

# Impact of Internet News Information Exposure on Government Trust among College Students in China: Mediating Role of Online Political Efficacy and Moderating Role of Gender

Dongjing Zhang<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** This study aimed to explore the impact of college students' exposure to internet news on government trust, as well as the mechanisms of online political efficacy and gender in this relationship. A total of 1623 Chinese college students were assessed on their exposure to internet news, government trust, and online political efficacy, using validated scales. We found significant positive correlations between exposure to internet news, online political efficacy, and government trust. Moreover, online political efficacy partially mediated the relationship between exposure to internet news and government trust, with the latter half of this mediation effect being moderated by gender. This study reveals the specific mechanisms through which exposure to internet news influences college students' government trust, which not only enhances our understanding of contemporary college students' political psychology, but also provides a scientific basis for conducting online political education in higher education institutions.

**Keywords:** Internet News Information Exposure, Government Trust, Online Political Efficacy, College Students, Gender

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1. School of Marxism, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, China.

**Correspondence** Dongjing Zhang (zdzj@hust.edu.cn)

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With the widespread adoption and development of the internet, online spaces have become crucial avenues for college students to acquire political knowledge and shape their political attitudes (Miao, 2019). According to the latest data from the Internet Information Survey Center, China's internet user base has reached 1.108 billion, with an internet penetration rate of 78.6%, accounting for over 20% of the global internet user population (China Internet Network Information Center, CNNIC, 2025). Social media has transformed traditional methods of information acquisition and news dissemination, enabling college students to access diverse political information more conveniently (Rothmund & Otto, 2016; Tan, 2024). In the digital realm, students have access to both official political information and various unofficial viewpoints and commentaries disseminated through self-media. This diversity of information sources undoubtedly exerts a profound influence on students' political cognition and attitudes. Moreover, the interactivity and immediacy of social media amplifies the speed and impact of information dissemination, allowing political content to spread rapidly among college students, fostering specific political climates and public opinion environments (Wang, 2019; Skoric et al., 2016). As a generation growing up in the digital era, exposure to internet information has emerged as a significant channel for the political socialization of college students (Huang & Xie, 2017; Weng, 2020; Yang, 2021; Zhou & Lu, 2023). The frequency, content, and quality of their engagement with online news may influence their attitudes and levels of trust in the government (Tan, 2024). Against this backdrop, an in-depth exploration of the mechanisms through which college students' exposure to internet news affects their trust in the government, particularly the mediating role of online political efficacy and the moderating effect of gender on this mediation holds substantial significance for understanding the political psychology and behavior of college students in the internet age.

Recently, the relationship between government trust and information exposure has garnered increasing research attention. Trust in the government is crucial for maintaining social stability and promoting democratic development (Newton, 2008). As a key indicator reflecting public confidence in government institutions and policies, government trust is shaped by multiple factors, including personal experiences, societal culture, and media influences (Li & Shang, 2023; OECD, 2020).

In the context of rapid technological advancements and widespread adoption of the internet, the role of internet information in shaping government trust among college students has become particularly prominent. Online political efficacy, defined as individuals' perceptions of their influence on political processes through online activities, is another pivotal factor in this relationship (Sasaki, 2016). High levels of online political efficacy may motivate individuals to actively engage in online political participation, thereby influencing their trust in government. Furthermore, gender differences in information processing and political attitudes suggest that gender may moderate the relationship between online political efficacy and government trust. Therefore, this study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how college students' exposure to internet news affects their trust in the government, focusing on the mediating role of online political efficacy and the moderating effect of gender.

## **Internet Information Exposure and Government Trust**

The internet has become a crucial domain for governments to establish trust, with its usage profoundly shaping individual perceptions and attitudes toward the government, particularly their sense of trust (Aarts et al., 2010; Ma & Lu, 2019; Miao, 2023). Currently, the relationship between exposure to internet news and government trust exhibits a double-edged sword effect. Some scholars argue that the internet compensates for the limitations of offline political information exposure, better meeting the public's demand for government information and thereby enhancing public trust in the government. The internet compensation theory (Hantula et al., 2011) also proposes that the internet plays a vital role in modern society, not only providing psychological support and comfort but also facilitating knowledge dissemination and the development of individual sociability. Particularly for college students, exposure to internet political information opens new pathways for political socialization, enabling them to understand government operations and decision-making processes more directly and comprehensively (Lu, 2018; Yuan et al., 2023). Some studies also indicate that the internet helps citizens access the latest government policies,

announcements, interpretations, statements, and activities of government officials, contributing to a more objective and holistic understanding of the government (Song & Lee, 2015).

