

A Systematic Review of Political Media and Audience Engagement

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How to cite this paper: Lege, L., & Ibrahim, N. (2023). A Systematic Review of Political Media and Audience Engagement. *Advances in Journalism and Communication*, 11, 310-326.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/ajc.2023.113022>

Received: June 26, 2023

Accepted: September 11, 2023

Published: September 14, 2023

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Abstract

Audience engagement in the new government media has become indispensable to government information dissemination. However, only some studies have analyzed the factors influencing audience engagement in new government media. Even fewer have compared the differences between Chinese and foreign studies on audience engagement in new government media. This study is a systematic literature review, selected Scopus and Cnki databases, and acquired 22 papers exploratively according to the review objective, which is to summarize the influencing factors of audience engagement in new government media and compare the differences between Chinese and foreign-related studies. The results of the study showed that a combination of media factors, public factors, environmental factors, and government factors influences audience engagement in new government media. Between Chinese and foreign scholars, there are huge differences in research platforms, research methods and research contents on audience engagement of the new government media.

Keywords

Political Media, Audience Engagement, Media Factors, Public Factors

1. Introduction

The new media of government affairs is a critical way to improve the new model of governance and the ability of social governance in the era of the mobile Internet (Zhang, 2020). Broad and active audience engagement has become a solid basis for promoting orderly political participation and deliberative democracy (Dai, 2021). The constant turnover of social media platforms such as Facebook in foreign countries and TikTok in China has brought new propositions and

challenges to audience engagement of new government media studies (Shang, 2021).

Unlike the audience engagement of the Internet and traditional media in the past, the audience engagement of new governmental media has quantitative and qualitative differences under the new communication pattern. Firstly, audience participation is broader and more profound. Secondly, audiences have gained unprecedented active participation capabilities. Thirdly, audience participation has mass communication characteristics (Lai & Liang, 2020).

Research on new government media has become a hot topic, and academics have focused on the following issues: the meaning, characteristics, and functions; the development history and current situation; the communication effect and evaluation system; problems and improvement strategies, etc (Hou & Du, 2019). Research on audience engagement is also widely available. For example, Kim & Yang (2017) studied the differences in the three audience engagement behaviors of likes, shares, and comments on Facebook, and Ji (2020) explored audience engagement in news production in the era of media convergence. However, only some studies combine new government media and audience engagement for research.

Chen (2017) summarized the international progress of new media research in government, and Hou & Du (2019) reviewed China's new media research on government affairs. But few have compared the differences between China and international studies on audience engagement in new government media. This study fills that gap.

Xiao (2016) validated that media factors, public factors, environmental factors, and government factors affect public willingness to participate in government microblogs. The four perspectives on the influencing factors provided in her study have important implications for this research. According to Xiao (2016), this study proposes the following hypothesis: media factors, public factors, environmental factors, and government factors jointly influence audience engagement. This systematic review of the literature selected Scopus and Cnki databases and acquired 22 papers exploratively according to the review objective. This study aims to verify the influencing factors of audience engagement in new government media and compare the differences between Chinese and foreign-related studies.

2. Material and Methods

In terms of tools, this paper uses the "China Journal Full Text Database" (Cnki) and the world's largest abstract and citation database (Scopus) as the data sources. This study is based on a report by Liberati et al. (2009). Identification, screening, eligibility, and data abstraction are the four important sub-sections that are summarized in this section (Figure 1).

2.1. Identification

This systematic review process consists of three stages as a way to select papers

