The Mediation Role of Social Trust in the Relationship Between Online Media Use and Social Participation: An Analysis Based on the WVS2018 Data

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Abstract. The increasing use of online media is transforming the world, and social participation is no exception. Therefore, it is essential to explore how online media affect social participation through which paths. This study uses the structural equation modeling method to investigate the mediation role of social trust in the relationship between online media use and social participation. The study found that general trust plays a mediation role, while specific trust does not. General trust mediates the relationship between online media use and social participation to a certain extent.

Keywords: online media · social participation · social trust

1 Introduction

With the development of mobile network technology and the widespread use of smartphones, online media has become an indispensable part of modern society. Compared with traditional media, the use of online media has deeply changed the way social interaction and information transmission occur. Online media provides people with a new way to participate, making it easier for them to express their opinions and ideas. Studying the use of online media and social participation can help us better understand people's participation methods, participation levels, and participation effects, thus providing a better way to encourage and promote people's social participation. Social trust plays an important mediation role in the relationship between online media use and social participation. Specifically, social trust affects people's sense of security and trust in the online media usage process, thus affecting their use of online media and social participation. For example, when people trust a certain internet service provider or platform, they may be more likely to choose to use that provider or platform, and more likely to participate in activities and public affairs related to it. Similarly, when people trust an organization or institution, they may be more likely to participate in activities and public affairs associated with that organization or institution, and more likely to recommend it to others. Therefore, social trust plays a mediation role in the relationship between internet use and social participation, helping us better understand the relationship between internet use and social participation and providing new ideas and methods for promoting people's social participation.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Online Media Use and Social Participation

For a long time, the academic community has been interested in the relationship between information exposure and social participation. The mainstream perspective holds that exposure to public information, such as news, promotes social participation. This is because exposure to such information can help increase people's political knowledge, enhance their understanding of the purposes and opportunities of public participation, and promote their political interest and political identity, thus laying the foundation for public discussion and participation. This perspective has been confirmed by numerous empirical studies, showing a positive correlation between exposure to public information and individual social participation. [1].

2.2 Online Media Use and Social Trust

The academic community has adequately focused on the impact of online media use on social trust. However, research conclusions regarding the impact of online media use on social trust have not yet been agreed upon. Some scholars believe that online media use can improve residents' social trust levels. For example,Fisman notes that public facilities such as telephones promote information exchange among people, promoting collective identity, and thereby increasing residents' trust levels. [2] Additionally, Ellison argues that social media use in online media can form and maintain people's social capital, improve the happiness of low-self-esteem and low-satisfaction groups, and maintain social relationships. [3] Furthermore, other scholars believe that online media use facilitates the integration of interpersonal trust relationship networks, creating a sense of identity and trust in social groups.[4].

2.3 Social Trust and Social Participation

With the development of the internet, social participation that was previously excluded from risk management should become a significant factor that affects public social trust and risk perception [5]. Social trust is the foundation of social participation because only when people have a high level of trust in it will they participate actively in social affairs. Furthermore, this process of participation will further enhance people's social trust levels.

3 Methodology

This article analyzes the mediation role of social trust in the relationship between online media use and social participation using the 2018 World Values Survey data from China, with 2884 valid samples. In terms of research methods, the results of the structural equation modeling method are used to analyze the mediation effect of social trust between online media use and social participation. In terms of social trust segmentation, this study divides it into two parts: Special Trust and Universal Trust, and examines their mediation

effects separately. In terms of independent variables selection, Special Trust selects the level of trust in three groups: Your neighborhood, People you know personally, and People you meet for the first time. Universal Trust selects the level of trust in four groups: Labor unions, The police, The courts, and The civil service. Social Participate selects the level of participation in three organizations: Environmental organization, Consumer organization, and Self-help group, mutual aid group. As for the dependent variable selection, Media selects the frequency of using four media: Email, Internet, Social media, and Talk with friends or colleagues online.

4   Empirical Analysis and Research Results

The data was analyzed using SPSS27.0 software for statistical analysis, and a structural equation modeling (SEM) was constructed using Amos28.0 software to examine the relationship between online media use, social trust, and social participation among the surveyed population.

Before conducting the structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis, it is necessary to conduct an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on the variables. The specific analysis results are as follows. In the EFA, Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the reliability of each potential variable. The values of the four variables are 0.799, 0.621, 0.788, and 0.557, all of which are greater than the minimum requirement of 0.5, indicating that they can pass the validity test. In the CFA, we need to measure the loading of each variable. In the social science field, a loading value greater than 0.5 is required. In this study, most variables can meet this requirement, and a few are also greater than 0.4, meeting the needs for structural equation modeling.

