

# WeChat News Contact among Chinese Youth and Impact on Political Participation: the Role of Social Capital, Political Trust, and Media Literacy

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## Abstract

Several recent studies have found that social media positively influences the online political participation behavior of youth. However, only a few studies have explored the political participation behavior of Chinese youth on specific social media, such as WeChat, the most widely used mobile social media in China. To bridge this gap, this study examines Chinese youths' contact with WeChat and its subsequent impact on political participation. The study uses a questionnaire to collect data and uses the SPSS 25.0 version to analyse data. The findings show that: (1) Chinese youths' WeChat news contact positively affects their WeChat political participation; (2) Chinese youths' social capital positively affects their political trust; (3) social capital and political trust play a partially mediating role between youths' WeChat news contact and youths' WeChat political participation; (4) media literacy plays a moderating role between youth WeChat news contact and youth WeChat political participation. Implications and limitations of the findings are discussed.

**Keywords:** WeChat news contact, political participation, social capital, political trust, media literacy

## 1. Introduction

Recently, there has been a growing trend among young people to participate in political activities through the use of social media and mobile devices (Yamamoto, Kushin, & Dalisay, 2015). In China, young people are increasingly utilizing social media platforms to obtain political information, generate their own political material, and articulate their political perspectives (Lu, 2018). WeChat, a relatively recent social media platform, has emerged as a significant avenue for political discourse among Chinese university students, according to Pang (2018).

This study aims to investigate the political participation of young people on social media in China. WeChat is chosen as the research platform, with a focus on the political participation of Chinese youth on this platform. This study is selected for multiple rationales: firstly, the youth demographic represents a distinct age group with significantly divergent political engagement compared to middle-aged and elderly individuals (Weiss, 2020). Consequently, it is imperative to investigate this particular age cohort. Secondly, social media platforms, particularly WeChat, are widely acknowledged as influential factors in shaping the political participation of Chinese youth. According to a survey conducted by the Institute of Journalism and Communication at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, with a sample size of 30,000, over 70% of individuals obtain their news from WeChat, as reported by the Chinese Academy of Cyberspace Studies in 2021. WeChat's substantial popularity, with 693 million active users, positions it as the foremost online news source and private communication medium for Chinese individuals (Chen, 2017). WeChat, being a nascent social media platform, has garnered significant attention from the younger demographic, comprising over 50% of Chinese Internet users aged fifteen to forty-four (China Internet Network Information Center, 2022). Moreover, WeChat is progressively establishing itself as the primary platform for online political discourse among Chinese citizens, particularly the youth (Cheng, Liang, & Leung, 2015). Nevertheless, there is a scarcity of research on the political engagement of Chinese young people on social media, particularly in comparison to Europe and the United States. Additionally, only a limited number of quantitative studies have thoroughly examined the influence of WeChat contact on the political behavior and attitudes of Chinese individuals (Wallis, 2011; Chen, 2014; Chan et al., 2012; Wei, Huang, & Zheng, 2018).

Prior studies on youth political engagement on social media have indicated that political participation is associated with factors such as education, religious beliefs, political knowledge, and political beliefs (Campbell, 2013). Additionally, research has examined the variations in political participation based on gender and ethnicity (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010; Cole & Stewart, 1996). Some studies have also investigated the factors that can predict political participation on WeChat (Gil, Garcia-Perdomo, & McGregor, 2015; Chen, 2017), such as the use of political messages on WeChat and political efficacy (Aimei, Yang, & Rita, 2020; Pang, 2018).

Based on the interests and established research results, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ1: Does Chinese youth's WeChat news contact affect their WeChat political participation?

RQ2: What are the predictive factors in the process of Chinese youth's WeChat news contact and WeChat political participation?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 WeChat News Contact and Political Participation

Politics can be described as a process that is influenced and shaped by the media, as stated by Delli and Williams (2001). Since its inception, the media has actively participated in political actions and processes. The media serves as a vehicle for spreading political information, a method of political communication, and a platform for political engagement. The "media stimulation theory" posits that social media, in contrast to traditional media, has the ability to enhance political interest, lower the expenses associated with political participation (Brundidge, 2010), streamline the process of political engagement (Willnat et al., 2013), amplify public involvement in political activities, and foster greater public participation in political affairs (Barry, 2001; Papp, 2003). Therefore, a correlation exists between the utilization of social media and engagement in political activities (Bode, 2012). Critics of media claim that engaging in recreational media activities diminishes the social capital of the general population, thereby diminishing their inclination to engage in political activities (Zhang, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2013). Regardless, the majority of experts concur that there exists a correlation, be it favorable or negative, between social media and political engagement.