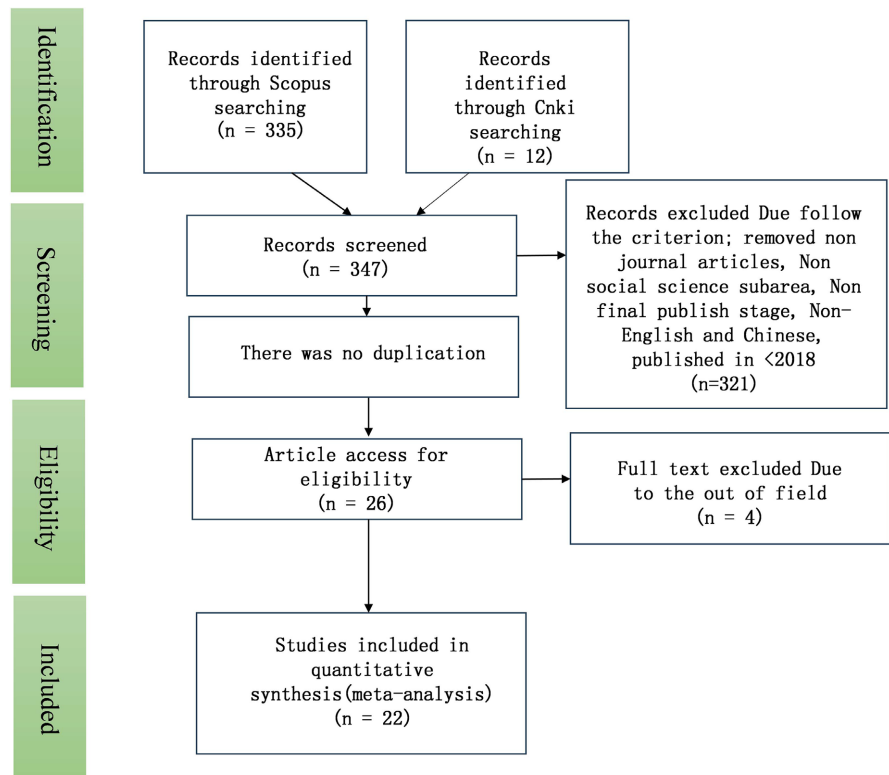


Figure 1. The PRISMA flow diagram.

relevant to this study. The first step is keyword identification, seeking linked and similar terms based on previous research and the needs of this research. The final search terms were identified: political media and audience engagement. The current study project was able to successfully obtain 347 papers from both databases during the first stage of the systematic review process.

2.2. Screening

Based on search strings for Scopus and Cnki, 347 publications were screened in this step.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria: ① Open Access: All open access; ② Subject Category: Social sciences; ③ Type of Literature: Journal (only research articles); ④ Publication stage: Final; ⑤ Language: English and Chinese; ⑥ Time: The time frame for this review was framed between 2018-2023, beyond that range were not included in the study.

In all, 321 publications were excluded. During this round of screening, no duplicate articles were found.

2.3. Eligibility

A total of 26 articles have been prepared for this step. Each publication was thoroughly scrutinized to ensure that it complemented the goals of the current study. Therefore, four articles were omitted because they were not highly relevant.

Finally, 22 articles are available for review.

2.4. Data Abstraction

In this study, an integrative analysis was carried out. The phase of data collection served as the foundation for the theme's development. The authors have carefully reviewed 22 papers for claims or details addressing the issues raised in this current research. The writers then analyze the variables that affect audience engagement in new government media to identify and develop substantive themes. The final phase involved comparing the results to iron out any differences in the theme-creation procedure. In the end, four key themes—media, public, environmental, and government factors—were discovered. To analyze the differences between Chinese and foreign-related studies, The research platform, research design, research content, and research findings of the chosen publications were also documented.

3. Result and Finding

Using the search approach, twenty-two (22) articles were extracted and examined. All papers were classified into four categories: media factors, public factors, environmental factors, and government factors.

3.1. Media Factors

Media factors include not only media content factors but also media content attributes factors and other factors (Table 1).

Several studies focus on media content factors, in other words, interactive audience engagement with content (Gu, Min, & Zhan, 2018; Mourão & Molyneux, 2021; Molyneux & Mourão, 2017; Savolainen, Trilling, & Liotsiou, 2020). Gu, Min, & Zhan (2018) proposed that there is an interactive relationship between news value and audience engagement in governmental microblogs and explored how 12 news value elements contained in news content predict audience participation through political news on Chinese governments' Weibo sites. Mourão & Molyneux (2021) suggested that tweets with multimedia and policy-related topics are more likely to spark engagement. In a different paper (Molyneux & Mouro, 2017), Mouro & Molyneux explored how news organizations and professionals are using new platform affordances to interact with their audiences on Twitter. According to Savolainen, Trilling, and Liotsiou's study (2020), conflict and morality frames consistently attracted retweeting behaviors from supporters of both Trump and Clinton on Twitter, while emotional frames consistently attracted favoriting behaviors.

There are several studies that have expanded our understanding of this research topic (Bonsón, Royo, & Ratkai, 2015; Wu & Pan, 2021; Ksiazek, Peer, & Lessard, 2014; Chen & Ke, 2013; Liu & Han, 2015). Bonsón, Royo, & Ratkai (2015) measured the impact of content types on stakeholders' interaction with Western European local governments' Facebook pages.

Table 1. Summary of Media factors.

