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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Role of Information Quality and Source Credibility in Promoting Public Engagement via Chinese Government TikTok in Public Health Emergencies

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ABSTRACT

Social media has been widely used by governments in public health emergencies to explain critical situations in a timely manner, provide health information, and encourage public engagement. Public engagement via Chinese government social media is challenging during a crisis. The study specifically investigates the impact of information quality, source credibility on public engagement through government social media, and the mediating role of trust. The elaboration likelihood model provided the theoretical foundation for this study. The data in this study was collected from youths aged 18-40 with TikTok accounts in Hebei Province, China. The findings showed that information quality and source credibility have a significantly positive relationship with public engagement via the Chinese government's TikTok. Findings also revealed that there was a mediating effect of trust in the relationship between source credibility, information quality, and public engagement via government TikTok.

INTRODUCTION

During a public health crisis, governments must be able to communicate effectively with their citizens to foster trust and encourage two-way engagement to decrease uncertainty and social anxiety. Particularly during the COVID-19 crisis, the massive flow of health information that was involved made communication a vital factor in saving lives (Finset et al., 2020). Social media allows for immediate, continuous dialogue and content creation ability between organizations and the public and has become an increasingly prominent mechanism for public engagement (Khan et al., 2021). Public engagement via social media is a process of communicative behavior that involves both organizations and the public exchanging fundamental facts, values, and viewpoints (Men & Tsai, 2013; Ekman & Amn, 2012).

Social media has become a vital communication tool for public health organizations and governments, allowing them to quickly share important information, make informed decisions, and communicate with the general population (Li et al., 2022). Furthermore, by engaging with the public via social media, the government may improve the populace's understanding of its activities and how to manage a crisis (Chatfield & Reddick, 2018). TikTok has emerged as a vital information and communication platform for the general public and government organizations (Basch et al., 2020). According to data released by Statista (2024), TikTok has gained over 4.92 billion global downloads and has over 1.582 billion users as of April 2024. It is currently ranked as the fifth most popular online social media platform worldwide. Chinese government agencies have used TikTok to interact with

the public and post statements or notifications to address public issues (Li et al., 2022). A CNNIC report released in 2020 indicated that by the end of 2020, the number of Chinese governments' TikTok had reached 26,100, and all 32 provinces had opened them. Moreover, public health organizations disseminate health knowledge and COVID-19 information through TikTok. For example, Chinese Provincial Health Committees and some health agencies have registered official accounts on TikTok to disseminate health knowledge and public information (Zhu et al., 2024). Similarly, Li et al. (2022) clearly showed that the TikTok platform and public health experts worked together to create an information center to offer users professional and authoritative information regarding COVID-19 and scientific knowledge about epidemic prevention, especially during the COVID-19 crisis.

Over the past decade, China's government has shifted its approach to social media from traditional political propaganda to developing more active engagement and transparent communication with the public. However, the effectiveness of two-way interactive communication within government social media is not positive and limited, primarily due to the superficial nature of the interactions, such as the restricted number of comments, privacy and security concerns, trustworthiness and transparency, and information risk (Chen et al., 2021). Many organizations continue to perceive social media primarily as an additional channel for dissemination of information instead of a mechanism to foster public engagement (Wukich, 2016; Neely & Collins, 2018). Furthermore, in China, where social media is extensively restricted, information regarding the COVID-19 outbreak is strictly controlled by the authorities. These facts somewhat limit public engagement and meaningful conversation between organizations and the public (Chen et al., 2020). These issues ultimately decrease public engagement online (Shah & Wei, 2022). Consequently, it is essential to comprehend methods for enhancing online public engagement during a crisis.

Many academic studies have focused on this phenomenon, and the amount of literature on online public engagement has grown steadily over the past few years (Lee, Tsohou, & Choi, 2017; Chen et al., 2021). Previous studies have mainly identified specific factors in terms of content topics, interaction characteristics, and message styles that influence public engagement online (Weismueller et al., 2020). As reported by Hoque et al. (2022), tweets from the government that included the action function had the greatest levels of engagement in terms of average retweets and likes across all accounts. The messages from Saudi Arabia's public health authorities regarding public reassurance, warnings, and uncertainty reduction were highly engaged on Twitter (Alhassan et al., 2021). However, these factors that are considered offer a limited explanation as to how public engagement with the government works during a crisis from varying perspectives. The public's information needs may be stronger during a public health crisis than they would be under normal circumstances. These demands will motivate them to concentrate on information factors in order to process information and achieve satisfaction (Chen et al., 2021).