Research has demonstrated that the use of WeChat, the predominant social media platform in China, is associated with increased political engagement through the platform. Specifically, reading and engaging with news and information related to specific political problems on WeChat has been found to have a positive correlation with political participation (Chen, 2017; Gan & Wang). WeChat is progressively emerging as the prevailing venue for online political discourse among Chinese individuals, particularly the younger demographic (Cheng, Liang, & Leung, 2015). Furthermore, scholarly interest has been drawn to the study of news consumption and its impact on political engagement. An analysis of American voters revealed that the political bias of the news they choose to consume has an impact on the timing of their decision-making and their level of engagement over a period of time (Dilliplane, 2011). Similarly, a separate investigation conducted in Turkey confirmed that citizens' exposure to political news via social media has a notable effect on their level of political involvement (Karakaya & Glazier, 2019). Thus, we put out a hypothesis in the following manner:

H1: Youth WeChat news contact positively and significantly affects youth WeChat political participation.

Social capital refers to the resources that are present within an individual's social network and can be utilized or activated through the interactions within that network (Lin, 2008). Following the publication of Putnam's influential study on the decrease in social capital and its effects on political engagement and democracy in the United States, there has been a significant increase in research exploring the connection between social capital and political participation (Putnam, 2000; Putnam, 2015). As an illustration, in a qualitative inquiry, scholars examined the characteristics of politically engaged migrants in Europe and shown that specific forms of social capital, such as religiosity, play a crucial role in motivating political activists (Kosic, 2007).

Studies have indicated that individuals who have low trust in the government tend to be less proactive in evaluating their relationship with the government and are less engaged in political activities. This suggests a correlation between political trust and political participation (Norris, 1999). Political trust is commonly regarded as a favorable aspect of political psychology that stems from people's interactions with the political system, resulting in positive behaviors and relationships (Easton, 1977).

Since the 1970s, the idea of social capital has been crucial in assessing the level of political trust among citizens (Levi & Stoker, 2000). Schyns and Koop (2010) categorized social capital into four dimensions: network (belonging to an organization), interpersonal or social trust, social norms (citizenship norms), and linked social capital (political engagement). The findings indicate that individuals with greater social capital tend to have higher levels of political trust. Meulemann (2008) asserts that social capital serves as a determining factor in political trust. Thus, we put forward the subsequent hypothesis:

H2: Youth social capital positively and significantly affects youth political trust

Coleman asserts that social capital fosters individuals' inclination towards undertaking affirmative endeavors (Coleman, 1988). To be more precise, it enhances the probability of individuals engaging in political activities by augmenting their capacity to take political action (La & Huckfeldt, 1998; Paxton, 1999). A study conducted on college students during the U.S. election examined the relationship between social media use, specifically WeChat, and political participation. The findings indicated that online social capital had a positive impact on WeChat political participation (Yang & Dehart, 2016). Similarly, another study focused on political discussions among Chinese college students found that WeChat usage was linked to social capital and political participation (Pang, 2023). Furthermore, researchers have contended that utilizing media as a means of accessing information is linked to an individual's capacity to generate social capital and engage in public matters (Gil, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012). Thus, we put forth the subsequent hypothesis.

H3: Social capital mediates between youth WeChat news contact and youth WeChat political participation

Findings from a poll conducted across 27 European Union nations indicate a strong positive relationship between individuals' engagement with social media for news consumption and their level of trust in political institutions (Andrea, 2015). Furthermore, research has demonstrated that individuals who have a low level of trust in the government tend to be less proactive in evaluating their connection with the government and engage in less political participation activities (Norris, 1999). This indicates that there is a correlation between political trust and political involvement. Engaging in WeChat usage and accessing news and information pertaining to specific political matters on WeChat are directly linked to increased political activity via WeChat (Chen, 2017). Thus, we put forth the subsequent hypothesis.