Contrary to this opinion, some scholars have pointed out that internet political information may contain misleading content, potentially undermining public trust in the government. Research on online rumors reveals that during sudden public crises, the proliferation of negative political information or false news on the internet may further deepen public distrust of the government (Amjad et al., 2020; Guo & Zhang, 2024). In particular, the anonymity and openness of cyberspace facilitate the spread of misinformation. Studies have found that the rapid iteration and dissemination of negative information influences the public's objective evaluation of the government, leading to a decline in government trust (Guo & Zhang, 2024). Additionally, the diversity of internet information may result in biased interpretations of government information by the public (Vasist & Krishnan, 2024), further affecting the establishment of government trust. Therefore, the impact of internet news exposure on government trust is neither singular nor deterministic, but rather shaped by the interplay of multiple factors. Research had indicated that exposure to different types of news affects trust in government through distinct mechanisms, as social media usage was negatively associated with trust in local governments but not with trust in the central government (Ceron, 2015; Xu et al., 2022). Using overseas media to access foreign news was negatively associated with Chinese citizens' trust in the central government, but did not affect their trust in local governments (Xu et al., 2022).

In conclusion, scholars hold divergent perspectives on the role of the internet in shaping political cognition. While some researchers emphasize its democratizing effect through information accessibility, others caution against potential polarization exacerbated by algorithmic filtering. Particularly in authoritarian contexts, digital platforms create dual channels for both state propaganda dissemination and grassroots political expression. However, the results are not consistent across studies, nor is the literature extensive. Research has indicated that the internet's effects on individual political socialization are reflected in the government's information governance capacity (Chao et al., 2017). By strengthening online information management and providing high-quality

government information, authorities can mitigate the damage caused by misleading content to public trust. Yin's (2023) study on Chinese social media politics highlights its pragmatic nature, shaped by the interplay of technology and socio-political environments, with a healthier media ecosystem and more positive outcomes compared with other countries. Empirical research based on the Chinese Social Survey (CSS2021) also found that an increased frequency of political internet use significantly enhances media trust (Ren & Zhang, 2023). Studies focusing on Chinese youths have further demonstrated that online news media usage boosts their national identity (Cai & Lu, 2023; Liu et al., 2023). Thus, understanding how college students engage with political information online and exploring the mechanisms of government trust formation in this process are crucial for fostering active political participation and maintaining a positive government image. Accordingly, based on previous theories and related research, this study hypothesized the following:

H1: Internet News information exposure would significantly and positively predict government trust in college students.

### ***Mediating Role of Online Political Efficacy***

Many studies have examined the relationship between extent of public exposure to political information and their level of trust in their government. However, the intricate mechanisms underlying this relationship are not fully understood. This paradoxical nature of internet-mediated governance communication necessitates an examination of the boundary conditions under which internet information exposure translates into institutional trust. Recent literature highlights political efficacy as a critical mediator in this relationship; citizens who perceive greater competence in processing and acting upon political information tend to develop more stable trust orientations (Chao et al., 2017; Kavanaugh et al., 2016, Wong, 2014). Online political efficacy refers to an individual's sense of confidence in and the capability to participate in online political activities. It is divided into internal and external efficacies. Internal efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their own ability to understand political affairs; external efficacy refers to an individual's perception that the political system can respond to the needs and expectations of the citizens (Craig, 1979). Political efficacy is a significant driver

shaping the political attitudes and behaviors of the general population. According to Campbell's (1954) foundational theory of political efficacy, the development of an individual's political efficacy results from the dynamic interplay between the person and the surrounding environment. In this interaction, exposure to internet news may play a crucial and indispensable role in college students' political efficacy. The dynamic nature of digital platforms enables real-time engagement with political content through interactive multimedia formats, fostering internal (confidence in political understanding) and external (belief in influencing governance) efficacy. Algorithmic curation on social media creates personalized information ecosystems, where exposure frequency and source diversity are significantly correlated with students' perceived political competence. However, this mediated environment introduces complex variables, including information verification behaviors and platform-specific filter bubble effects, which may differentially moderate the relationship between news consumption patterns and subsequent political engagement outcomes.