After conducting the exploratory factor analysis and the confirmatory factor analysis, it is possible to construct the model. Before evaluating the fit of the model, it is necessary to examine the absolute and relative fit indices. The results of the analysis are as follows: CMIN/DF value of 16.108, RMSEA value of 0.073, GFI value of 0.943, AGFI value of 0.917, SMRM value of 0.064, NFI value of 0.889, IFI value of 0.895, TLI value of 0.867 and CFI value of 0.895. The CMIN/DF value is large, mainly due to the large sample size of the data, which leads to an increase in the chi-square value. However, the other results can meet the requirements. Therefore, it can be judged that the model fit meets the requirements.

After the model fit meets the requirements, the structural equation model is established, and the specific results are shown in Fig. 1. We can see that there is a negative correlation between Media and Special Trust, with a standardized path coefficient of -0.1. That is, the higher the frequency of Media use, the lower the level of Special Trust. Media has a negative impact on Special Trust, and using Media will reduce people's level of Special Trust. There is a negative correlation between Media and Universal Trust, with a standardized path coefficient of -0.06. That is, the higher the frequency of Media use, the lower the level of Universal Trust. Media has a negative impact on Universal Trust, and using Media will reduce people's level of Universal Trust. There is a negative correlation between Media and Social Participate, with a standardized path coefficient of -0.18. However, Social Participate is a negative score, so the higher the frequency of Media use, the higher the level of Social Participate. Media has a positive
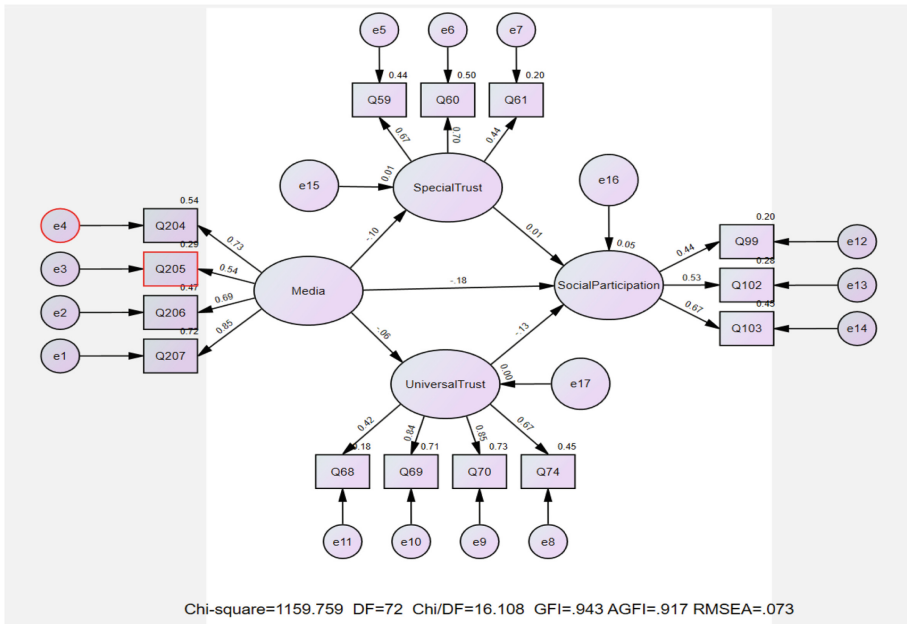
Chi-square=1159.759 DF=72 Chi/DF=16.108 GFI=.943 AGFI=.917 RMSEA=.073

Fig. 1. Structural Equation Model

impact on Social Participate, and using Media will improve people's level of Social Participate.

The relationship between social trust and Social Participate is particularly unique. There is no correlation between Special Trust and Social Participate, indicating that Special Trust does not have an impact on Social Participate, which is inconsistent with previous experiences. A possible explanation is the existence of separation between personal trust and organizational trust. Additionally, there is a negative correlation between Universal Trust and Social Participate, with a standardized path coefficient of -0.13. However, Social Participate is a negative score, so the higher the level of Universal Trust, the higher the level of Social Participate. Universal Trust has a positive impact on Social Participate.

5   Conclusions

As the frequency of Online Media use increases, people's social participation frequency also increases. However, the relationship between social trust and social participation still remains controversial. Based on the results of this study, the following conclusions can be drawn.

Firstly, Online Media can have a negative impact on social participation. Therefore, governments and social platforms need to strengthen their control over Online Media to promote its positive role in leading social engagement。

Secondly, Universal Trust is the bridge between Online Media use and social participation. The results show that Universal Trust plays a partial mediation role

between Online Media use and social participation. Therefore, we should strengthen the development of Universal Trust and encourage people to actively participate in social activities.

Finally, Special Trust does not have an effect on social participation, which requires further in-depth analysis in future studies. Possible reasons for this include the fact that Special Trust does not require Online Media to function.

Overall, social trust plays a mediation role between Online Media use and social participation. Universal Trust plays a mediation role in this process, which may be due to people's greater trust in Online Media information and opinions as they become more widely trusted. This mediation role may also be due to people's greater trust in Online Media, leading them to be more likely to participate in social activities.

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