H4: Political trust mediates between youth WeChat news contact and youth WeChat political participation.

### *2.3 Media literacy, WeChat News Contact and Political Participation*

Media literacy refers to the capacity to effectively obtain, scrutinize, assess, and generate information across different situations and settings (Livingstone, 2003). The advancement of digital technology and social media has caused a shift in the academic emphasis on media literacy. Initially, the focus was on technical skills, but now there is a greater emphasis on cognitive skills. Media literacy researchers are now placing more importance on "knowledge," "information," "analysis," and "analytical skills." The concept of media literacy was officially proposed in the 1940s, however, it has only gained significant attention in recent times. In the past ten years, communication academics have started to conduct more in-depth research, both in theory and via practical studies, on the concept of media literacy. However, there has been limited study on the correlation between media literacy and political engagement, perhaps due to media literacy's emphasis on the public's cognitive capacity to access, evaluate, and contemplate media information, which falls within the realm of communication science. Media literacy appears to have a less direct correlation with politics when compared to political science categories like political knowledge and political efficacy (Demir, et al., 2011).

Paul emphasized that teaching media literacy promotes political engagement and raises awareness among the populace (Mihailidis, 2013). The inclusion of digital media literacy instruction has also had a positive impact on the involvement of young people in political activities on WeChat (Kahne & Feezell, 2012). The study conducted by Zhang and Huang (2022) examined the impact of social media news exposure on online political engagement among Chinese adolescents. The findings revealed that individuals with higher levels of media literacy experienced a more pronounced positive influence of social media news exposure on their online political participation, compared to those with lower levels of media literacy. These results suggest that media literacy may act as a moderating factor in the relationship between social media news exposure and online political engagement. Thus, we put forward the subsequent hypothesis.

H5: Media literacy plays a moderating role between youth WeChat news contact and youth WeChat political participation.

## **3. Method**

### *3.1 Sampling*

The statistics were acquired via an online survey administered by a reputable data gathering firm in China over the period of April to May 2022. According to the World Health Organization's categorization of young individuals (aged 15-44) (Mo, Feng, & Gu, 2023), the final sample size comprises 480 participants, with females accounting for 60 percent and the majority being young people. Approximately 42 percent of the participants possessed a bachelor's degree.

### *3.2 Variables*

The control variables are primarily classified into demographic data and information on sample characteristics. Demographics include: gender (M=1.41, SD=0.49), age (M=27.80, SD=6.86), income (M=4.00, SD=1.93), education

(M=4.22, SD=1.50). The sample characteristics encompass the means of accessing WeChat news, such as receiving forwarded content from family and friends, the preference for consuming WeChat news content, such as video format, the methods of engaging in political activities through WeChat, such as participating in polls and discussions on political events, and the frequency of weekly contact with WeChat news, ranging from one to three times per week.

Table 1. Measurement of Key Variables

Variables	Questions items	M	SD	Alpha
WeChat	WeChat news has become an integral part of my daily life	3.40	0.91	0.84
News Contact	Occasionally, I engage in discussions with friends regarding specific articles I have read on WeChat I experience a sense of unease if I miss out on reading WeChat news for even a single day. I feel engaged if the news is discussed through the WeChat community Over the past year, the frequency of accessing current affairs news using WeChat has increased			
WeChat	I had contacted or clicked on official government websites	3.30	0.92	0.82
Political Participation	I had retweeted topical news or expressed my opinions on current news I had participated in polls or discussions on political events initiated by political new media on WeChat I had unofficial channels to express my dissatisfaction with government policies I had discussed public events through WeChat communities			
Social Capital	I believe that there are several friends on WeChat who can help me solve some life/work problems I can seek advice from one of my WeChat friends when making some important decisions I feel comfortable discussing some private and personal issues with one of my WeChat friends; I can chat with my WeChat friends when I feel lonely I can borrow money from my WeChat friends if I am desperately short of money On WeChat, I can find friends who are willing to stake their reputation on me and share my hardships I know my friends on WeChat better and can leave anything important to them interacting with my friends on WeChat makes me curious about people, things and events in the outside world I am sometimes willing to spend time participating in some activities on the WeChat platform	3.44	0.84	0.90
Political Trust	I often have access to new friends, both online and offline Many of us believe that government officials are more competent Government officials usually make the right decisions without our supervision I am willing to let government officials make some major decisions that affect me I would prefer to have government officials make some major decisions that affect the country more than ordinary people We can rely on government officials to make the right decisions The more influence government officials have on our lives, the better	3.38	0.85	0.85
Media Literacy	I can access the news I want to know on WeChat When accessing and reading WeChat news, I can judge whether the news is stating facts or expressing opinions When accessing and reading WeChat news, I sometimes question whether certain facts or statements in the news are objective and rational When accessing and reading WeChat news, I verify the truth of the news in a variety of ways When accessing and reading WeChat news, I can distill my own opinions from the established news	3.53	0.85	0.83