Moreover, public trust is a vital factor that can influence engagement by the public (Tangi et al., 2021; Arshad & Khurram, 2020). The study conducted by Khan et al. (2021) found a strong relationship between public intentions to access government e-services and the level of trust. The increased accessibility of information from government agencies' social media platforms is a reliable means of establishing long-term trust among the public (Tangi et al., 2021). Prior research has not provided a comprehensive understanding of how trust can be cultivated. Furthermore, there have also been suggestions for further research into the trust behavior of the public towards the government on social media platforms (Warren et al., 2014), especially to identify the mediating role of trust.

Due to the existence of numerous research gaps, this study employs the elaboration likelihood model and trust based on information quality and source credibility to construct a conceptual framework. The study also takes into account public trust's mediating effect on public engagement behavior. Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Public Engagement via Social Media

The processes of public engagement have significantly improved and generated a new category of users called digital citizens or e-citizens via social media (Guidry et al., 2017). Public engagement on social media is defined as an effective state of psychological motivation that results in extra-role behaviors (Huang et al., 2021; Kang, 2014) and how individuals' respond to social media content and what they do with it (Smith & Gallicano, 2015). Previous research claimed that public engagement on social media reflects the public's attitudes and behaviors towards online content, including activities such as posting, searching, and liking (Tsai & Men, 2018). These three elements indicate users' subjective motivation to share content because they define all human interactions via social media (Dong & Lian, 2022). Kim and Yang (2017) explained the differences between these three characteristics from a communication perspective. Sharing on social media is categorized as the highest level, commenting as the middle level, and liking as the lowest level, and this is used to measure the level of engagement in social media.

Recent research has primarily considered public engagement on social media as a unidimensional concept that emphasizes behavioral dimensions (Chen, 2020), but the substantial significance of public engagement depends not only on the public's comments, liking, and sharing actions but also on their active generation of content for the organization on social media (Ji et al., 2019; Men & Tsai, 2013). This content can reflect the public's multi-layered perceptions and emotions about the organization through their natural reactions in real-time (Huang et al., 2021). Chen (2020) investigated the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of engagement. Cognitive engagement is the processing of cognitive information, while affective engagement is the display of commitment, zeal, or attachment (Schamari & Schaefers, 2015). Li et al. (2021) employed the sum of shares, comments, and likes, as well as the relevancy of public comments to postings, to quantify the breadth and depth of public engagement in social media. This feature marks a fundamental shift in how information is shared between the public and government entities. It facilitates two-way interactions between the public and various government entities (Agostino & Arnaboldi, 2015).

Researchers have been attempting to measure public engagement from various angles and vantage points. In this study, public engagement via social media is defined as individuals' behaviors employing government social media platforms to disseminate information and gain social support, including behaviors such as liking, sharing, commenting, and uploading relevant content (Chen et al., 2020; Shah & Wei, 2022).

2.2 Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

In this study, a framework was created using the ELM, which were employed to analyze how government agencies can utilize social media as a tool for improving their services and public engagement. Cacioppo and Petty developed the dual process ELM of persuasion concept in 1986 to explain how intentions and attitudes change and develop. It also aims to provide an extensive overview of the different processes involved in the presentation of persuasive arguments, categorizing and organizing these elements (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

The ELM posits that fine processing occurs along a continuum of a person's cognitive functioning, which is the product of changes in attitude triggered by communication. This continuum can be categorized into two routes; one is a systematic, thoughtful approach that considers the quality of the information presented and engages in sophisticated cognitive thinking, the central path. Central path processes are those that call for a significant amount of mental effort, and therefore they are more likely to be prevalent under circumstances that encourage a high level of elaboration.

Central route procedures require careful examination of persuasive communication to assess the validity of the arguments. In these circumstances, an individual's distinct cognitive reactions to the message determine the persuasive result. The peripheral path, on the other hand, requires a relatively

lower level of cognitive effort due to individuals relying on heuristic cues, including the utilization of popularity, source credibility, and source attractiveness, to affect their intentions and attitudes (Kang & Namkung, 2019; Xu & Warkentin, 2020).

The ELM claimed that argument quality is the key factor that determines the level of informational influence when there is a high possibility of elaboration (Petty & Cacioppo 1986). Peripheral cues significantly enhance the influence of persuasion when an individual is unable to fully comprehend the message in a communication (Sussman & Siegal, 2003).

