

Reconstructing Public Communication: A Social Media-Based Model for

Government Short Video Dissemination

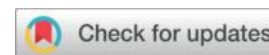


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Abstract

This paper explores the emerging model of government short video dissemination within the context of evolving digital governance and participatory communication. Drawing upon media convergence theory and digital interaction frameworks, this study examines how platforms such as TikTok and WeChat Video Channel reshape traditional government communication into interactive, algorithm-driven, and emotionally resonant forms. Through case studies and comparative content analysis, we identify four key mechanisms: narrative localization, algorithmic amplification, emotional engagement, and participatory feedback loops. We argue that the short video model not only enhances policy dissemination but also reconstructs the government-citizen interface. The study provides theoretical and practical implications for reimagining digital governance strategies in the social media environment.

Keywords

social media; government affairs; short video; communication mode

1. Introduction

The rise of social media and digital platforms has revolutionized the dynamics of communication between governments and the public. In an era characterized by immediacy, brevity, and visual storytelling, short video content disseminated via platforms such as TikTok, WeChat Video Channel, and Bilibili has emerged as a crucial instrument for digital governance. These platforms facilitate not only the distribution of policy-related information but also provide interactive spaces where citizens can engage, react, and co-create narratives with governmental institutions. This transformation marks a significant shift from the unidirectional communication model of traditional media to a more decentralized and participatory framework of governance communication. Government short videos represent a convergence of audiovisual innovation, algorithmic dissemination, and user-centered engagement. They address the need for

accessibility, emotional connection, and narrative clarity in government communication. However, the rapid growth of this medium has brought about several challenges, including content homogenization, limited responsiveness to user feedback, and inadequate integration across platforms. Understanding and optimizing these practices is vital to enhancing transparency, trust, and democratic engagement in the digital era. This study aims to systematically analyze the dissemination model of government short videos on social media by integrating theoretical insights with empirical observations. Drawing on media convergence theory and digital governance frameworks, the paper investigates the narrative strategies, platform-specific adaptations, and interactive mechanisms employed in government short video practices. Through a qualitative case study approach, we explore how these videos influence public perception, facilitate policy understanding, and support participatory governance. Ultimately, this research seeks to offer actionable insights for improving the effectiveness and inclusivity of digital government communication.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Media and Government Communication Evolution

The intersection of social media and government communication has been widely studied as digital platforms transform public administration. Scholars like Mergel (2013) and Criado and Rojas-Martín (2013) note that governments are shifting from monologic, hierarchical communication models to more dialogic, participatory approaches. These new channels enhance real-time engagement, transparency, and public trust (Bertot et al., 2012). Fung (2015) argues that digital tools can reinvigorate deliberative democracy by enabling public feedback loops and participatory governance. Medaglia and Zheng (2017) mapped the global landscape of e-government practices, identifying social media as a central element in new public service paradigms. Papacharissi (2015) introduced the idea of “affective publics,” where social media platforms amplify emotional expression in civic participation, reinforcing the relational dynamics between institutions and citizens. In the Chinese context, Wu and Ma (2019) found that short videos foster more accessible and visually appealing representations of government services, helping to demystify bureaucratic systems.

2.2 Short Video as an Emerging Civic Medium

As a convergence of entertainment and public service messaging, short video has emerged as a key format for contemporary government communication. Highfield and Leaver (2016) emphasized that short-form visual content promotes engagement by drawing on meme logic, emotional immediacy, and audiovisual brevity. In their study of Chinese government TikTok accounts, Chen and Zhang (2020) found that narrative localization, humor, and emotional storytelling are critical to message receptivity. Xie and Tsang (2021) further argue that visualization, scene-based storytelling, and dramatization can significantly

improve comprehension of complex policy issues. Gillespie (2018) framed platforms as curators of public attention, where algorithmic curation determines visibility and shapes discourse. Zeng and Liu (2020) discussed “algorithmic governmentality,” noting that digital platforms structure the way government messages are targeted, promoted, and consumed. Harju and Huhtamäki (2022) point out that short videos not only deliver content but also activate civic identities and emotional solidarity. Yet, the design of engagement—likes, shares, comments—is often influenced by commercial metrics rather than democratic values.

