or equivalent currency lotteries, which can be exchanged for small prizes or phone bills.

In order to ensure the quality of the online questionnaire, they have adopted the following measures: First, in order to avoid repeated answers, they make sure each IP address can only participate in the questionnaire once during the online survey. Secondly, in the data collection process, questionnaires with short answering time were eliminated, and some questionnaires that were obviously not answered carefully were eliminated by manual browsing of the questionnaire in the later stage. In addition, in a later investigation, the question items of the authenticity of the internet users’ self-assessment questionnaire were set as references.

Considering the limitations of funding and the convenience of sample collection, the survey focused on Chinese internet users rather than the entire Chinese population. However, convenient methods often come at the expense of sample representativeness. The survey does not follow the principle of probability sampling. Due to the limitation in the sampling method, the survey sample does not represent the whole population. Therefore, researchers need to be cautious when using this survey samples to describe and make inferences about the whole population.

Whether or not internet users' actual attitudes and opinions can be obtained through the methods mentioned above needs further explanation. The creators of the questionnaire believe that the credibility of the sample is acceptable for the following reasons: First, if a respondent spends 10-30 minutes answering the questionnaire without coercion, then he/she should answer the question seriously (some halfhearted respondents can be excluded by the answer time). Registered users of the Questionnaire Website can get points rewards for answering questions, while Sina Weibo participants gain no benefit except for the basic statistical results after answering the questions. In this case, they still answer the question, so they should answer it carefully. Second, because the respondent does not face the interviewee directly and participates in the questionnaire anonymously, the interviewee may not have a kind of guardianship (or social expectation or political correctness) like the interview. It may be easier for respondents to express thoughts candidly.

3.2. Measurement

Dependent variable

Political trust. Following Easton (1965), we can differentiate between trust in the political community, the regime and political authorities. The focus of this study is on the regime level and particularly on trust in political institutions. Although there are several indicators of political trust and similar concepts that have been used in previous research, in this study political trust will be operationalized as trust in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the central government. This variable comes from the question “For the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the central government, please express your trust towards them.” There are four levels of political trust. From 1 to 4, the level of political trust increases. Answers like “don’t want to say” or “don’t know” will be regarded as missing values and excluded from the analysis at first.

Independent variable

The independent variable, *education*, is measured by the highest education the respondents received. From low to high, there are eight levels including “Did not go to school,” “Primary School,” “Junior high school,” “High school,” “Higher vocational and specialized education,” “Bachelor,” “Master” “Doctor.” The eight education levels will be coded as 1 to 8, the higher the value, the higher the education level.

Mediating variable

Type of media use. In line with extant literature, media use is measured by the question “What channels do you mainly use to obtain current affairs and political news” There are nine options (media channels) for respondents to choose from. When they choose the type of media use, they also choose the frequency of use. It allows me to investigate their preferred media channel and their dependence on the selected media channel.

First, the nine media channels will be roughly divided into two categories. After that, factor analysis will be used to check and correct this classification, making sure they are in two dimensions. The first category of *social media* consists of the answers (1) current political news shared by acquaintances and friends in WeChat moments and QQ groups; (2) foreign social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook; (3) current political posts in professional forums; (4) personal Sina Weibo, unofficial and official WeChat account and other new self-media platforms³; (5) political insider and news obtained through gossip or friend chats. The answers that make up the second category of *traditional media* are (1) current political news on commercial portals; (2) current political news programs on central and local TV stations; (3) current political and social issues reported and analyzed by professional magazines; and (4) current political analysis reported by CCTV, Xinhua News Agency and People's Daily.

Control variables

Previous studies have identified a series of individual-level factors besides level of education that predict political trust (Anderson and Singer 2008; Mishler and Rose 2001). These include demographic variables such as age, gender, and income. Therefore, in this study, I also control for individual background characteristics by including *gender*, *age*, and *average household income* into the model. Taking into account party membership of CPC (Communist Party of China) as a sign of social status, the variable of whether they are *party member* is also added. Among these demographic variables, age and average household income are interval variables, and gender and whether they are party members are nominal variables.