Prior studies have applied ELM to the field of socio-psychology to describe how people process information and how they form their attitudes toward behavior (Bhattacherjee & Sanford, 2006; Shah & Wei, 2022). Based on the ELM of persuasion theory, Lee et al. (2017) argued that preference match, location match, social proof, and authority are identified as persuasive variables in the context of civic engagement, attracting more attention, longer elaboration time, and more participation. Chen et al. (2022) came to the conclusion that central cues (content improtance and content theme) and peripheral cues (media richness, social media capital, social media strategy, and source credibility) had a beneficial influence on public sharing of fact-checks posted by the government on Sina Weibo. However, the literature lacks studies that explain how to apply the ELM of persuasion to public engagement in public health emergencies (Lee et al., 2017). COVID-19 mitigation measures depend significantly on persuading individuals to adjust their behavior; hence, it is essential to figure out how to enhance the efficacy of this persuasion. This study employed information quality and source credibility of ELM to examine the public's positive cognitive process of public engagement in public health emergencies.

2.3 Information quality

Information quality refers to the persuasive power of arguments that are used in an informational presentation (Bhattacherjee & Sanford, 2006). This determines how well an individual can comprehend the information (Zhou, 2012; Goh & Chi, 2017; Li et al., 2022). The information argument components include comprehensiveness, accuracy, timeliness, and relevance (Goh & Chi, 2017; Chang et al., 2020). In the context of engagement with government social media, the information quality involves evaluating the timeliness, completeness, and accuracy being disseminated by government agencies (Bonsón et al., 2015).

Information quality is the primary factor influencing individuals' attitudes and intentions. High-quality information is more likely to be trusted due to its capacity to enhance sense-making and facilitate more accurate decision-making (Pee & Lee, 2016). The public tends to share and accept information that accurately and timely reflects the developments of a situation in the mass of information on social media (Emerson, 2020). Consequently, the ability of government to quickly distribute accurate and timely information helps reduce information uncertainties and public concerns (Zhang et al., 2017).

Many previous studies have shown that information quality significantly contributes to the behavioral of public engagement (Filieri & McLeay, 2014; Xie et al., 2017). Dessart et al. (2017) believed information of high-quality in social media can help people gain a deeper understanding and enhance their positive attitudes of how to engage with online communities. Li et al. (2022) looked into the positive effect of information timeliness on public engagement during the COVID-19 crisis. Moreover, according to Shah and Wei (2022), having convincing and high-quality information can help decrease the risk of negative perceptions about the COVID-19 crisis and increase online engagement.

H1 Information quality has a positive relationship with public engagement via Chinese government TikTok.

2.4 Source credibility

ELM suggests that source credibility is strongly linked to changes in attitudes and beliefs (Bhattacherjee & Sanford, 2006). Source credibility is determined by the extent to which individuals consider it to be reliable, trustworthy, and competent (Bhattacherjee & Sanford, 2006). During the COVID-19 crisis, the public increasingly utilized online platforms for searching or disseminating crisis information (Weismueller et al., 2020). In addition, misinformation is disseminated rapidly and widely via social media platforms, which makes it substantially more challenging for the general public to obtain useful messages (Liu et al., 2012). Additionally, when the public perceives social media posts to be from highly credible individuals or organizations, they are more likely to confirm their value (Chen et al., 2021).

Research showed that individuals are more willing to adhere to direct communications from authoritative sources (Liu et al., 2016). The local government was the most important source of information when it came to responding to disasters (Avery, 2017; Kim et al., 2022). The public places a high value on the credibility of a message's source because it shows that the person or organization behind the information is trustworthy (Yin & Zhang, 2020).

Prior studies show that credible sources have a significant persuasive effect on public engagement (Pee, 2012; Chen et al., 2021; Shah & Wei, 2022). According to Pee (2012), social media users prefer to trust information that they come across through trustworthy sources before engaging with it. Chen et al. (2021) noted that source credibility significantly impacts the dissemination of government information based on their analysis of the information about 413 Chinese government official accounts on Sina Weibo. In addition, Shah and Wei (2022) found a positive correlation between source credibility and online public engagement through a questionnaire survey involving 630 SNS users.

H2 Source credibility has a positive relationship with public engagement via Chinese government TikTok.

2.5 Trust as a mediator

Trust is considered by many scholars as a complex, multifaceted, and ambiguous concept (Cheema, 2011; Liu & Raine, 2016). Consequently, the impression of trust may have numerous significances. Trust in government refers to citizens' perspectives and their confidence in the organization's adequate knowledge to make decisions, meet its responsibilities, and act in the best interest of society (Mansoor, 2021). Moreover, Arshad and Khurram (2020) have described public trust in government as attitudes towards government agencies influenced by individuals' assessments of expected effects from the use of social media in government.

Prior research has shown the positive relationship between trust and public engagement. It has also identified the antecedents of trust in government on social media from three primary perspectives: information quality and information sources (Khan et al., 2021; Shah & Wei, 2022).