For instance, when college students frequently interact with online political information, they tend to assess the governance capabilities of the government by considering its efficiency, transparency, and fairness in managing such information. The World Internet Project survey has also highlighted that more than 60% of the Chinese respondents expressed feeling "more empowered to voice their opinions about the government through internet use." (Zhang & Huang, 2022). Researchers have proposed that exposure to internet information is a substantial source of online political efficacy, which in turn mediates the connection between exposure to social media news and political participation among adolescents (Huang, 2022; Zhang & Huang, 2022).

Therefore, online political efficacy is also a key factor in shaping college students' political trust. If the government demonstrates competence in online information governance, such as by promptly and accurately addressing political appeals and concerns online, students' trust in the government is likely to increase. Conversely, deficiencies in online information governance, such as delayed responses or unfair handling, may erode trust. Therefore, this study hypothesized the following:

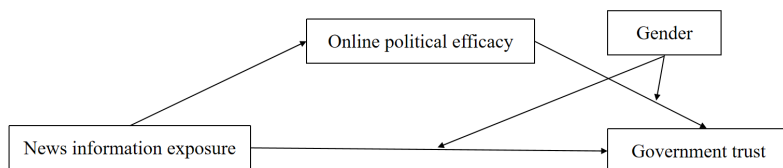
H2: Online political efficacy could play a mediating role between college students' exposure to internet news and their trust in the

government.

### ***Moderating Role of Gender***

Gender differences may also moderate this relationship. According to social cognitive theory (SCT), the environment serves as a crucial framework that helps shape individual political values, attitudes, and participation patterns through observational learning and social modeling processes. This theoretical perspective illuminates the gender-based disparities observed between internet information exposure and institutional trust dynamics, wherein differential socialization experiences and media consumption habits reinforce the cognitive schemas of governmental legitimacy (Bandura, 1977). The triadic reciprocal causation model within the SCT further explains how personal factors (e.g., self-efficacy), behavioral patterns (e.g., online political information engagement), and environmental influences (e.g., algorithmic content curation) interact to perpetuate these trust gaps across gender lines in digitally mediated societies. When exposed to the same internet political information, college students of different genders may develop varying levels of political efficacy and government trust (Fraile & Marinova, 2024; Stefani et al., 2021; Van et al., 2019). Research on citizen political participation also indicates that men are more inclined to engage in politically related behaviors, such as voting, electoral activities, and social movements compared to women (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010; Houle, 2022). Through exposure to internet political information, they may place greater emphasis on rational analysis and critical thinking to increase political efficacy. Their evaluations of government actions from online comments by the public may be more composed and objective, making it easier for them to form positive expectations of government behavior, thereby enhancing government trust.

By contrast, although female college students may be more sensitive to internet political information, this sensitivity could also make them more susceptible to the influence of negative information, leading to fluctuations in government trust (Heger & Hoffmann, 2019). Some studies also suggest that female students exhibit greater nuances in emotional resonance and information interpretation and less offensive patterns of political behavior online (Lilleker et al., 2021;



**Figure 1.** Moderated Mediation Model

Olga & Lukyanova, 2020), which may enable them to gain a deeper understanding of the social and political significance of internet political information.

These differing response patterns remind us that the moderating role of gender as a critical variable cannot be overlooked when studying the impact of exposure to internet news on government trust. Based on this, this study further hypothesizes the following:

H3: Gender would moderate the impact of exposure to internet news on college students' trust in the government.

H4: Gender would moderate the latter half of the mediating effect of online political efficacy on internet news exposure and college students' trust in the government.

### ***The Present Study***

This study selected college students as research participants. Data on exposure to internet news, perceived political efficacy, and government trust were collected through paper-based questionnaires. During the data analysis phase, Model 15 of the SPSS plugin Mays (2019) was employed to test the direct effect of internet news information exposure on government trust as well as the mediating role of online political efficacy in this process. Additionally, we delved into how gender moderates the relationship between internet news information exposure and government trust and how gender further moderates the mediating effect of online political efficacy. The moderated mediation model is shown in Figure 1.

## **Methods**

### ***Participants***

A convenience sampling method was adopted, and questionnaires were distributed to 1,800 college students from three universities in the Hubei, Henan, and Hunan provinces of China. Paper-based questionnaires were uniformly administered in each class, with each class being assigned to a trained examiner. After excluding 177 invalid questionnaires, 1,623 (90.17%) valid responses were included in the final analyses.