2.3 Critical Reflections on Platform Governance and Narrative Strategy

Despite optimism about digital communication, several scholars warn of pitfalls in platform-mediated governance. Chadwick (2017) and van Dijck et al. (2018) critique how governments risk adopting performative transparency, where the appearance of openness masks a lack of real accountability. Tufekci (2015) highlights the danger of algorithmic bias, as platforms can entrench polarization and marginalize dissenting voices. Studies from the Global South, such as Oduro-Frimpong (2020), emphasize the importance of localized content practices and warn against cultural homogenization in state messaging. Kaye et al. (2021) note that algorithmic logics often prioritize sensationalism over substance, potentially undermining deliberative dialogue. To counter these risks, scholars have advocated for integrating theories of digital affordances (Nagy & Neff, 2015), convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006), and hybrid media systems (Chadwick, 2017) to develop a critical yet constructive framework for analyzing short video-based governance. Such an approach acknowledges the technological, emotional, and institutional layers of this evolving medium and informs the current study’s analytic lens.

3. Theoretical Framework

To critically examine the dissemination model of government short videos on social media platforms, this study integrates three complementary theoretical perspectives: media convergence theory, participatory governance theory, and digital affordance theory. Together, these frameworks provide a multidimensional lens for analyzing the hybrid nature of digital government communication, which operates at the intersection of technology, institutional intent, and citizen engagement.

3.1 Media Convergence Theory

Originating from Jenkins (2006), media convergence theory explains the blending of old and new media forms, institutions, and user practices. In the context of government short videos, convergence is evident in the way traditional public information functions (e.g., policy announcement, service delivery, crisis

communication) are restructured to fit the fragmented, interactive, and algorithm-driven logic of platforms like TikTok and WeChat Video Channel. This convergence does not merely involve the reuse of content across formats but reflects a deeper restructuring of communication norms and narrative strategies (Chadwick, 2017). Government short videos often combine institutional authority with culturally resonant tropes—memes, music, influencers—to increase relatability and virality. These convergent practices enable governments to reach diverse audiences while navigating platform-specific constraints, such as time limits and algorithmic ranking systems.

3.2 Participatory Governance

The second theoretical strand draws from participatory governance theory, which emphasizes inclusive, dialogic, and co-productive interactions between citizens and the state (Fung, 2015). In a digital environment, participation extends beyond physical deliberation to include symbolic, emotional, and expressive forms of engagement (Papacharissi, 2015). Government short videos represent an evolution in participatory governance—they not only inform but also solicit reactions, user-generated content, and real-time feedback through comments, shares, and duets. Such affordances create the conditions for a “networked public sphere,” wherein civic sentiments and interpretations circulate alongside official narratives. However, this participation is shaped by platform design and user demographics, making it crucial to evaluate whether these engagements truly reflect deliberative inclusion or are performative in nature. Thus, this framework helps assess both the depth and equity of digital participation in the governance process.

3.3 Digital Affordance Theory

To bridge the gap between institutional intention and user behavior, this study incorporates the concept of digital affordances—the perceived and actual action possibilities enabled by digital environments (Nagy & Neff, 2015). Affordances in the short video ecosystem include features such as algorithmic curation, low-cost video creation tools, interactive buttons (likes, comments, shares), and real-time trend tracking. These technological features not only shape how government content is produced and circulated but also influence user interaction patterns and emotional resonance. For example, algorithmic recommendation engines can amplify popular content, creating a feedback loop that enhances visibility while potentially sidelining dissenting voices or complex messages (Gillespie, 2018; Zeng & Liu, 2020). The affordance perspective allows us to analyze how digital infrastructure mediates power dynamics, accessibility, and communicative

efficacy within the government-public interface.