³ Self-media refers to the new media in which private, civilian and independent communicators transmit normative and non-normative information and news to the outside world through modern and electronic means.

In the 2018 survey, researchers collected 1,363, 2,291, 1,761 questionnaires from the three channels of WeChat, Weibo, and questionnaire, respectively, for a total of 5,415. Missing data in the data set can reduce the power of a model or can lead to a biased model. First, with regards to the questionnaire design, all the related questions for the variables are mandatory questions, answers are provided correspondingly. Second, when analyzing data, answers such as “don’t know” or “no answer” will be excluded from analysis. Missing value analysis showed that the missing values are missing at random. The total survey sample is 5,415, and the ‘Political Trust’ item contains 172 missing variables, accounting for 3.18% of the total sample size. After deleting the missing values, there is a total of 5,243 respondents left.

The detailed operationalization process and descriptive analysis of variables are in the Appendix A and appendix B.

3.3. Operationalization of media variables

3.3.1 Factor analysis

Before testing the hypotheses, factor analysis will be performed first to see whether two types of media variables can be empirically discerned and constructed. In other words, we should find clearly little or no convergence between the measures for traditional media and the measure for social media. The results of a rotated factor analysis are presented below, which distinctly signifies a two-factor structure in the data.

Table 1 demonstrates the results of two factor analyses. The first factor analysis suggests that the cumulative variance explanation rate after rotation is 55.043%. It means that only 55.043% of the variance is accounted for by the first two components. The acceptable variance explained in factor analysis for a construct to be valid is 60%. Therefore some

variables might be excluded from the analysis based on the following criteria to increase the explained variance.

Table 1. Factor analysis on items measuring media use

Items	Factor loading 1		Communalities 1	Factor loading 2		Communalities 2
	Factor 1	Factor 2		Factor 1	Factor 2	
Traditional media 1	.295	.768	.594	.253	.778	.608
Traditional media 2	.370	.741	.551	.365	.766	.593
Traditional media 3	.699	.551	.556			
Traditional media 4	.344	.768	.589	.286	.782	.612
Social media 1	.433	.499	.302			
Social media 2	.805	.231	.672	.836	.260	.702
Social media 3	.714	.525	.572	.741	.554	.634
Social media 4	.587	.456	.389			
Social media 5	.759	.278	.581	.795	.274	.632
Cumulative %		55.043%			63.031%	
Number of factors extracted		2			2	

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

Factor loading is basically the correlation coefficient for the variable and factor, it shows the variance explained by the variable on that particular factor. Loadings close to $|1|$ indicate strong influences of the factor on the variable. Loadings close to 0 indicate weak influences of the factor on the variable. As a rule of thumb, a rotated factor loading of at least $|0.4|$ onto one of the factors is considered important. In quantitative research, researchers commonly adopt a

much more stringent criteria such as a cut-off of $|0.7|$. The communality is each variable's proportion of variability that is explained by the factors. More specifically, it clarifies what proportion of the variable's variance is a result of either: the principal components or the correlations between each variable and individual factors (Vogt, 1999). It is also a deciding factor to include or exclude a variable in the factor analysis. Values closer to 1 suggest that extracted factors explain more of the variance of an individual item. Usually, a value of above 0.5 is considered to be ideal.

Accordingly, social media 1 item and social media 4 item will be deleted based on low communalities; traditional media 3 item will be deleted based upon low factor loading. The second factor analysis on the remaining 6 items shows that the cumulative variance explanation rate is relatively high (63.031%), indicating that the first two factors can explain 63.031% of the variance. Therefore, the remaining six media items can be properly divided into traditional media and social media.

3.3.2 Validity test and reliability test

The KMO and Bartlett test are used to verify the validity. From the above table, it can be seen that the KMO value is 0.783, which is greater than 0.7. The KMO value is excellent and the validity of the research data is very good.