### ***Measurement Tools***

#### Internet News Information Scale

The Internet News Information Usage Scale, developed by Ma and Hou (2022), was used to assess the frequency of news acquisition among college students through eight channels: official platforms (portal websites, mobile news apps, television, and official radio media accounts), social media (WeChat, Weibo, short videos, knowledge-sharing platforms, etc.), and foreign media and websites. This scale employs a 5-point scoring system, with higher average scores indicating a greater frequency of internet information acquisition. In this study, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient for this scale was 0.76.

#### Government Trust Scale

Government trust was assessed by inquiring about respondents' trust levels in various government institutions (central government, provincial government, county/township government, official news media, courts, public security bureaus, township governments, and village committees). Response options ranged from completely distrust to completely trust, on a 5-point scale. This measurement approach has been widely adopted in empirical studies on trust in the Chinese government (Zhan et al., 2025; Zou et al., 2021). In this study, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient for this scale was 0.94.

#### Online Political Efficacy Scale

The Online Political Efficacy Scale developed by Chen (2019), was adapted to measure individuals' online political efficacy across

**Table 1.** Demographic Information

Categories	N (%)
Complete sample	1623 (100%)
Gender	
Male	767(47.26%)
Female	856 (52.74%)
Major	
Humanities and social science	730(44.98%)
STEM	863(53.17%)
Grade	
Freshman	486 (29.95%)
Sophomore	487 (29.95%)
Junior	440 (27.11%)
Senior	6 (0.37%)
First year graduate students	195(12.01%)
Others	8(0.49%)

three dimensions: internal, external, and collective (Zhang & Huang, 2022). This scale consists of 3 items rated on a 5-point scale, with higher average scores reflecting stronger online political efficacy. In this study, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient for this scale was 0.81.

### Demographic Variables

This study collected demographic data on the participants' age, gender, majors, and grade (Table 1). This study included 1,623 participants (767 male, 47.26%; 856 female, 52.74%), with an age distribution spanning 17 to 26 years ( $M_{age} = 20.18 \pm 1.50$  SD). Data were collected during the 2023–2024 academic year across the 3 universities. Among the participants, 44.98% majored in humanities and social sciences and 53.17% in science, engineering, agriculture, or medicine. The sample comprised 29.95% freshmen, 29.95% sophomores, and 27.11% juniors, with senior and first-year graduate students accounting for 0.37% and 12.01%, respectively (Table 1).

## **Results**

### ***Common Method Bias Test***

As a self-report method was used to collect data, the results might have been influenced to some extent by common method bias. To ensure the rigor of the results, Harman's single-factor test was employed, and an exploratory factor analysis was conducted to examine potential common method bias. The results showed that there were 5 factors with eigenvalues  $> 1$ , and the largest factor explained 26.85% of the variance, which was below the critical threshold of 40%. This indicates that the data in this study did not exhibit severe common method bias.

### ***Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis of Variables***

As shown in Table 2, the descriptive statistical results indicate that college students most frequently accessed internet news through social media, followed by official platforms and foreign media. The Pearson range correlation analysis results demonstrated that college students' news exposure to official platform information was significantly and positively correlated with online political efficacy ( $r = 0.24, p < 0.001$ ) and government trust ( $r = 0.25, p < 0.001$ ). Social media was also significantly and positively correlated with online political efficacy ( $r = 0.26, p < 0.001$ ) and government trust ( $r = 0.19, p < 0.001$ ). In contrast, news exposure to foreign media and websites showed no significant correlation with online political efficacy or government trust. The average of the three types of news exposures was calculated to represent the overall level of college students' exposure to internet news. Pearson's range correlation analysis revealed that the total mean score was positively correlated with both online political efficacy ( $r = 0.26, p < 0.001$ ) and government trust ( $r = 0.23, p < 0.001$ ). Moreover, online political efficacy was significantly and positively correlated with government trust ( $r = 0.26, p < 0.001$ ).

### ***Testing for Moderated Mediation Effects***

Controlling for gender and age, Model 15 from Hayes' SPSS macro was employed to examine the relationship between exposure to internet

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

	<i>M</i> ± <i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	-	1							
2. Age	20.18±1.50	-0.08**	1						
3. Official platform information	2.48±0.82	0.20***	-0.05*	1					
4. Social media information	3.29±0.80	0.22***	-0.03	0.53***	1				
5. Foreign media information	1.86±1.05	-0.11***	-0.03	0.35***	0.17***	1			
6. Total information exposure	2.84±0.69	0.22***	-0.04	0.83***	0.88***	0.44***	1		
7. Online political efficacy	3.68±0.86	0.08***	0.01	0.24***	0.26***	0.00	0.26***	1	
8. Government trust	4.00±0.79	0.09***	-0.07**	0.25***	0.19***	0.04	0.23***	0.26***	1

Note. \*  $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

news information and college students' trust in government, as well as the mediating effect of online political efficacy and the moderating effect of gender.