3.4 Integrated Analytical Model

By synthesizing these three theoretical lenses, this study proposes an Integrated Convergence-Participation-Affordance (CPA) Framework (see Figure 1). This model conceptualizes government short video dissemination as a hybrid process where:

1. Convergence informs how government adapts narrative form and institutional messaging;
2. Participation captures how users engage, reshape, or contest meaning;
3. Affordances explain how platform structures facilitate or constrain communicative exchange.

This framework provides a comprehensive basis for analyzing empirical cases, enabling a deeper understanding of how government short videos function as tools of digital governance, public engagement, and policy legitimization in a highly mediatized society.

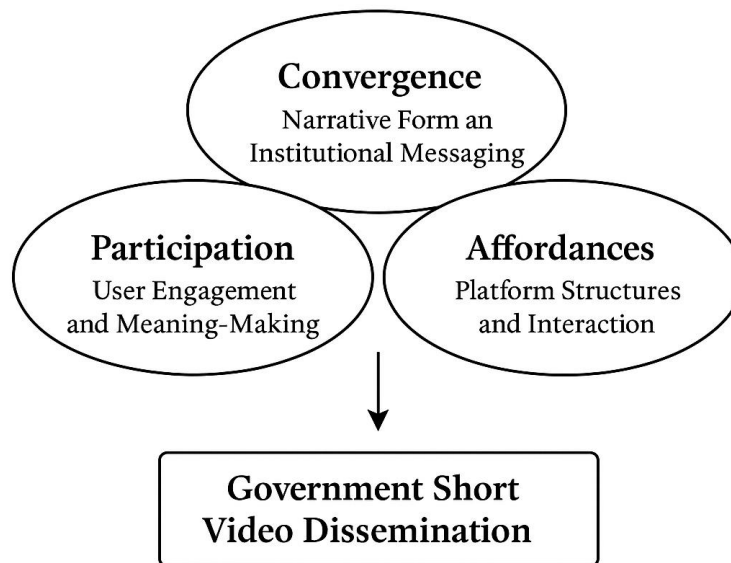


Figure 1. Integrated Convergence-Participation-Affordance (CPA) Framework

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative multi-case analysis to investigate the dissemination strategies and interactive mechanisms of government short videos across different social media platforms. Given the exploratory nature

of the research and the interpretive richness required to understand narrative construction and user engagement, a qualitative approach is particularly suitable. The research design follows an embedded case study logic, focusing on three representative government-affiliated accounts: CCTV News on TikTok (Douyin), People's Daily on WeChat Video Channel, and the Communist Youth League on Bilibili. These accounts were selected via purposive sampling based on their institutional credibility, consistent content output, and their alignment with the cultural logics of each platform—vertical short-form video, acquaintance-based interaction, and subcultural youth fandom, respectively.

4.2 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted between January and April 2024. A total of 90 short video posts (30 per platform) were selected using stratified sampling, ensuring diversity in content format (e.g., storytelling, policy animation, live broadcasts) and engagement performance. Each video was accompanied by metadata such as views, likes, shares, and comment counts. In addition, approximately 3,000 user comments were randomly sampled and anonymized to capture the sentiment and discursive practices of audience engagement. Publicly available platform policy documents and algorithmic feature descriptions were also reviewed, alongside three expert interviews with platform content moderators, conducted under conditions of anonymity. All data were collected in accordance with institutional ethical review procedures, with no personally identifiable information retained.