Descriptive data for the variables and items are summarized in Table 1. For WeChat news contact, items are adapted from Van (2014) to measure the intensity and frequency of youth’s contact with current affairs news through WeChat. A 5-point Likert scale is used to measure the level of agreement to several statements, with 1 representing “strongly

disagree” and 5 “strongly agree.” And the last question is assessed through "1=never, 2=occasionally, 3=some, 4=more, 5=a lot". For WeChat political participation, items are designed from three questions: institutional, non-institutional, and expressive (De, 2016; Stout & Michael, 2008). Respondents are asked to answer whether they had participated in WeChat political affairs in the past year through five questions. A 5-point Likert scale is used to measure the level of agreement, with 1 representing “never” and 5 “a lot.”

For social capital, items mainly use the Williams Social Capital Measurement Scale (Ben, 2016), which consists of adherent social capital and bridging social capital. Respondents are asked to answer ten questions on a 5-point Likert scale of 1 representing "strongly disagree" and 5 "strongly agree." For political trust, items are adapted from Ben (2016). A 5-point Likert scale is used to measure the level of agreement to six statements, with 1 representing "strongly disagree" and 5 "strongly agree." For media literacy, items are designed regarding Eveland's scale (Chen, 2017), in which respondents are asked to answer five questions on a 5-point Likert scale of 1 representing "strongly disagree" and 5 "strongly agree."

**4. Results**

The various manifestations of political involvement among young people on WeChat, as well as the average number of times they engage with news on WeChat each week, were assessed and assigned scores (SUM=24). These scores were then added together and averaged to determine the overall degree of political engagement among young people on WeChat (M=10.23, SD=5.12). When examining the demographic disparities in political involvement among young people using WeChat, it was discovered that Chinese youth, on the whole, exhibit a moderate to low degree of political participation through this platform (M=10.23, M<SUM/2).

Prior to conducting hypothesis testing, the study assesses the reliability and validity of each dimension of the variables. Firstly, the KMO value of 0.975 and the significant result of Bartlett's sphericity test indicate that the variables are correlated and suitable for factor analysis. The study also does a validated factor analysis to examine convergent and differential validity. It is widely accepted that an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value exceeding 0.5 or a Combined Reliability (CR) value exceeding 0.7 indicates strong intra-factor convergent validity. The findings indicate that social capital (AVE=0.481, CR=0.902), political trust (AVE=0.477, CR=0.845), media literacy (AVE=0.497, CR=0.832), WeChat news contact (AVE=0.512, CR=0.839), and political involvement (AVE=0.479, CR=0.821) demonstrate strong construct validity as measures. The AVEs have higher values compared to the Pearson correlation coefficients of the other components, suggesting that they possess strong discriminant validity.

Table 2. Person correlation coefficient

	WeChat News Contact	Social capital	Political Trust	Political participation
WeChat News Contact	1.000(0.000***)	0.780(0.000***)	0.766(0.000***)	0.804(0.000***)
Social capital	0.780(0.000***)	1.000(0.000***)	0.785(0.000***)	0.728(0.000***)
Political Trust	0.766(0.000***)	0.785(0.000***)	1.000(0.000***)	0.715(0.000***)
Political participation	0.804(0.000***)	0.728(0.000***)	0.715(0.000***)	1.000(0.000***)

Note:; \*p<0.005, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

In order to confirm H1 and H2, an analysis of the Person correlation coefficient is initially performed using the SPSS 25.0 software. The findings of this correlation study further validate a robust positive connection among the five components, as shown in Table 2.