The results are listed in Table 3. First, after controlling for age, a regression analysis was conducted using internet news exposure as the independent variable and government trust as the dependent variables. The results indicated that college students' exposure to internet news significantly and positively predicted government trust ( $\beta = 0.21$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Second, after controlling for age, a regression analysis was performed using internet news exposure as the independent variable and online political efficacy as the dependent variable. The results showed that college students' internet news information exposure significantly and positively predicted individual online political efficacy ( $\beta = 0.32$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Third, multiple regression analysis was conducted with government trust as the dependent variable. The model incorporated internet news exposure, online political efficacy, and two

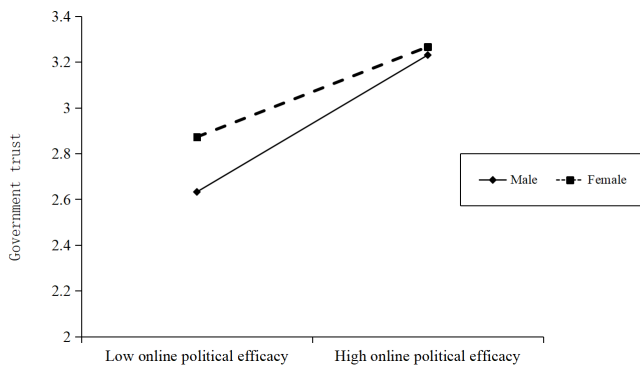
**Table 3.** Test of the Moderated Mediation Model

Predictor variable	Dependent variable					
	Total effect: Government trust		Mediating variable: Online political efficacy		Dependent variable: Government trust	
	$\beta$	$t$	$\beta$	$t$	$\beta$	$t$
Age	-0.08	-3.12*	0.02	1.19	-0.05	-3.48***
Gender	0.04	1.62			0.41	1.96
Information exposure	0.21	8.65***	0.32	10.76***	0.19	2.11*
Online political efficacy					0.34	4.91***
Information exposure*Gender					-0.01	-0.05
Online political efficacy*Gender					-0.09	-2.07*
Fitting indicators	$R$	0.06	0.26		0.33	
	$R^2$	0.06	0.07		0.11	
	$F_{(df)}$	33.327 <sub>(3)</sub> ***	58.23 <sub>(2)</sub> ***		31.99 <sub>(6)</sub> ***	

Note. \*  $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

interaction terms: (1) internet news exposure and gender and (2) online political efficacy and gender, serving as independent variables. Results demonstrated that internet news exposure maintained a significant predictive effect on government trust ( $\beta = 0.19, p < 0.05$ ), while online political efficacy exhibited a stronger significant association with governmental trust ( $\beta = 0.34, p < 0.001$ ). These findings suggest that online political efficacy plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between college students' internet news exposure and government trust. The mediation effect test results showed that the mediation effect was 0.07, with a confidence interval of [0.05, 0.09], accounting for 25% of the total effect.

This study also found that gender moderated the mediating effect of online political efficacy. In the overall regression equation, the interaction term between online political efficacy and gender significantly predicted



**Figure 2.** Gender Moderation Effect Diagram

government trust, indicating that gender moderated the predictive effect of online political efficacy on government trust. Further, a simple slope analysis revealed that online political efficacy had a more pronounced predictive effect on government trust in male individuals than in female ones (simple slope for male individuals = 0.28,  $t = 9.50$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Male college students also showed higher levels of online political efficacy and were more likely to develop positive expectations and trust in government actions (Figure 2) compared to female college students, in whom online political efficacy also predicted government trust to some extent; however, its predictive effect was relatively weaker (simple slope for female individuals = 0.19,  $t = 5.49$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

The analysis of the mediating effect of online political efficacy across genders also showed that the mediating effect was stronger in male college students than in female college students. In addition the mediating effect of online political efficacy across genders was stronger among male college students (effect size = 0.08) than female college students (effect size = 0.05) (Table 4). This gender-specific pattern was further corroborated by the simple slope analysis presented in Figure 2, where the regression line for male individuals exhibited a steeper trajectory ( $\beta = 0.28$ ) compared to their female counterparts ( $\beta = 0.19$ ). The differential mediation effects may stem from gender-based variations in online political participation patterns, with male students demonstrating more

**Table 4.** Moderating Effect Analysis

Gender	Effect size	Boot SD	Boot CI low	Boot CI up
Male individuals	0.08	0.02	0.05	0.11
Female individuals	0.05	0.01	0.03	0.07

frequent engagement in political discussions and information-sharing behaviors on digital platforms. Additionally, the weaker mediation observed in female students could be attributed to their tendency to employ online political efficacy primarily for informational purposes rather than as a catalyst for trust-building interactions with government institutions.