4.3 Analytical Strategy

The analytical process was conducted in two stages. First, thematic content analysis was performed using NVivo software, guided by the CPA (Convergence–Participation–Affordance) framework developed in this study. Codes were applied to identify stylistic convergence strategies, participatory affordances, and platform-specific interaction cues. Inter-coder reliability was ensured through the double-coding of 20% of the sample (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.81$), indicating strong agreement. Second, user comment data were analyzed using a combination of sentiment analysis (via TextBlob and SnowNLP for Chinese language content) and engagement mapping, categorizing feedback into clusters such as supportive, oppositional, humorous, and neutral. This dual-level approach enabled a triangulated understanding of how institutional narrative intent, technological architecture, and user interaction co-construct the digital performance of governance.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

All research materials were publicly accessible, and no private user data were collected. Comment data were fully anonymized, and pseudonyms were used when direct quotations were included in the analysis. The study received institutional ethics clearance and adhered to international standards for digital communication research ethics (Townsend & Wallace, 2016).

5. Findings

This section presents the empirical findings of the multi-case analysis of government short videos across TikTok (Douyin), WeChat Video Channel, and Bilibili. By integrating the CPA theoretical framework with thematic content analysis and user engagement metrics, the results provide a comparative overview of how narrative convergence, participatory design, and platform affordances shape the communication dynamics of digital governance. The analysis draws upon a dataset of 90 videos and 3,000 user comments, complemented by Figure 2 (User Engagement Type Distribution Across Platforms) and Table 1 (Platform Comparison Table), which illustrate the structural and behavioral distinctions among platforms.

5.1 TikTok (Douyin): Emotional Convergence and Algorithmic Amplification

Among the three platforms, TikTok stands out for its high-volume, algorithm-driven environment that strongly favors emotional and visually arresting content. Government-affiliated accounts such as CCTV News effectively capitalize on TikTok's architecture through convergent communication strategies—adopting meme culture, popular music, and cinematic effects to repurpose formal policy into emotionally engaging narratives. Videos typically last under 60 seconds and often include on-screen text, ambient soundtracks, and rapid editing techniques that resonate with mobile-first users and short attention spans.

As shown in Figure 2, TikTok exhibits the highest proportion of supportive ($\approx 35\%$) and humorous ($\approx 25\%$) user comments, indicating that viewers respond positively to emotionally appealing content. The affordances of TikTok—particularly its duet, repost, and algorithmic trending functions—create fertile ground for participatory remixing and real-time interaction. Videos about national celebrations, emergency responses, or youth entrepreneurship tend to go viral, benefiting from the algorithm's preference for fast engagement. However, critical comments remain marginal ($\approx 15\%$), potentially due to self-censorship or content moderation, reflecting what Zeng and Liu (2020) describe as “algorithmic governmentality.” Despite this, the participatory atmosphere, fostered by TikTok's design logic, offers the government an unprecedented opportunity to circulate emotionally charged governance narratives with high diffusion velocity.

5.2 WeChat Video Channel: Community-Centric Narratives and Deliberative Interaction

Unlike the fast-paced, visually saturated world of TikTok, WeChat Video Channel supports a more measured and community-oriented communication ecosystem. Government content on WeChat—such as from People’s Daily—tends to focus on livelihood services, health policy, regional governance, and practical guides. The narrative style often adopts documentary realism, with dialect narration, slow-paced transitions, and scenario-based problem solving. These videos are highly contextualized, drawing from the platform’s semi-private, trust-based social architecture.

According to Table 1, the dominant audience on WeChat is composed of middle-aged and older adults, many of whom use the platform to access utility-based government content. This aligns with Figure 2, where neutral and supportive comments each comprise approximately 30–35%, while humorous or critical feedback is minimal. Unlike TikTok or Bilibili, WeChat is not optimized for virality but for credibility and depth. User interaction frequently takes the form of sincere inquiries (e.g., “Where can I apply for this policy?”) or expressions of civic gratitude (e.g., “Thank you for explaining this clearly.”). The platform’s limited affordances—restricted sharing outside of closed networks and limited comment visibility—constrain the participatory dynamic but simultaneously enhance the platform’s role as a trusted policy communication hub. This reflects Medaglia and Zheng’s (2017) observation that credibility, rather than reach, may be the decisive metric in digital government communication.