ELM suggests that high-quality arguments represent high information reliability and persuasiveness of arguments (Chang, 2020). By disseminating timely and accurate information on social media, citizens can gain a clearer picture of what the government is doing to meet the needs of the people, thereby increasing public trust in their government (Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006). Moreover, individuals may have more intense information requirements than usual during public health emergencies. These demands will lead them to concentrate on content-related central paths in order to find fulfillment and to choose a central path for information processing (Chen et al., 2020). Consequently, it is important for governments to quickly disseminate correct information to the public during a crisis, as the public critically judges the credibility of information sources based on the timeliness of information (Gesser-Edelsburg, 2014).

According to ELM, the peripheral route involves less cognitive effort, and the formation of receptive behavior relies on cues about the target behavior, such as identifying with sources or reliance on decision heuristics (Chaiken & Trope, 1999). The content on social media is updated quickly during times of crisis, while too much information overwhelms audiences. Considering the lack of time and energy to research the specifics of the posts, one should concentrate on peripheral clues such as the reliability of sources (Xu & Zhang, 2018). Source credibility can also generate expectations about the information's validity, which in turn affects how people trust information on social media (Yang et al., 2020). Moreover, information posted by government agencies on social media concerning significant decisions via social media is regarded as a credible source, hence enhancing the public's trust level (Arshad & Khurram, 2020). Similarly, Nabi, Zohora, & Misbauddin (2023) argued that the government has become an influential source of information by providing a large amount of information about COVID-19 through social media and updating it promptly, thus greatly increasing trust and engagement.

H3 The relationship between information quality and public engagement is mediated by trust.

H4 The relationship between source credibility and public engagement is mediated by trust.

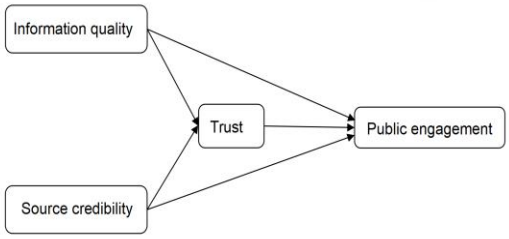

Figure 1 : Conceptual Framework

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Measurement

The questionnaire was developed and items from past studies were modified for this study, which was divided into three parts to test hypothesis. The first section of the questionnaire included demographic questions regarding the respondents. The demographic questions included age, gender, income level, and education level.

The second part tries to find out the interviewees' usage habits of TikTok and their attention to the government's TikTok. These questions examine the time spent browsing TikTok every day, whether participants follow the government TikTok.

The third part of the questionnaire was designed to study the questions related to the variables, namely information quality, source credibility, trust, and public engagement. These questions were put forward with a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". For details for all the items, see Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 : The measuring items

Items	Measures	sources
Information Quality		Filieri et al (2015) Lee et al (2002)
IQ1	The information about the COVID-19 crisis posted by the organization on TikTok is timely.	
IQ2	This information about the COVID-19 crisis posted by the organization on TikTok is objective and based on facts.	

IQ3	This information about the COVID-19 crisis posted by the organization on TikTok is easy to understand.	
IQ4	This information about the COVID-19 crisis posted by the organization on TikTok has sufficient breadth and depth.	
Source Credibility		
SC1	The organization posted COVID-19-related information on TikTok is credible.	Bhattacherjee & Sanford (2006) Filieri et al (2015)
SC2	The organization posted COVID-19-related information on TikTok is knowledgeable.	
SC3	The organization posted COVID-19-related information on TikTok is experienced.	
SC4	The organization posted COVID-19-related information on TikTok is reliable.	
SC5	This organization has the ability to understand and meet my needs during COVID-19.	
Trust		
T1	I believe that organization are trustworthy.	Teo et al (2008) Khan et al (2021)
T2	I expect that organizations on TikTok will not take advantage of me.	
T3	This organizations' TikTok seems to be honest and truthful to me.	
T4	I believe that TikTok has enough safeguards to make me feel comfortable using it to engage in organization.	
Public Engagement		
PE1	I like, comment, and share information on organization TikTok to help people during COVID-19 crisis.	Shah & Lu (2022) Men & Tsai (2013)
PE2	I follow official organizations TikTok.	
PE3	I engage in conversations on government TikTok (e.g., sending private messages) hoping to adopt suggestions or solve problems.	
PE4	I exchange information related to COVID-19 crisis on organization TikTok to seek or provide help to others in decision-making process.	
PE5	I recommend organization TikTok to my contacts.	

3.2 Data collection

This study conducted a cross-sectional online survey between February 1, 2024, and March 30, 2024. Respondents were ultimately selected from hospitals, universities, companies, and communities in Hebei Province according to these criteria: 1). Aged between 18-40 years old. According to the All-China Youth Federation (ACYF), a coalition of youth groups with the Communist Youth League of China as the core force, the age of youth is defined as between 18 and 40 years old. In addition, official statistics released by TikTok show that young users are more active. As of June 2023, the proportion of TikTok users between the ages of 18 and 40 has exceeded 70%. 2). Be a registered user of TikTok app. Have visited official information from the Chinese government on TikTok during the COVID-19 crisis, 4). Lives in Hebei Province, China.