In the overall equation, the interaction term between internet news exposure and gender did not significantly predict government trust, indicating that gender did not moderate the relationship between college students' internet news exposure and government trust.

## **Discussion**

This study constructed a moderated mediation model based on the SCT, the internet compensation theory, and technology symbiosis theory to explore the impact of college students' exposure to internet news on government trust in China. It also examined the mediating role of online political efficacy and the moderating effect of gender. The results indicated that exposure to internet news significantly influenced college students' government trust, and this effect was partially mediated by online political efficacy. Additionally, gender played a moderating role in this mediation process.

### ***Theoretical Implications***

The descriptive statistical results indicate that college students' exposure to internet news stemmed primarily from social media, which aligns with previous research (Miao, 2019; Rothmund & Otto,

2016; Tan, 2024). Exposure to internet news not only influences their channels for accessing news but may also have profound effects on their political attitudes and behaviors. As a crucial medium for information dissemination, the speed and convenience of social media enables college students to access news anytime and anywhere, thereby enhancing their attention to and engagement with political events. These findings suggest that social media serves as a compensatory mechanism for college students with limited traditional information acquisition mediums. This digital compensation effect not only reinforces political efficacy among information-disadvantaged groups but also reshapes government trust through diversified information exposure patterns. Our results extend the social cognitive theory by revealing gender-specific compensation dynamics: among college students, male students enhanced their sense of online political efficacy more than female ones through the use of internet news, thereby influencing government trust. These patterns of gender differences align substantially with the nuances of previous assertions about digital mediation in political socialization.

The findings reveal that exposure to news on official platforms and social media is significantly and positively correlated with college students' trust in the government in China, which is consistent with prior research (Lu, 2018; Meng & Li, 2021; Yuan et al., 2023 ). Relevant studies suggest that improving the government's information governance capacity is vital. Additionally, political information needs to provide better guidance to the public and be supervised more effectively to maintain government trust and promote stable societal development (Jo, 2025). This study found that college students' exposure to internet news contributes to the formation of their trust in the government, which differs from other related studies. The results indicate that China's internet information governance has been effective in enhancing college students' trust in the Chinese government. Efficient information governance ensures that citizens are notified of government policies promptly and accurately, thereby strengthening credibility and public trust in it. This result also corroborates with Yin's perspective on the symbiotic relationship between politics and technology in China's social media, suggesting that compared to the negative effects of other countries' internet news exposure (Guo & Zhang, 2024), Chinese online media ecosystems are healthier, exhibiting numerous positive effects (Jin & Zhang, 2025; Yin, 2023). The findings

further extend the media system dependency theory by demonstrating how institutional characteristics shape technology-politics dynamics in digital communication environments. In particular, the integration of state-led governance and platform algorithms creates a unique feedback mechanism that reinforces constructive citizen-state interactions in contrast to the polarization patterns observed in Western contexts.

This study also found that exposure to internet news information not only directly affects government trust but also indirectly influences government trust through the mediating role of online political efficacy. This finding revealed an important internal mechanism: when individuals frequently engage with internet news, they may gradually construct cognitive frameworks regarding the online political environment and develop specific attitudes, which ultimately affect their level of trust in the government in a subtle manner. Additionally, prior research has pointed out that online political efficacy plays a significant mediating role between adolescents' exposure to political news media and the formation of their national identity (Huang, 2022; Zhang & Huang, 2022). These findings collectively underscore the crucial role of online political efficacy as a key psychological mediator that shapes political attitudes and trust formation. The findings of this study help clarify the complex relationship between exposure to internet news and government trust; namely, that exposure to internet news may enhance individuals' online political efficacy, thereby influencing their evaluation of government trust.