Reliability tests are performed to see how consistent respondents score on the two factors. For the traditional media items, the reliability coefficient value is 0.780, which is greater than 0.7. It indicates that the reliability of the scale is acceptable; For the social media items, the reliability coefficient value is 0.809, which is greater than 0.8. It indicates that the reliability of the research data is good; For items the two scales there was no increase in the Cronbach's

alpha if a specific items was dropped, which means that we do not need to exclude any item.

In summary, the data reliability is of good quality and can be used for further analysis.

3.3.3 Construction of new variables

Based on the factor analysis and a distinct two-factor structure, I create two new variables for traditional media and social media by averaging the remaining items. Specifically, traditional media 1, traditional media 2, and traditional media 4 will be added up and divided by three to become a new traditional media variable. Social media 2, social media 3, and social media 5 will be added up and divided by three to become the new social media variables.

4. Analysis

In general, the analysis consists of two parts. First, mediation analysis will be performed to see whether my hypotheses are correct or not. Second, indirect effects will be calculated based on regression analysis.

4.1 Regression analysis

The mediation test will be conducted using SPSS software.

4.1.1 Predictions of media

I hypothesize that social media is unavailable and selective to some people in the Chinese context. Therefore, people with more knowledge reserves and longer years of schooling are more likely to use social media frequently. The higher popularity and accessibility of traditional media are more welcomed by less-educated citizens. Hence the lower educated adopt traditional media often. The actual regression results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Regression results (N=5339)

Dependent variable: media				
OLS model with standard errors robust to heteroskedasticity				
	Model 1		Model 2	
	Traditional media		Social media	
Education	0.040*** (0.009)	.058*** (.009)	.033*** (.009)	.065*** (.010)
Gender		.004 (.020)		.070*** (.021)
Age		.030*** (.005)		.0780*** (.006)
Party member		.060*** (.011)		.101*** (.012)
Income		-.001 (.000)		-.001** (.000)
Constant	3.078*** (0.051)	2.726*** (.076)	3.623*** (.055)	2.814*** (.080)
Confidence level		95%		95%
R-square	.004	.015	.002	.049

Note: All models are estimated using enter (regression) in which all variables in a block are entered in a single step. The first model is the regression analysis of education on traditional media. The second model is the regression analysis of education on social media.

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

Model 1 demonstrates that education has an unexpectedly positive and statistically significant impact on traditional media use. The regression coefficient of traditional media to education level is 0.058. For every unit increase in the education scale, traditional media use is 0.058 higher on a dependent scale with a range of 1-5. The higher the level of education, the greater the likelihood of using traditional media. This effect is even more substantial after controlling gender, age, party member, and household income. Although this effect is significant, the effect size is only 0.015, indicating a very small effect.

Models 2 shows that, as expected, education has a positive and statistically significant impact on social media use. The regression coefficient of traditional media is 0.065. The higher the level of education, the greater the tendency to use social media. This effect is even

stronger after controlling for gender, age, party membership, and household income. Through calculation, the effect size of 0.051 indicates that this is still a small effect.

The evidence concerning hypothesis 1A and hypothesis 1B is clear. The increase in the level of education will simultaneously increase the use of traditional media and social media. The effect on using social media is slightly larger than that of traditional media. To conclude, compared with lower educated counterparts, higher educated individuals are more likely to consume more traditional media and social media news. Therefore, hypothesis 1A is confirmed, hypothesis 1B is rejected.

4.1.2 Prediction of political trust

Models 3 and 4 include the effects of the two mediating variables for explaining differences in political trust. We expect that different types of media use will have varying degrees and different directions on the respondents' trust in the central government. Social media factors and traditional media factors should have opposite effects on the trust of residents in the central government. That is, the use of social media can weaken the trust of residents in the central government, while the use of traditional media promotes the trust of residents in the central government. But the actual results are different from my assumptions.