This study employed a non-probability sampling technique known as purposive sampling. Due to the huge population size of Hebei, it is impossible to list all the people in China who have registered TikTok accounts and are familiar with the government TikTok information for this study. It is difficult to establish a complete sampling frame. In addition, in purposive sampling, researchers selectively choose cases for inclusion in the sample based on their assessment of typicality. They can then create a sample that meets their specific demands in this manner (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2013).

To make sure that the sample was sufficiently representative of Hebei Province, the formula of Taro Yamane, 2003, with a confidence level of 95% and a p-value of 0.05, was employed by the researchers to determine the sample size. According to the seventh national census bulletin released by the National Bureau of Statistics on May 11, 2021, the total population of Hebei Province aged 18-40 is 21.44 million. Therefore, the sample to be surveyed is around 400 participants. This study was planned to collect more data than the minimum required sample size. Finally, 630 people were asked to respond to the questionnaire. 614 respondents answered the questionnaire and returned it. The fairly high response rate in this study leads to a larger data sample, smaller confidence intervals around the sample, as well as a more powerful statistical procedure (Rogelberg & Stanton, 2007). Therefore, these questionnaires from 614 respondents will be used to analyze the data.

3.3 DATA ANALYSIS

Statistical analyses was conducted utilizing Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) and Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Descriptive and inferential statistics will be used in data analysis. Descriptive statistics are regarded as the initial step in data analysis since they provide a basic description of the people and situations in research (Walker, 2005).

Moreover, inferential statistical analysis was employed to identify, evaluate, and test potential correlations between variables. First, The study performed Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) for each component, including source credibility (SC), information quality (IQ), trust, and public engagement (PE), to determine the efficacy of indicators in measuring specific constructs.

Finally, the structural equation modeling (SEM) technique was adopted with AMOS 26 to evaluate the proposed model. Since the focus of this study is to empirically validate the relationships between different variables based on theoretically based assumptions, CBSEM was considered to be the appropriate approach of SEM for this study. It has two main components: the measurement model and the structural model. The measurement model establishes the connection between observed variables and latent variables, whereas the structural model evaluates the proposed relationships. Additionally, the reliability and validity of various constructs are evaluated using factors including factor loadings, average variance explained (AVE), Cronbach's alpha, and composite reliability (CR). Following, five goodness-of-fit indices were used in this study including the parsimonious fit index Chisq/df, the incremental fit indices CFl and TLI, and the absolute fit indices RMSEA and GFl to assess model fit. Moreover, to test the mediating effect of trust, a bootstrap method with 5000 resamples was employed (95% percentile confidence).

4 RESULTS

4.1 Demographic profiles of respondents

The results show that 55.4% of youths were female and 44.6% of youths were male. In terms of age, 48.5% of the youth were in the 18-23-year-old range. 66.3% of the youths had a Bachelor's degree; in addition, 17.7% of the youths had a Master's degree. 53.7% of the respondents were full-time students, and the percentages of self-employed and part-time employed were 6.4% and 7.3%, respectively. Table 4.1 summarizes the demographic profiles of participants.

Table 4.1 : Distribution of youth by demographic characteristics

Profile		Frequency	Percentage(%)
Gender			
	Male	378	61.6
	Female	236	38.4
Age			
	18-23	297	48.5

	24-29	102	16.4
	30-34	120	19.6
	35-40	95	15.5
Education level			
	Senior High School or Below	50	8.1
	Diploma	49	8
	Bachelor's Degree	401	65.3
	Master's Degree	103	16.8
	Doctor of Philosophy	11	1.8
Employment status			
	Temporary/Part-time Employment	26	4.2
	Full-time Employment	199	32.4
	Self-employed	47	7.7
	Full-time Student	298	48.5
	Unemployed	44	7.2

4.2 Validity and reliability

The CFA was conducted independently for each latent variable in preparation for SEM analysis. Table 4.2 presents the results of the evaluation of the various construct fit indices.

Convergent validity and discriminant validity are the two categories of constructs' validity. Convergent validity of this study examines the degree to which a measurement or a variable is related to other measures of variables in predictable ways (Dunn, 2001). There are three ways to evaluate convergent validity: Factor Loading, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Construct Reliability (CR) (Hair et al., 2010).