5.3 Bilibili: Subcultural Integration and Youth-Led Civic Expression

On Bilibili, the government’s digital communication strategy reflects deep engagement with youth culture and fandom aesthetics. The Communist Youth League’s short videos often employ anime-inspired visuals, retro arcade sounds, and humorous narrative tropes to translate complex topics—such as constitutional reform or environmental protection—into relatable, entertaining formats. These efforts align with Jenkins’s (2006) idea of convergence culture, where users and institutions co-produce meaning through shared symbolic languages.

As seen in Figure 2, Bilibili displays a high volume of humorous ($\approx 35\%$) and critical ($\approx 25\%$) interactions, illustrating the playful but reflexive nature of user engagement. The platform’s unique affordances—especially bullet chats (danmu)—enable synchronous, horizontal discourse that unfolds in real time as users watch the video. This co-viewing experience transforms government content into a “social event,” where

meaning is negotiated, contested, or parodied by viewers. While this openness allows for wider reach and youthful appeal, it also introduces unpredictability and risk. For example, policy videos are sometimes co-opted for satire or heavily memefied, complicating the control of official discourse. Nonetheless, the presence of participatory design and the integration of subcultural references enhance bottom-up legitimacy, particularly among digitally native and politically ambivalent youth demographics.

Figure 2: User Engagement Type Distribution Across Platforms

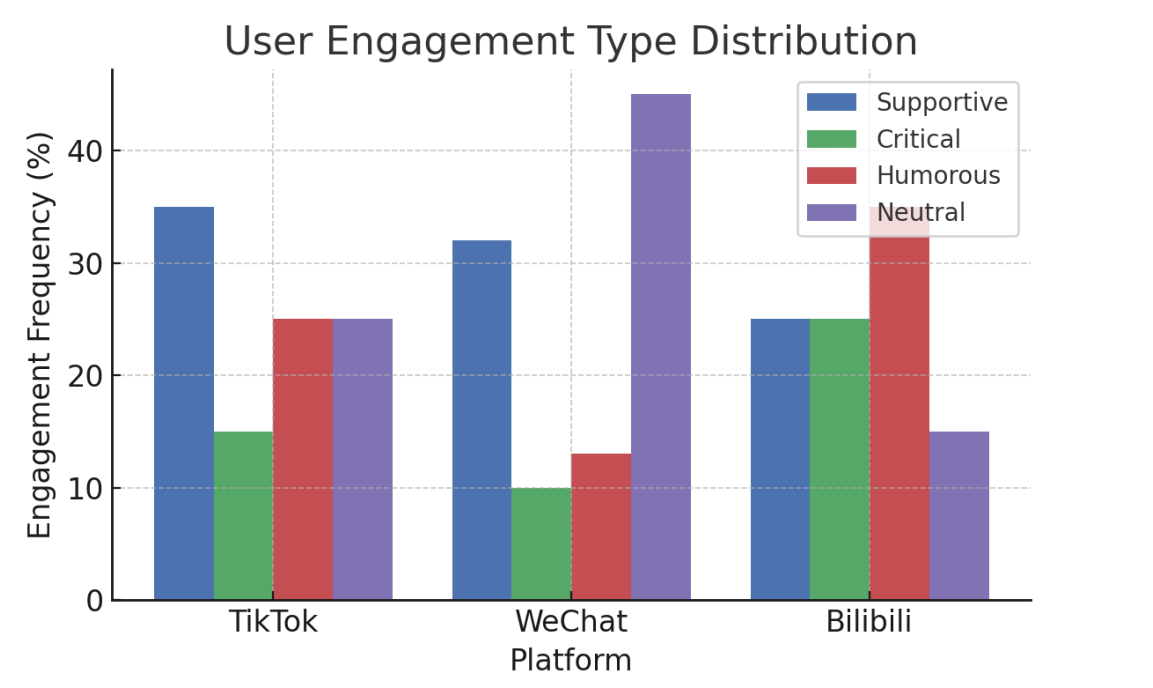


Table 1: Platform Comparison Table

Platform	Content Focus	Narrative	User	Algorithmic	Dominant
		Style	Engagement	Affordance	Audience
TikTok	Policy	Short-form,	High (likes,	Strong	General
(Douyin)	visualization,	emotionally	shares, duets)	recommendation	public,
	viral	driven		loop	mobile-first
	storytelling				users
WeChat Video	Community-	Narrative	Moderate	Friend-based	Local
Channel	focused public	depth, dialect	(comments,	sharing	residents,
	services	features	reposts)		service seekers

Bilibili	Youth-oriented civic education	Subcultural, gamified	High (comments, bullet chats)	Tag-driven discovery	Gen Z, subcultural communities
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6. Discussion

The findings of this study illustrate how government short videos on social media are deeply shaped by the triadic interaction between narrative convergence, participatory design, and digital affordances. This section discusses these findings through the lens of the CPA (Convergence–Participation–Affordance) framework and situates them within broader academic debates on digital governance, platform society, and mediated public engagement. Three central themes emerge: the differentiated logic of platform-specific governance communication, the tension between performative participation and substantive engagement, and the opportunities and constraints posed by algorithmic infrastructures.

6.1 Platform-Specific Governance Logics: One Message, Multiple Media Worlds