Table 3. Regression results (N=5339)

Dependent variable: political trust						
OLS model with standard errors robust to heteroskedasticity						
	Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Education	-.044***	-.044***	-.025*	-.016*	-.043***	-.042***
	(0.12)	(.013)	(.012)	(.012)	(.012)	(.013)
Traditional media			-.475***	-.486***		
			(.019)	(.019)		
Social media					-.034	-.041*
					(.018)	(.019)

Gender	.048		.050		.051	
	(.028)		(.027)		(.028)	
Age	-.013		.001		-.010	
	(.008)		(.007)		(.008)	
Party member	.012		.041**		.016	
	(.016)		(.015)		(.016)	
Income	.000		.000		.000	
	(.001)		(.000)		(.001)	
Constant	4.435***	4.397***	5.896***	5.722***	4.558***	4.513***
	(.074)	(.110)	(.090)	(.115)	(.099)	(.122)
Confidence level		95%		95%		95%
R-square	.002	.004	.110	.117	.003	.005

Note: All models are estimated using enter (regression) in which all variables in a block are entered in a single step. The first model is the indirect effect of education and traditional media on political trust, the second model is the indirect effect of education and social media on political trust, and the third model is the direct effect of education on political trust.

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

Model 3 shows that education has a significant direct and negative effect on citizens' political trust. There is a significant negative correlation between education level and residents' trust in the central government, which shows that people with higher education levels are less likely to trust the government than people with lower education levels. Although considering the effect size of 0.004, this is a small effect. Generally, this finding is consistent with previous studies, which shows that individuals acquire more independent thinking ability with the increase in academic qualifications. Hence, hypothesis 3 is confirmed, that the higher educated express less political trust than their lower educated counterparts.

Model 4 shows that both education and traditional media significantly decrease political trust. The effect size of 0.133 indicates a medium effect. The negative effect of traditional media on political trust is inconsistent with our expectations. Therefore hypothesis 2A was rejected. At first sight, this negative relationship seems to be at odds with our hypotheses, which suggests that traditional media did not promote but reduced political trust. This is

inconsistent with most existing research results. This may be related to either the current transformation of traditional media or the excessive publicity of traditional media that ultimately leads to public distrust. These possibilities will be discussed in depth in later chapters.

Model 5 demonstrates that, as predicted, increasing use of social media will result in a decrease in political trust, given that the other variables in the model are held constant. This model also shows a small effect size of only 0.005. In other words, social media and education together have imposed a significantly negative but weak impact on political trust. In general, the negative effect of social media on political trust is consistent with our expectations. Therefore hypothesis 2B was affirmed.

It should be noted that the R-square of these five models is low. After controlling for some variables, although R-square has increased, it is still low overall. It means that our independent variable, even though significant, is not accounting for much of the variation in the dependent variable.

4.2 Calculating indirect effects

Table 4. Indirect effects of media on political trust

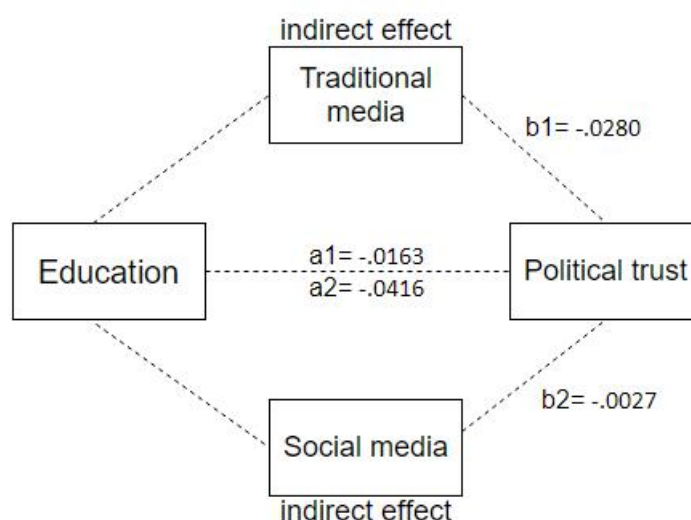
	Traditional media	Social media
Total effect of education on political trust	-.0443 (100%)	-.0443 (100%)
Direct effect of education on political trust	-.0163 (36.8%)	-.0416 (93.91%)
Indirect effect of education on political trust	-.0280 (63.2%)	-.0027 (6.09%)

According to the regression results, the effect size is calculated by dividing the indirect effect regression coefficient by the total regression coefficient. The indirect effect between education and political trust via traditional media is statistically significant. However, it is

inconsistent with our expected direction. The higher educated people will also increase traditional media use, thereby reducing political trust. The results does not support our general hypothesis 4.