The standardized factor loading value recommended for each is 0.5 or higher, and high factor loadings on a factor indicate high convergent validity (Hair et al., 2010). In this study, all of the factor loading values exceeded 0.50, fulfilling the criteria. Moreover, convergent validity was identified based on AVE, which can be obtained using standardized factor loadings. Convergent validity was higher than the cutoff value of 0.50 for all constructs, meaning that the constructs explained most of the variance (Hair et al., 2010). The findings demonstrate that all constructs show an AVE ranging from 0.809 to 0.883, exceeding the cutoff value of 0.5.

The measurement model's composite reliability aids in assessing the accuracy of measuring the study's latent constructs (Awang, 2015). This is regarded as an additional determinant of convergence validity. CR can be achieved by the value of 0.7 or greater. In this study, all the CR values had met the recommended criteria.

Table 4.2 : CR, AVE and Cronbach's α

Variables	Items	Factor Loading	CR(>0.7)	AVE (>0.5)	Cronbach's α
Information Quality	IQ4	0.943	0.961	0.862	0.961
	IQ3	0.922			
	IQ2	0.943			
	IQ1	0.905			
Sourcec Credibility	SC5	0.910	0.974	0.883	0.974
	SC4	0.95			
	SC3	0.956			
	SC2	0.956			
	SC1	0.925			
Trust	T4	0.939	0.959	0.854	0.958

	T3	0.940			
	T2	0.880			
	T1	0.936			
Public Engagement	PE5	0.887	0.955	0.809	0.957
	PE4	0.916			
	PE3	0.884			
	PE2	0.908			
	PE1	0.903			

Discriminant validity is determined by the extent to which the variety measures that are not highly correlated with one another are actually distinct. This is done by comparing the AVE value with the correlation coefficients of those constructs (Hair et al., 2010). The square root of a given construct's AVE should exceed the other correlation coefficients related to that construct in this mechanism (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). As results show in Table 4.3 for the factor correlation matrix, all absolute values of correlations were lower than the square root of AVE. Therefore, the model does not raise any discriminant validity concerns, and the discriminant validity is established for the measurement model of the study. Concurrently, all constructions have Cronbach's alpha values between 0.957 and 0.961, which is a positive indicator of reliability.

Table 4.3 : Discriminant validity

Construct	**PE**	**Trust**	**SC**	**IQ**
Public engagement (PE)	**0.899**			
Trust	0.802	**0.924**		
Sourcec credibility(SC)	0.741	0.843	**0.939**	
Information quality(IQ)	0.72	0.801	0.838	**0.928**

Note: The diagonal values (in bold) are square root of AVE of each construct

4.3 Test of the measurement model

The goodness-of-fit indices for the measurement model are evaluated. GFI, CFl, and TLI should be larger than 0.9. In addition, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) should be less than 0.08 (Hair et al., 2010). X^2/df should be less than 5. The results confirm that the final measurement model achieved good fit with GFI=0.915, CFI=0.980, TLI=0.977, IFI=0.980, RMSEA=0.053, X^2/df =2.707.

4.4 Test of the structural model

Like the measurement model, the structural model must also satisfy the goodness-of-fit index requirement to confirm that the model is fit for analysis. X^2/df of 2.744, GFI of 0.928,TLI of 0.980, CFI of 0.982, and IFI of 0.983 are within recommendations. In addition, based on RMSEA with a value of 0.053 which is less than the recommended value 0.08. All the indices met the recommended criteria of goodness of fit. Consequently, structural model of the study was also fit for further analysis.

4.5 Direct effect

As shown in Figure 2, There was a statistically significant positive relationship between information quality and public engagement via Chinese government TikTok with the measure of $\beta = 0.325$, $p < 0.001$, as shown in Table 4.4, hence H1 is supported.

Source credibility also has a significant effect on public engagement via Chinese government TikTok with a magnitude of $\beta = 0.462$, $p < 0.001$, leading to accepting H2.

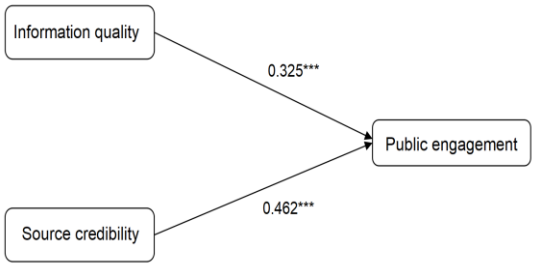

Figure 2. Main effect. ***$p < 0.001$.

Table 4.4 : Hypothesis testing on direct effect

Hypothesis	Path	Estimate	Beta	p Value	Decision
H1	IQ→PE	0.320	0.325	p < 0.001	Supported
H2	SC→PE	0.487	0.462	p < 0.001	Supported

4.6 Mediation effect

In order to determine whether trust mediates the relationship between information quality, source credibility, and public engagement, this research constructed the mediation model using AMOS (as shown in Figure 3). The overall fit statistics of the model indicate a good fit: $X^2/df = 2.80$, GFI = 0.937, NFI = 0.902, CFI = 0.985, TLI = 0.982, RMSEA = 0.054.