The findings of this study contribute to the broader literature on political communication and trust by highlighting the nuances of how gender shapes individual responses to internet news. Thus, gender should not be overlooked when analyzing the impact of online news on political attitudes and trust. Instead, it should be considered as an important variable that can influence the way in which individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to internet political information. Its moderating effect revealed that gender moderates the latter half of the mediating effect of online political efficacy. This implies that in male college students, exposure to internet news significantly enhanced their high online political efficacy, which in turn strengthened their positive expectations and trust in government actions. This may be related to their greater tendency to engage in online political activities and focus

on current affairs (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010; Houle, 2022). In contrast, while online political efficacy can also predict government trust in female college students, its predictive effect is relatively weaker on them. This may reflect the differences in political participation and news engagement between female and male college students. Research suggests that female college students exhibit greater emotional resonance and nuanced information interpretation (Lin & Wang, 2020), making them more susceptible to the influence of internet political information, particularly negative public opinion (Gluck et al., 2014), which may lead to cognitive biases toward the government.

Additionally, gender did not moderate the direct relationship between college students' exposure to internet news and their trust in the government. This suggests that regardless of gender, the impact of internet news exposure on college students' trust in the government is relatively stable. This non-significant result may also stem from gender differences in the pathways through which internet information exposure influences trust in governments. Specifically, for male students, exposure to internet news may enhance their trust in the government primarily by boosting their sense of online political efficacy. In contrast, while internet news exposure similarly affects female students' sense of online political efficacy, the conversion of this efficacy into government trust may be also moderated by additional factors such as personal experiences or social environment. Therefore, future research should explore not only the specific mechanisms of gender differences in the relationship between internet information exposure and government trust but also the influence of other variables on these mechanisms.

### ***Practical Implications***

The theoretical insights gained from this study have valuable implications for policymakers, educators, and media practitioners. For policy-makers, understanding the positive correlation between internet news exposure and government trust underscores the importance of maintaining transparent and effective communication channels. This highlights the need for governments to continue investing in digital platforms that disseminate accurate and timely information to foster citizen trust. For educators, this study emphasizes the significance of

incorporating media literacy and critical thinking skills into curricula, enabling students to critically evaluate internet news and form informed political attitudes. Moreover, media practitioners should recognize their responsibility in shaping public opinion and strive to provide balanced, objective reporting that contributes to a healthy internet media ecosystem. By adhering to these practical implications, society can foster more informed, engaged, and trusting citizens.

Understanding gender differences in the relationship between internet information exposure and government trust has several practical implications. First, it highlights the importance of considering gender when designing communication strategies aimed at enhancing public trust in the government. Tailored messages that resonate with the specific concerns and information processing styles based on gender may be more effective in fostering trust. Second, policymakers and government agencies should be aware of these gender differences when engaging with the public via online platforms. By understanding how different genders perceive and respond to internet information, communication approaches can be tailored to effectively address their needs and concerns. Additionally, future public relations and communication campaigns should incorporate gender-sensitive strategies to ensure that messages are received and interpreted positively by both men and women, thereby enhancing overall government trust.

### ***Limitations and Future Research Directions***

Although this study explored the relationship between internet news information exposure and government trust among Chinese college students, as well as the mediating role of online political efficacy and the moderating role of gender, there were still some limitations. First, this study employed a cross-sectional design, which cannot establish causal relationships between variables. Future research could consider using a longitudinal design to more accurately reveal the dynamic relationships between these variables. Second, this study primarily focused on the impact of internet news information exposure on government trust, but the relationship between social media use and government trust is very complex that may involve other various factors, Future research could further investigate whether other demographic variables such as political

affiliation and digital literacy influence the relationship between college students' exposure to internet news and their trust of government. Additionally, studies could also examine the differential effects of various types of online news (e.g., positive and negative news) on college students' trust in the government, as well as whether these effects are moderated by online political efficacy or other factors. Through such in-depth research, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of how college students are influenced by internet news and how they form attitudes and trust in the government, thereby offering more specific guidance for policy making and educational practices. Lastly, this study primarily collected data through questionnaire surveys, which, although representative to some extent, may still be affected by factors such as sample selection bias and self-report bias. Future research could employ a combination of methods, such as experimental and observational methods, to more comprehensively understand the relationship between social media use and government trust of college students.

## Conclusion

Based on the findings of our study, we can conclude that there is a significant positive correlation among Chinese college students' exposure to internet news information, their sense of online political efficacy, and their trust in the government. Moreover, the impact of college students' internet news exposure on government trust is partially mediated by their sense of online political efficacy. Notably, gender seems to moderate the latter half of online political efficacy, with the positive influence of online political efficacy on government trust being more pronounced in male college students.