Taken together, the indirect effect between education and political trust via social media is statistically significant and in line with our hypothesis, so our general hypothesis 5 is accepted. Higher education leads to more social media use, thereby reducing political trust.

Figure 2. The path model of the media's indirect effect on political trust



Regarding traditional media, the total effect of education on political trust is -0.0443 , the indirect effect is -0.028 , so the indirect effect accounts for 63.2% of the total effect that education has on political trust. Therefore, 36.8% of the relationship operates directly, while 63.2% is managed through the use of traditional media. For instance, if the interviewee's education level increases by one unit, the political trust will be reduced under the dual effects of education and traditional media. 36.8% of this decrease is directly caused by education, and 63.2% is indirectly caused by traditional media.; Concerning social media, the total effect of

education on political trust is -0.0443, the indirect effect is -0.0027, so the indirect effect accounts for 6.09% of the total effect that education has on political trust. Therefore, 93.91% of the relationship operates directly, while 6.09% is managed through the use of social media. In this case, the indirect effect of social media is very insignificant.

5. Discussion

In this article, I have examined two types of media and their mediating role in the relationship between education and political trust in the Chinese context. I use a secondary database named “Internet Users’ Social Awareness Survey”, with education level as the independent variable, political trust as the dependent variable, and media use as the mediating variable. Regression analyses were conducted to explore these relationships.

The results show that the overall negative relationship between education and political trust has been confirmed. The hypothesis that education promotes the consumption of social media information has been confirmed by the analysis results; but education also increases people’s tendency to use traditional media, which does not support our hypothesis. Traditional media unexpectedly reduced the political trust of higher educated groups. While social media, as expected, reduced the political trust of higher educated citizens, although this effect is weak.

In general, the mediating role of social media has been confirmed. Although the mediation effect is significant but small, this will be discussed later. Traditional media also has a significant mediating effect on this relationship, but not in the direction we expect.

The media is an indispensable part of contemporary political life. First, media is an

effective tool for political communication because it has advantages over direct face-to-face communication. The media disseminates information to the entire society and helps citizens obtain information about current political events. Citizens become well-informed about political issues based on the information; Second, except being the expression channel of public opinion, media also draw the public's attention to a specific event through extensive and in-depth reports, and mobilizes people to express their opinions on current topics; Last, in particular, social media becomes a platform for people to obtain information, as well as a platform to express their political views. Therefore, education is the prerequisite for obtaining information, and political trust results from obtaining information. They are both closely linked by this mediating variable.

The findings of this research mainly include the following three aspects. Firstly, in accordance with our expectation, education slightly reduces people's trust in the central government. As stated before, with the intensification of social transformation and the advent of modern society, brand-new systems, rules, and concepts are impacting all traditional ideas. People continue to acquire democratic values and become more critical and questioning of political institutions. They decide to grant or withdraw trust in the government based on stricter standards. In the Chinese context, this standard is highly correlated with the degree of bureaucratic integrity. Uslaner (2004) pointed out that trust is affected by social conditions, and countries in transition are facing more corruption and instability. In recent years, under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, China has launched a large-scale anti-corruption operation and has also made some progress. However, due to the severe corruption in the past, it was difficult to eradicate corruption in a short period. Corruption still exists, and the

higher-educated are still highly skeptical and critical of existing corruption. The more rampant corruption in a country, the less people trust the government, especially for highly educated groups. Consequently, higher education level hinders the improvement of residents' trust level to a certain extent and even played a negative role. As the central government continues to combat corruption and build a clean government, the relationship between education and political trust may slightly change or even reverse in the future.