As shown in Figure 3, in the path of information quality→trust→public engagement, information quality has a significant positive effect on trust (β = 316, p <0.001), and trust has a significant positive effect on public engagement (β = 0.556, p < 0.001). Meanwhile, information quality also has a positive impact on public engagement (β = 0.149, p < 0.001), and after adding trust as a mediating variable, the path coefficient decreased from 0.325 to 0.149, but it is still significant (p = 0.006). And the indirect effect was statistically significant at 95% CI (0.108, 0.277), as shown in Table 4.5. This shows a positive relationship and the absence of zero value in the bootstrap lower level confidence interval (LLCl) and the upper level confidence interval (ULCl). It suggests that trust partially mediates the relationship between information quality and public engagement.Therefore, H3 is supported.

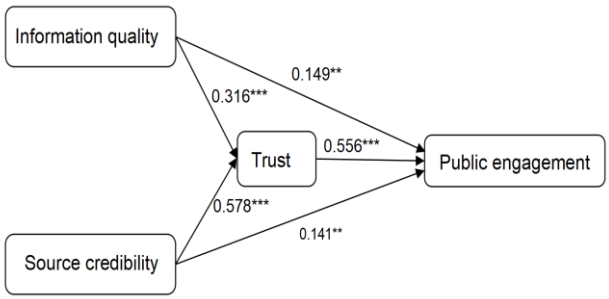

Figure 3. Mediation model. **$p < 0.01$. ***$p < 0.001$.

In terms of the path of source credibility →trust →public engagement, the source credibility has a positive and significant impact on trust (β = 0.578, p < 0.001). Similarly, trust has a positive and significant impact on public engagement (β = 0.556, p <0.001). It can be seen that after adding trust as the mediation variable, the path coefficient of source credibility on public engagement decreased from 0.487 to 0.141 and became insignificant (p = 0.20). And the indirect effect was statistically significant at 95% CI (0.108, 0.277), as shown in Table 4.5. This indicates that trust partially mediates the relationship between information quality and public engagement and H4 is supported.

Table 4.5 : Hypothesis testing on mediation

Path	Estimate	Beta	p	95%Bootstrap BCCI		Decision
				Lower	Upper	
H3:IQ→TRUST→PE	0.148	0.149	0.009	0.108	0.277	supported
H4:SC→TRUST→PE	0.140	0.141	0.023	0.233	0.452	Supported

Note: Beta:Standardized Estimate. P: P value.

5 DISCUSSION

This study sought to determine the relationship between information quality and source credibility towards public engagement, as well as the mediating role of trust.

5.1 Correlation between predictors and public engagement

Based on the results, information quality and source credibilityare associated with public engagement in a positive manner.

Regarding H1, the findings show that there was a significant positive relationship between information quality and public engagement via Chinese government TikTok, which provided evidence to support the findings of previous studies that information quality was a significant predictor of public engagement via government social media (Shah & Wei, 2022; Dessart et al., 2017). According to Dessart et al. (2017), users are provided with a wealth of knowledge that increases their positive attitudes about online engagement when they are exposed to high-quality material in online communities. Shah and Wei (2022) suggested that the public's online engagement may be increased during the COVID-19 crisis, if they were provided with information supported by high-quality arguments that reduced their perceptions of risk.

Similarly, in response to H2, this study found that the relationship between youth's perception of the government as a source of information and engagement is significant. This result is supported by prior studies (Yang et al., 2020). According to Chen et al. (2021), the public prefers to accept official sources' direct guidance during times of crisis or tragedy and considers local government sources as a reference. Yang et al. (2020) concluded that the public preferred the information released by the local government in Wuhan during COVID-19 because it was closely related to the public themselves.

5.2 The mediating role of trust

The analysis result has shown that there was a mediating effect of trust in the relationship between information quality, source credibility, and public engagement via government TikTok. Therefore, H3 and H4 are supported. Based on this research, it can be concluded that trust is an indispensable factor that influences public engagement during a crisis. When government agencies disseminate invaluable information on Tiktok in times of crisis, on the one hand, the public can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the actions taken by the government that are aimed at protecting its citizens, as well as the accuracy and significance of the various decisions made (Purwanto, Zuiderwijk, & Janssen, 2020). On the other hand, the high quality of information posted by the government increases the transparency of this effort and reduces the misunderstanding of the citizens, enabling them to comprehend the reasons behind the decisions and to evaluate the performance of government entities, thus building their trust. Furthermore, during the COVID-19 crisis, there was an overabundance of advertisements and too much misleading health information and even rumors on social media, the timely release of clear and accurate information by the governmental part that clarifies what is known and what is not known to debunk the mistakes and

false information helps the public to cope with the uncertainty efficiently, which in turn increases the trust of the public.