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## 大学生网络新闻信息接触对政府信任的影响： 网络政治效能感的中介和性别的调节作用

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**摘要：**本研究旨在探讨大学生接触网络新闻对其政府信任的影响，以及网络政治效能感和性别在该关系中的作用机制。研究采用经过验证的量表，对1623名中国大学生进行了网络新闻接触、政府信任和网络政治效能感的评估。结果发现，网络新闻接触、网络政治效能感与政府信任之间存在显著正相关。此外，网络政治效能感在网络新闻接触与政府信任之间起部分中介作用，且该中介作用的后半段受到性别的调节。本研究揭示了网络新闻接触影响大学生政府信任的具体机制，不仅深化了对当代大学生政治心理的理解，也为高校开展网络政治教育提供了科学依据。

**关键词：**网络新闻信息接触、政府信任、网络政治效能感、大学生、性别

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## 대학생의 온라인 뉴스 정보 접촉이 정부 신뢰에 미치는 영향: 온라인 정치 효능감의 매개와 성별의 조절 효과

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**초록:** 본 연구는 대학생의 온라인 뉴스 정보 접촉이 정부 신뢰에 미치는 영향, 그리고 이 과정에서 온라인 정치 효능감과 성별이 어떻게 작용하는지를 탐색하는 데 목적이 있다. 이를 위해 온라인 뉴스 정보 접촉, 정부 신뢰, 온라인 정치 효능감 척도를 활용하여 대학생 1,623명을 대상으로 자료를 수집하였다. 분석 결과, 첫째, 온라인 뉴스 정보 접촉, 온라인 정치 효능감, 정부 신뢰는 모두 유의미한 정적 상관관계를 보였다. 둘째, 온라인 정치 효능감은 온라인 뉴스 정보 접촉과 정부 신뢰 간의 관계를 부분적으로 매개하며, 이 매개 효과의 후반부는 성별에 따라 조절되는 것으로 나타났다. 구체적으로, 남학생에게서 온라인 정치 효능감의 매개 효과가 여학생보다 더 크게 나타났다. 본 연구는 대학생의 정부 신뢰 형성 과정에서 온라인 뉴스 정보 접촉이 작용하는 구체적인 기제를 심층적으로 규명했다는 점에서 의의가 있다. 이러한 연구 결과는 현대 대학생의 정치 심리를 이해하는 데 기여할 뿐만 아니라, 대학의 온라인 사상·정치 교육을 효과적으로 전개하기 위한 과학적 근거를 제공한다.

**주제어:** 온라인 뉴스 정보 접촉, 정부 신뢰, 온라인 정치 효능감, 대학생, 성별

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## 大学生のオンラインニュース情報接触が政府信頼に及ぼす影響： オンライン政治的効力感の媒介と性別の調整効果

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**要旨:** 本研究は、大学生のオンラインニュース情報接触が政府信頼に与える影響、そしてその過程におけるオンライン政治的効力感と性別の作用機序を解明することを目的とする。研究方法として、オンラインニュース情報接触尺度、政府信頼尺度、およびオンライン政治的効力感尺度を用いて、大学生1,623名を対象に調査を実施した。分析の結果、まず、オンラインニュース情報接触、オンライン政治的効力感、政府信頼の間に有意な正の相関が確認された。次に、オンライン政治的効力感は、オンラインニュース情報接触と政府信頼の関係において部分的な媒介効果を示し、この媒介効果の後半は性別によって調整されることが明らかになった。具体的には、男子大学生の方が女子大学生よりも、オンライン政治的効力感の媒介効果がより大きく現れた。本研究は、大学生の政府信頼形成においてオンラインニュース情報接触が作用する具体的な機序を深く掘り下げて解明した点で意義がある。この研究成果は、現代の大学生の政治心理を理解するのに役立つだけでなく、大学におけるオンライン思想・政治教育を効果的に展開するための科学的根拠を提供するものである。

**キーワード:** オンラインニュース情報接触、政府信頼、オンライン政治的効力感、大学生、性別

## **Author biography**

**Dongjing Zhang** is an associate professor at Huazhong University of Science and Technology. She holds a Ph.D. in Developmental and Educational Psychology from Huazhong Normal University. Her research interests include cyber political psychology, Internet political socialization, and mental health education.