Secondly, unexpectedly, education has increased the use of traditional media. One reason may be that driven by the rapid evolution of internet technology, revolutionary changes have taken place in audience demand and market demand, which directly led to the dilemma of traditional media worldwide: American newspaper advertising has entered a cliff-like decline since the beginning of 2009, Chinese newspaper advertising revenue has also witnessed a sharp decline since 2012. Therefore, as a response, major traditional media in China have adopted new transformation strategies to survive. They set up official accounts on major social platforms and take advantage of social platforms' fast and convenient features to make a voice and expand the customer base. In this case, although traditional media is presented in the form of "social media", the nature of the information disseminated remains unchanged. Social media is now used by traditional media to attract traffic to their website, which means traditional media can still reach out to vast audiences online and offline. People may consume new versions of "traditional media news" on social media unintentionally. Another reason may be related to the preference for multiple forms of media of higher educated people. Apart from the single information that may bring prejudice, they are more inclined to obtain information from multiple channels and platforms, and do not rely solely on a particular

media platform. Only in this way, they can be better informed and have a broader view of things.

Thirdly, the influence of social media on political trust is relatively weak. There is a possibility that social media's influence is significant, but the interaction of other factors between social media may offset this effect. Although Chinese social media is less regulated by the government than traditional media, it still needs to comply with some unwritten regulations. Chinese government pursues "carrot and stick policies" in the management of private media enterprises. Invisible reward and punishment mechanism always influences and restricts the strategies of these companies. For enterprises that firmly implement government policies, they are often rewarded with preferential policies; For enterprises with "mistakes in policy and decision-making", the government tends to restrict them with policy barriers; The influence of traditional media on political trust is significant. Obviously, traditional media such as TV and newspapers no longer positively affect citizens' political trust. Other things remain unchanged, the increase in traditional media use will reduce political trust by nearly half. This again reflects the dilemma of traditional media⁴.

It must be pointed out that this study has the following two limitations. First, the sample population is mainly composed of Chinese internet users. Although China's internet penetration rate reached 64.5% in 2020, this does not mean that the general public's political attitudes and media preferences are well represented in this research. Descriptive analysis shows that respondents aged 18-34 years old account for about 70% of the total sample population. Therefore older generations who did not have access to this online survey are less

⁴ The Internet adopts a "free + charge" business model. That is to use free news to attract a large number of users, and then build a large platform for resource collaboration and sharing. And on this basis, to carry out charging business to realize commercial value. This is an advantage that traditional media does not have.

represented than young generations. Under such conditions, it is difficult to reflect the status quo of all Chinese internet users' political trust and media use. It might further affect the analysis of the relationship between media use and political trust. Those who were not included in the survey were mainly people who grew up before China's reform and opening up. They are accustomed to authoritarianism and traditional media's absolute right to speak in the field of news. At the same time, there are group, individual and regional differences in the use of social media by the elderly. A study by Zhang and Chen (2013) showed that in Chaoyang District, Beijing, the elderly who use new media most actively are generally younger, better-educated, and economically better-off. Therefore, we can speculate that if older generations are included, then from the overall sample, the probability of using traditional media will be greater and political trust will be higher.

Second, the measurement of some concepts requires further improvement. The measurement of political trust in this study refers to people's trust in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the central government, and did not consider more levels of trust objects such as trust in officials, judicial and law enforcement agencies and civil servants. In addition, due to the usage of secondary survey data, the variable of "media use" is only measured by the frequency of using various media, which may neglect other dimensions in "media use", such as the degree of attention to media, the content of media use.

From the results, it can be seen that in explaining the political trust of the Chinese people, traditional media exhibits a complex and diverse effect mechanism. Therefore, we should not be confined to the discussion of "media malaise theory" or "virtuous circle theory". The former emphasizes the obstructive effect of traditional media on political trust, while the latter

states that traditional media promotes institutional trust. Regarding the results, the role of traditional media is more supportive of the “media malaise theory”. More importantly, further studies may corroborate or refute our findings by using data sets that are more representative of the general public. Research should be carried out in specific contexts, combining the individual characteristics of the audience and the social structure characteristics in a detailed analysis to examine the influence of mass media on political trust. This is also one possible direction for future research.