Table 3. Regression analysis statistics

	B	Standard error	Beta	t	p	VIF	R <sup>2</sup>	Adj R <sup>2</sup>	F
Dependent variable:political participation									
WeChat News Contact	0.806	0.027	0.804	29.575	0.000***	1.000	0.647	0.646	F=876.672 P=0.000***
Dependent variable:political trust									
Social capital	0.793	0.029	0.785	27.725	0.000***	1.000	0.617	0.616	F=768.68 P=0.000***

Note: \*p<0.005, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

The validation of H1 and H2 is performed using linear regression. The study of the F-test findings reveals that the VIF for variable cointegration is below 5, indicating good performance. Therefore, the regression model does not exhibit any

multiple cointegration issues, and the p-value of 0.000\*\*\* indicates a high level of significance. As a result, the model satisfies the necessary criteria. Therefore, providing evidence for H1 and H2 (refer to Table 3) and addressing RQ1.

Table 4. Coefficients for parallel mediated effects models

	MODEL1	MODEL2	Model3	MODEL4
Block1: Control variables				
Age	0.005	0.002	-0.007	0.006
Gender	0.088	0.022	0.011	0.082
Annual household income	0.006	0.025	0.019	-0.003
Education	-0.006	-0.01	-0.033	0.003
News sources	-0.004	0.001	0.001	-0.004
Content format	-0.01	-0.006	0.046	0.001
Forms of political participation	0.004	-0.008	-0.013	0.008
Weekly news contact frequency	-0.027	-0.051	-0.027	-0.013
Block2:				
WeChat message use	0.793	0.723	0.726	0.513
WeChat News Contact				
Block3: Motivation				
Social capital				0.23
Political trust				0.157
R <sup>2</sup>	0.652	0.596	0.648	0.688
Adj.R <sup>2</sup>	0.646	0.641	0.678	0.68
F	F(9, 470)=97.978, p=0.000**	F(9, 470)=76.979, p=0.000**	F(10, 469)=96.023, p=0.000**	F(11, 468)=93.67, p=0.000**

Note: \*p<0.005, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

The mediation effect was primarily assessed by constructing four regression models to conduct the test. Bootstrap sampling was employed to standardize the variables, while also accounting for control variables such as age, gender, average annual household income, education, source of WeChat news, form of WeChat news content, mode of political participation, and frequency of weekly contact with news. The regression model coefficients obtained from the regression models are displayed in Table 4. The findings are condensed in Table 5.

Table 5. Coefficients for parallel mediated effects models

c effect	Total a	b	a*b intermediary value	a*b effect SE	(Boot a*b(z)a*b (p)	a*b(95%BootCI)	c' effects	Direct	Test conclusion
0.793	0.723	0.157	0.113	0.039	2.893	0.004***	0.189 - 0.042	0.513	Partial intermediary role
0.793	0.726	0.23	0.167	0.046	3.601	0.000***	0.265 - 0.084	0.513	Partial intermediary role

Note: \*p<0.005, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

From Table 5, for the two mediating paths "WeChat news contact → social capital → political participation (z=3.601, p-value significant)" and "WeChat news contact → political trust → political participation (z=2.893, p-value significant)", the 95% interval does not include the number 0 (95% CI: 0.016~0.1), which proves that this mediating path exists and supports H3 and H4. The 95% interval, excluding the number 0 (95% CI: 0.016-0.1), proves the existence of this mediating path and supports H3 and H4. However, excluding the number 0 (significant), if c' is significant and a\*b has the same sign as c', the results are partially mediated. Thus, social capital and political trust only partially mediate the process from WeChat news contact to political participation.

The test on the moderating effect of media literacy was carried out mainly through the stratified regression method in SPSS 25.0. The moderating effect was mainly based on whether there was a significant change in F from model 2 to model 3. From Table 6, it can be found that the p-value of ΔF is 0.000\*\*\*<0.05. From model 2 to model 3, it is significant, implying that the moderating variable of media literacy has a significant effect on the influence of WeChat news contact on political participation, i.e. the moderating effect of media literacy holds, and hypothesis H5 is valid.