As suggested by Williams et al. (2018), it is crucial to develop trust between government and the public before a disaster occurs, and the public needs trust in order to receive information from sources through accessible channels. This is in keeping with prior research (Yang et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2021). Source credibility affects users' trust in social media information because it can generate expectations about the likely validity of the information (Yang et al., 2020). In this study, youth perceived information about important decisions provided by government organizations through TikTok as truthful sources of information relative to other sources of information and had a higher level of trust in them, which led to more active participation on TikTok.

Moreover, TikTok has become a valuable information source for the public because of the global lockdown and COVID-19 pandemic. Many researchers have noted that TikTok has played a vital role in spreading health-related information throughout the pandemic (Li et al., 2021). However, although many government agencies have recognized the importance of TikTok and have actively posted information related to COVID-19 on TikTok, TikTok is still in its infancy as an e-government service, and many government departments do not have the ability to produce engaging short videos, which to some extent limits the public's trust in this information (Zhu et al., 2020).5.3 Theoretical and practical implications.

5.3. Theoretical Implications

The current study was rooted in the theoretical framework that integrated ELM and trust to study the public online engagement behavior of Chinese youth. In order to strengthen the research framework, this study draws on previous research on public engagement via social media, and trust was included as a mediator to support the importance of public engagement among Chinese youth. The empirical application of these theories helps to better understand the antecedents that affect the public's online engagement behavior and enriches the theoretical perspective in the field of public engagement. Prior studies have applied ELM to marketing research and the field of socio-psychology, and the findings of this study can be considered as a theoretical boost to ELM's expansion in crisis communication.

The finding from this study leads to some practical and policy matters. The researcher would like to suggest that policymakers need to intensify their efforts to increase youth trust and improve online engagement activities. First, government agencies should offer accurate, consistent, and timely emergency-related information to build public engagement online during a crisis. Having high-quality information about an emergency can help alleviate the public's concerns and anxieties. Due to the rapid emergence and evolution of new technology, it has been difficult to prevent the transmission of false information. This has resulted in an informationdemic, which can hinder the public's ability to respond effectively to the COVID-19 outbreak (Barua et al., 2020). Consequently, government organizations ought to promote the evaluation of information quality on social media by the public prior to engaging with content through likes, comments, or shares during a crisis.

In terms of policy implications, this study's findings can offer insight into the Chinese government and policymakers. TikTok has become an indispensable, useful, and easy-to-use channel for governments to communicate with the public. Governments should actively embrace this new method of communication and fully utilize the advantages of short video platforms in rapidly disseminating information. The government should establish an information content management system to disseminate crisis prevention and control actions in time to clarify rumors and other misinformation during a crisis, and it can train professional crisis communicators responsible for online monitoring of public concerns, delivering timely information to address public concerns.

5.4 Limitations and future directions

This study was subjected to several limitations. First, this study identified information quality and source credibility as predictor variables affecting levels of public trust and online engagement. Researchers in the future could explore additional central and peripheral factors such as perceived benefits, perceived risks, source attractiveness, and source expertise that may influence public online engagement. Moreover, information quality was considered a unidimensional construct in the present study. However, there are different dimensions of information quality, such as valence, informativeness, helpfulness, etc. Therefore, future researchers can explore different dimensions of information quality to see if that produces a different result on public engagement.

The interpretation of the findings may also be limited by the research design employed in this study. There could be an issue raised about self-reported data having the limitation in accuracy and reliability of the data itself (Shadish et al., 2002). Therefore, this is likely to result in reporting bias. Future researchers ought to conduct experimental studies to determine whether a certain treatment affects an outcome while controlling for confounding variables. For example, future research could manipulate information content with different characteristics, including high-quality and low-quality, and have a random group respond to these scenarios to investigate the impact of information on public online engagement during a crisis. Moreover, since quantitative research is all about facts and figures, the analysis is done by statistical methods. However, this approach may be unable to provide a broad interpretation of the motivations for individual behavior based on the feelings and opinions of the respondents, which may differ from what is listed in the questionnaire. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies employ qualitative approaches, such as case studies, to explore more about the behaviors of Chinese youths' engagement via government social media, providing more value and deeper understanding.

Finally, the age group of respondents in this study was mainly focused on the young adult group (18-40 years old), which is another limitation. Future studies could widen the age range and give equal attention to respondents of different age groups, which may bring more useful results in the future.

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