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Appendix A: Operationalization of all variables

Variable	Question number	Question	value
Political trust	44-3	Please indicate your trust in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the central government.	1= “don’t know (or don’t want to say)” 2= completely distrusting 3= not very trusting 4= relatively trusting 5= very trusting
Education	45	What is your education level?	1= Did not go to school 2= Primary School 3= Junior high school 4= High school 5= Higher vocational and specialized education 6= Bachelor 7= Master 8= Doctor
Media use	11	What channels do you mainly use to obtain current affairs news and comments?	1= Business portals 2= WeChat Moments and QQ groups 3= Twitter, facebook, BBC and other foreign media 4= Local TV stations 5= Professional magazines 6= CCTV, Xinhua News Agency, People’s Daily 7= Professional forums or websites 8= Personal Sina Weibo, unofficial WeChat public account 9= Political insider information
Gender	1	What is your gender?	1= Male 2= Female
Age	2	What is your actual age?	1= below 18 years old 2= 8-24 years old 3= 25-29 years old 4= 30-34 years old 5= 35-39 years old 6= 40-44 years old 7= 45-49 years old 8= 50-54 years old 9= 55-59 years old 10= Over 60 years old
Party member of CPC	5	What is your political affiliation? ⁵	1= Party member of CPC 2= Member of democratic parties 3= General public
Average household income	6	How much is the average annual income of your family?	

⁵ This is a word with Chinese characteristics, and there is no accurate corresponding vocabulary in English. It shows a political affiliation, which is the most direct reflection of a person’s political identity, and refers to the political parties and political groups that a person participates in; It indirectly shows people’s ideological tendencies, political positions and political views. In China, this is mainly used to fill in personal personnel files, household registration and other items.

Appendix B: Descriptives for all variables

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
political trust	5415	1.00	5.00	4.1753	.01391	1.02343
education level	5415	1	8	5.90	.015	1.130
traditional media 1	5415	2.00	5.00	3.2240	.01199	.88259
traditional media 2	5415	2.00	5.00	3.4098	.01288	.94762
traditional media 3	5415	2.00	5.00	3.6916	.01281	.94266
traditional media 4	5415	2.00	5.00	3.3104	.01221	.89834
social media 1	5415	2.00	5.00	3.0471	.01168	.85923
social media 2	5415	2.00	5.00	3.9620	.01339	.98513
social media 3	5415	2.00	5.00	3.8301	.01310	.96385
social media 4	5415	2.00	5.00	3.3394	.01267	.93254
social media 5	5415	2.00	5.00	3.6576	.01230	.90490
traditional media	5415	2.00	5.00	3.3147	.00965	.71038
social media	5415	2.00	5.00	3.8166	.01029	.75702
gender	5415	1	2	1.45	.007	.497
age	5415	2	10	3.92	.025	1.807
party member	5415	1	3	2.27	.012	.911
average household income	5339	0	1000	15.35	.346	25.283

Appendix C



CHECKLIST ETHICAL AND PRIVACY ASPECTS OF RESEARCH

INSTRUCTION

This checklist should be completed for every research study that is conducted at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS). This checklist should be completed *before* commencing with data collection or approaching participants. Students can complete this checklist with help of their supervisor.

This checklist is a mandatory part of the empirical master's thesis and has to be uploaded along with the research proposal.

The guideline for ethical aspects of research of the Dutch Sociological Association (NSV) can be found on their website (http://www.nsv-sociologie.nl/?page_id=17). If you have doubts about ethical or privacy aspects of your research study, discuss and resolve the matter with your EUR supervisor. If needed and if advised to do so by your supervisor, you can also consult Dr. Jennifer A. Holland, coordinator of the Sociology Master's Thesis program.

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Project title: Master Thesis: "The role of media: improve or impede? The mediating effect of media use on the relationship between education and political trust."

Name, email of student: Mengdi Yu, 558517my@student.eur.nl

Name, email of supervisor: Gijs Custers, custers@essb.eur.nl

Start date and duration: March 22nd, 2021 – July 1st, 2021

Is the research study conducted within DPAS YES

If 'NO': at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted?