From the above results, it can be concluded that Chinese youth's engagement in the process of WeChat news contact to WeChat political participation is influenced by social capital, political trust, and media literacy, with social capital and trust playing a partially mediating role and media literacy playing a moderating role. This also answers RQ2.

Table 6. Moderating effect model

	MODEL1				MODEL2				MODEL3				
	B	Standard error	t	p	B	Standard error	t	p	B	Standard error	t	p	
	0.567	0.096	5.919	0	0.388	0.107	3.617	0	0.216	0.358	0.605	0.546	
WeChat News Contact	0.806	0.027	29.575	0	0.154	0.043	3.533	0	0.764	0.136	5.619	0	
Media literacy					0.699	0.04	17.255	0	0.206	0.112	1.831	0.068	
WeChat News Contact * Media literacy									-0.019	0.037	-0.503	0.615	
R <sup>2</sup>		0.647				0.656				0.656			
Adj.R <sup>2</sup>		0.646				0.654				0.654			
F		F(480, 1)=874.672, p=0.000***				F(2, 477)=454.087, p=0.000***				F(3, 476)=302.335, p=0.000***			
ΔR <sup>2</sup>		0.647				0.656				0.656			
ΔF		ΔF(1, 480)=874.672, p=0.000***				ΔF(1, 477)=12.486, p=0.000***				ΔF(1, 476)=453.63, p=0.000***			

Dependent variable: political participation

Note: \*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

### 5. Conclusion and Discussion

This study explores the relationship between social capital, political trust, media literacy, youth WeChat news contact and WeChat political participation in China. We discovered the following relationships: (1) The contact with youth WeChat news had a positive and significant impact on youth WeChat political participation (H1); youth social capital had a positive and significant influence on youth political trust (H2); social capital acted as a partial mediator between youth WeChat news contact and youth WeChat political participation (H3); political trust acted as a mediator between youth WeChat news contact and youth WeChat political participation (H4); media literacy acted as a mediator between youth contact to WeChat news and youth participation in WeChat politics (H5). All of the research hypotheses were valid.

#### 5.1 Presentation of Content

Respondents exhibit a diverse range of preferences when it comes to how content is presented, which is likely influenced by the inherent uncertainties that exist in communication dynamics. Furthermore, it is crucial to have efficient communication tactics from both the standpoint of the person sending the message and the person receiving it, as explained by Luhmann (1982). When using social media platforms like WeChat, it is important for the communicator to have a strategic approach to communication that is based on their perspective. Given these observations, it is crucial for political communicators to proactively develop communication strategies that provide new and varied elements into WeChat news content. This could involve incorporating animated movies, VR interactive imagery, and visually captivating photographs with written storytelling. An extremely thorough approach not only matches the interests of youth groups but also has the ability to inspire their active involvement in political participation.

#### 5.2 WeChat as a Catalyst for Political Participation

The study places importance on the mediating role of social capital, specifically inside the WeChat environment, due to its complex dynamics. WeChat functions as a central point that strengthens and enhances pre-existing social relationships and group associations. The software effectively keeps consumers informed about their contacts, enabling continuous interaction. The continuous flow of information acts as a foundation for the development of trusting connections among persons. The significant significance here is the iterative process of exchanging information, which serves as a catalyst for the growth and enhancement of social capital. To elaborate, it is important to emphasize that WeChat, with its diverse features, not only facilitates communication but also actively enhances users' understanding of their social environment. The increased consciousness of others, together with the strengthened interconnectedness, functions as a dual process inside the platform. According to Gil, Jung, and Valenzuela (2012), this dual mechanism not only creates a feeling of connection but also establishes the basis for developing reciprocity and trust, which are essential elements of strong social capital.