Although all three platforms serve as vehicles for public communication, their communicative architectures generate distinct governance dynamics. On TikTok, the government's convergence strategy involves transforming policy information into emotionally resonant, fast-paced content that aligns with platform culture. This convergence enables broad diffusion and emotional mobilization, but risks oversimplifying complex policies for entertainment value. On WeChat, communication logic is more utilitarian and trust-oriented, prioritizing clarity and credibility over virality, resonating with middle-aged users and residents in need of practical services. Bilibili, by contrast, invites a youth-driven reinterpretation of official narratives through subcultural lenses, creating unpredictable but authentic civic dialogue.

This asymmetry challenges the assumption of a “one-size-fits-all” digital government strategy. As Chadwick (2017) and van Dijck et al. (2018) argue, media hybridity necessitates adaptive communication strategies tailored to platform affordances and audience culture. Our findings affirm this view, suggesting that effective digital governance must balance message consistency with aesthetic and functional flexibility. This implies a shift from centralized command-and-control messaging to a “polyphonic governance model,” where multiple platform voices and logics co-exist under a unified institutional narrative framework.

6.2 Performative vs. Substantive Participation

While social media platforms promise two-way engagement, not all forms of participation are equally meaningful. On TikTok, the abundance of supportive and humorous engagement often reflects performative participation—interactions driven more by platform incentives and affective resonance than by critical civic deliberation. This confirms Papacharissi's (2015) notion of "affective publics," where emotional expression substitutes for structured dialogue. WeChat, with its semi-private architecture, facilitates more substantive engagement, where users pose questions and seek clarification on real policies. Bilibili presents a hybrid scenario: users remix and challenge official narratives, producing a unique form of "reflexive participation" that is both critical and creative.

However, the presence of interaction alone does not guarantee democratic legitimacy. As Fung (2015) and Kaye et al. (2021) caution, participatory infrastructures can mask unequal power relations if governments merely simulate responsiveness without incorporating feedback into decision-making. The findings thus highlight the need for governments to move beyond visibility and toward accountability—by incorporating user feedback into policy cycles and co-creating content with platform communities.

6.3 Algorithmic Infrastructure: Affordance and Ambiguity

Digital affordances such as trending algorithms, recommendation feeds, bullet chats, and duet functions enable unique forms of civic interaction. Yet, these same affordances also constrain engagement by privileging emotionally charged, non-critical content. On TikTok, the virality logic often amplifies content with high affective salience but suppresses dissent or complexity, a phenomenon consistent with Tufekci's (2015) critique of "algorithmic harms." Bilibili's bullet chats foster dynamic expression, but their speed and ephemerality may dilute deliberation. WeChat's limited public visibility supports credibility but restricts dialogic potential.