(e.g. internship organization)

PART II: HUMAN SUBJECTS

1. Does your research involve human participants. NO

If 'NO': skip to part V.

- If 'YES': does the study involve medical or physical research? NO

Research that falls under the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act ([WMO](#)) must first be submitted to [an accredited medical research ethics committee](#) or the Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects ([CCMO](#)).

2. Does your research involve field observations without manipulations that will not involve identification of participants. NO

If 'YES': skip to part IV.

3. Research involving completely anonymous data files (secondary data that has been anonymized by someone else). YES

If 'YES': skip to part IV.

PART III: PARTICIPANTS

1. Will information about the nature of the study and about what participants can expect during the study be withheld from them? YES - NO
2. Will any of the participants not be asked for verbal or written 'informed consent,' whereby they agree to participate in the study? YES - NO
3. Will information about the possibility to discontinue the participation at any time be withheld from participants? YES - NO
4. Will the study involve actively deceiving the participants? YES - NO
Note: almost all research studies involve some kind of deception of participants. Try to think about what types of deception are ethical or non-ethical (e.g. purpose of the study is not told, coercion is exerted on participants, giving participants the feeling that they harm other people by making certain decisions, etc.).
5. Does the study involve the risk of causing psychological stress or negative emotions beyond those normally encountered by participants? YES - NO
6. Will information be collected about special categories of data, as defined by the GDPR (e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a person, data concerning mental or physical health, data concerning a person's sex life or sexual orientation)? YES - NO
7. Will the study involve the participation of minors (<18 years old) or other groups that cannot give consent? YES - NO
8. Is the health and/or safety of participants at risk during the study? YES - NO

9. Can participants be identified by the study results or can the confidentiality of the participants' identity not be ensured? YES - NO
10. Are there any other possible ethical issues with regard to this study? YES - NO

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the previous questions, please indicate below why this issue is unavoidable in this study.

What safeguards are taken to relieve possible adverse consequences of these issues (e.g., informing participants about the study afterwards, extra safety regulations, etc.).

Are there any unintended circumstances in the study that can cause harm or have negative (emotional) consequences to the participants? Indicate what possible circumstances this could be.

Please attach your informed consent form in Appendix I, if applicable.

Continue to part IV.

PART IV: SAMPLE

Where will you collect or obtain your data?

An existing, open, and anonymous data set that has been used by many Chinese scholars. The Chinese name of this database is “网民社会意识调查” [Internet Users’ Social Awareness Survey], and there is no official English name yet. To understand the general public’s views on social and political events in China, Professor Deyong Ma at the Renmin University of China has conducted an online survey of Chinese internet users by publishing online questionnaires on the internet since 2012. The data set mainly includes five aspects: basic personal information, media use, psychological characteristics, social attitudes, and political attitudes.

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the (anticipated) size of your sample?

The size should be between 4000 and 5000 respondents after after excluding invalid answers.

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the size of the population from which you will sample?

1,400,050,000 as of 2019, according to the Chinese National Bureau of Statistics.

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

Continue to part V.

Part V: Data storage and backup

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

Offline, on an external hard drive with a backup on a different external hard drive.

Note: indicate for separate data sources, for instance for paper-and pencil test data, and for digital data files.

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?

I, Mengdi Yu, am responsible for the day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data.

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

Daily for as long as there are changes to the data set. After the last changes are made to the data set, one final back-up will be made which will be stored on a separate hard drive.

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?

I will use an open data set which is used by many Chinese scholars. And the database was anonymized when collecting data for the first time.

Note: It is advisable to keep directly identifying personal details separated from the rest of the data. Personal details are then replaced by a key/ code. Only the code is part of the database with data and the list of respondents/research subjects is kept separate.

PART VI: SIGNATURE

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: Mengdi Yu

Name (EUR) supervisor: Gijs Custers

Date: 21-03-2021

Date: 21-03-2021

余梦笛



APPENDIX I: Informed Consent Form (if applicable)