Examining the consequences more thoroughly, the formation of standards of mutual exchange and confidence inside the WeChat system creates a favorable atmosphere for promoting the engagement of young people in politics. It is crucial to acknowledge that these standards are not just side effects, but rather essential elements that are actively fostered by the design and functionality of WeChat. The complex interaction between connectedness, information sharing, and the

cultivation of trust serves as a sophisticated basis for comprehending the influence of social capital on adolescent involvement in political activities on WeChat. The platform serves not only as a means of communication, but also as a catalyst for socio-political engagement by intricately integrating social capital dynamics.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the influence of social capital in this study is not completely mediated. This phenomenon may arise due to the disparity in the accumulation of social capital among different young groups in society. Only a select few individuals possess a significant amount of social capital, which ultimately impacts the resulting mediated outcome. This implies that it is crucial for us to address the disparity in social capital among young individuals. To address the social capital disparity among young people, it is necessary to enhance the social welfare system by implementing measures such as tax and subsidy policies. Encouraging businesses to engage in community care, fostering collaboration between different societies, and promoting the redistribution of social capital are also crucial. However, it is necessary for the government to engage in more public welfare endeavors in order to foster youth initiatives and establish stronger social bonds at the psychological level.

### *5.3 Media Literacy as a Way to Promote Political Participation*

The observed relationship between higher levels of media literacy and more political activity on WeChat among young people in this study reveals a significant interaction between cognitive abilities and political engagement in the modern media environment. In the current era of new media, users, particularly the younger generation, are offered a wide range of options. The choices they make while selecting and interacting with content on platforms such as WeChat have significant consequences for their political assessments. The inherent connection between media literacy and political involvement underscores a direct route by which individuals exercise their entitlement to obtain information, engage in political procedures, and ultimately shape the democratic environment.

This direct impact extends beyond the level of individuals and has implications for greater sociopolitical consequences. According to Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal (2007), the ability of internet users to obtain information and make informed choices not only affects their personal rights but can also worsen existing disparities in political involvement. It is crucial to see this as a complex problem, where differences in media literacy might possibly exacerbate existing inequities in civic participation. Given the complex nature of these dynamics, it is crucial to fully incorporate media literacy into the framework of young involvement on WeChat. Ensuring that the youth possess the essential abilities to navigate and critically evaluate political material in the digital domain is not solely a matter of personal preference, but a shared obligation. According to Buckingham (2007), digital skills can provide opportunities for collaborative production and sharing their work with a wider audience. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt a structural strategy that involves China's education sector actively integrating comprehensive media literacy education into basic school. The purpose of this proactive integration is to build a population that is skilled in understanding and analyzing various media messages, as well as to enable individuals to use media messages for their own personal and societal growth.

### *5.4 Study Implications, Limitations and Directions*

This study examines the basic situation of Chinese youth's WeChat news contact and the predictors of youth's WeChat political participation behavior from the perspective of individual cognition. The significance of this study is that, in the theoretical research dimension, most previous studies have focused on the relationship between social media and political participation, lacking attention to specific types of social media. This study focuses on youth news contact and political participation on the WeChat platform, which helps researchers in different fields to deepen their understanding of the relationship between youth WeChat news and WeChat political participation and broaden their theoretical perspectives. In the practical application dimension, the study explores the factors influencing Chinese youth's WeChat news contact to WeChat political participation behavior by adding the constructs of social capital, political trust, and media literacy, which helps news media organizations understand the content of youth's WeChat news contact and political participation form preferences, deepen government agencies' perceptions of youth's WeChat political participation level, and develop WeChat news dissemination strategies for youth groups based on the findings.

There are three main limitations of this study. First, although the study implemented a more rigorous data analysis procedure, causal relationships between variables could only be inferred due to the cross-sectional survey design. Longitudinal studies and experimental data can be added to further confirm the accuracy of the relevant influencing factors. Second, for the influencing factors between youth WeChat news contact and WeChat political participation, this study only considered social capital, political trust, and media literacy, and more factors on youth WeChat news contact and WeChat political participation can be studied in the future, such as political efficacy (Mazzurco, 2012), communication patterns (McLeod, 2001). Finally, the study focuses on youth as the main research investigation targets the WeChat news contact, and WeChat political participation of other age groups is also worthy of attention, such as adolescents and older age groups, and further research can be done in the future.



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**Authors contributions**

Qingqing Tang and Dr. Syafila were responsible for study design and revising. Qingqing Tang and Xin Zhang were responsible for data collection and data analysis. Qingqing Tang drafted the manuscript and Dr. Syafila revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript. All authors contributed equally to the study.

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Data is available upon request from the author, subject to participant consent restrictions and non-commercial use.

**Data sharing statement**

No additional data are available.

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