This underscores the ambiguous role of algorithmic systems in digital governance. As Zeng and Liu (2020) argue, algorithmic governmentality can obscure state control through decentralized, data-driven mechanisms. Our findings suggest that while platform affordances offer new tools for engagement, they also reproduce digital hierarchies that may marginalize slow, critical, or minority perspectives. To mitigate these effects, governments must not only adapt to platforms but also push for platform accountability, such as transparency in algorithmic curation and space for counter-narratives.

In summary, the discussion reveals that while government short videos offer unprecedented opportunities for public communication, their effectiveness depends on platform-specific adaptation, commitment to authentic engagement, and awareness of algorithmic constraints. These findings contribute to ongoing scholarly efforts to rethink digital democracy in the age of platform society and offer concrete directions for building more inclusive and responsive communication systems in digital governance.

7. Conclusion

Government short videos have rapidly evolved into a critical instrument of digital governance, reshaping how policy information is conveyed, interpreted, and acted upon in the platform society. Through a comparative multi-case analysis of TikTok, WeChat Video Channel, and Bilibili, this study demonstrates that effective digital public communication depends not only on content quality but also on how well institutions navigate the distinct participatory cultures, algorithmic infrastructures, and audience expectations of each platform. The proposed CPA (Convergence–Participation–Affordance) framework has provided a systematic lens for examining the structural and interactional dimensions of government video dissemination. The findings reveal that while TikTok enables emotional convergence and wide reach, WeChat fosters credibility and practical interaction, and Bilibili encourages subcultural adaptation and youth-led reflexivity. Together, these insights offer valuable guidance for policy innovation and institutional reform in the digital age.

7.1 Policy Implications

The study suggests three key policy directions for enhancing the governance value of short video communication:

First, governments should adopt a platform-differentiated strategy that aligns message form and tone with the affordances and user demographics of each platform. This requires moving beyond uniform content repurposing toward tailored design that optimizes impact and inclusivity.

Second, to ensure genuine civic engagement, digital communication units within public institutions should establish feedback integration mechanisms. These can include real-time comment analysis systems, participatory content co-creation (e.g., contests, citizen reporters), and periodic content reviews informed by user insights.

Third, regulatory attention must be directed toward platform transparency and accountability, especially

regarding algorithmic biases, shadow banning, or content suppression that may distort public discourse. Collaborative governance arrangements between governments, platforms, and civil society actors can help ensure that digital infrastructures support pluralism and democratic participation.

These strategies require not only technical capacity-building but also cultural transformation within public institutions—one that values open dialogue, agility, and responsiveness as foundational pillars of twenty-first-century governance.

7.2 Future Research Directions

While this study offers significant contributions, several limitations point to opportunities for future research. First, the dataset focused on three major platforms in China; comparative studies involving non-Chinese platforms such as YouTube Shorts, Instagram Reels, or Facebook Watch would enrich the understanding of cross-cultural digital governance models. Second, future research could expand beyond qualitative case studies to include computational analysis of larger datasets—incorporating network analysis, sentiment dynamics over time, and A/B testing of content formats.

Third, the psychological and cognitive dimensions of audience reception merit deeper exploration. Investigating how short videos influence public trust, policy comprehension, or behavioral intent across demographic groups would offer actionable insights for both communication design and policy framing. Finally, more attention should be paid to ethical considerations and data justice—including how marginalized voices are represented (or excluded) in algorithmically mediated public discourse.

In sum, this study underscores the urgent need for more interdisciplinary, comparative, and ethically grounded research at the intersection of media, technology, and governance. Only through such efforts can digital communication evolve from a tactical tool into a transformative force for democratic renewal.

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