Authors	Title	Journal	Methodology	Result and Advantages
Mohd Fathir, M. F., Lokman, A. M., Kadir, S. A., Sualman, I.	Social Media Visual Framing towards Political Participation: An Analysis on BERSIH 2.0	(2022) Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication	Content analysis	According to the data, images of demonstrators were most frequently used at the denotative level, followed by images of famous people and placards.
Janét, K., Richards, O., Landrum, A. R.	Headline Format Influences Evaluation of, but Not Engagement with, Environmental News	(2022) Journalism Practice 16(1), pp. 35-55	Experimental method	Science journalists should think about how alternative headline forms affect readers.
Mourão, R. R., Molyneux, L.	Tweeting Outside the Lines: Normalization and Fragmentation as Political Reporters Break from the Mainstream	(2021) Journalism Practice 15(8), pp. 1089-1107	Content analysis	Forces of normalization would unite mainstream and alternative journalists in a unified, ubiquitous practice that might combine both more recent and traditional reporting techniques. On the other hand, fragmentation forces would push groups of practitioners farther apart, drawing more distinct lines between mainstream journalism and its offshoots.
Molyneux, L., Mourão, R. R.	Political Journalists' Normalization of Twitter: Interaction and new affordances	(2019) Journalism Studies 20(2), pp. 248-266	Content analysis	According to research, tweets and retweets are more commonplace than replies and quote tweets, and journalists often disregard the public in favor of conversing with one another in social media echo chambers.
Sahly, A., Shao, C., Kwon, K.H.	Social Media for Political Campaigns: An Examination of Trump's and Clinton's Frame Building and Its Effect on Audience Engagement	(2019) Social Media and Society 5(2)	Content analysis	Compared to Clinton, Trump used a wider variety of emotional frames in his messaging, emphasizing conflict and negative emotional frames on Twitter while frequently using positive emotional frames on Facebook. On Twitter and Facebook, Clinton's strategy largely leaned on confrontation and upbeat emotional states.

Continued

Thurman, N	Newspaper Consumption in the Mobile Age: Re-assessing multi-platform performance and market share using “time-spent”	(2018) Journalism Studies 19(10), pp. 1409-1429	Media measurement, Print and Digital Data” (PADD)	The findings indicate that 88.5 percent of the time spent on 11 national newspaper brands in the UK by their British consumers still comes from their print editions, 7.49 percent from mobile devices, and only 4 percent from Desktops.
Miaomiao, Z.	Research on audience engagement in new government media	(2021) Western Radio and Television	Comprehensive Review	Ways to improve audience engagement in new government media: First, new government media need to change their understanding of the role of the audience. Secondly, the new government media need to focus on optimizing the audience experience. Once again, the new governmental media must insist on content as king.
Zhang, L	Audience engagement and ways to enhance the new media for government affairs in the new communication pattern	(2021) Press Communications	Comprehensive Review	The way to improve the new media of government affairs in the new communication pattern: First, Use audience thinking to build a multifunctional communication platform Secondly, Provide better services for the audience. Thirdly, Organic combination of online and offline.
Wang, Z	Research on audience participation mechanism of government affairs weibo in new media environment	(2021) Journalism Research Guide	Comprehensive Review	Government WeChat has a significant effect in improving audience participation; Ways to improve audience participation: Change the main understanding of “media audience” to “platform users”; Do a good job in visual design of the platform and optimize audience experience; Smartly divide the time to push and insist on content as king.

Continued

Zhang, Z	Current Research and Characteristics of New Media in Government Affairs under the New Network Governance Environment	(2020) Audio-Visual	Comprehensive Review	There are several characteristics of government new media research as follows: 1) Research object focuses on a single government new media platform 2) Research is less from the audience's perspective 3) Research methods are mainly qualitative, lack of scientific methodology application 4) Lack of policy guidance for audience participation in government media.
Xu, W	Research on Audience Engagement Mechanism of New Media of Government Affairs in New Era—An Empirical Analysis Based on “Ping’anShangqiu” Government Microblog	(2020) Dissemination and Copyright	Empirical study	By analyzing the current situation, content, characteristics and data of “Ping’anShangqiu” government microblog, this study proposes optimization strategies in three aspects: highlighting localized government information, creating original content to show personalization and establishing a perfect new media matrix.
Lai, L & Liang, L	Audience engagement and ways to enhance the new media for government affairs in the new communication pattern	(2020) Media	Comprehensive Review	The way to improve audience participation in the new government media: 1) Create a multi-functional communication platform based on the perspective of people's livelihood with audience thinking; 2) Create value for the audience and provide quality services to attract audience participation; 3) Find the right entry point for planning and take a good and practical online mass route.
Fang, L & Shengli, W	Audience engagement and social impact of new government media	(2019) Media	Comprehensive Review	The typical problems of audience engagement in new government media are focused on the following aspects: First, the interactivity of new government media is poor, and the response rate is not high.

Continued

Fang, L & Shengli, W	Audience engagement and social impact of new government media	(2019) Media	Comprehensive Review	Second, there is still much room for improvement in the convenience of audience participation in the new government affairs media. Once again, the imperfect management of new government media does not effectively increase the audience's willingness to participate.
Gu, J., Min, S., & Zhan, Q.	Citizen Engagement in the Era of Social Media: Correlations between News Value and Audience Engagement in Governments' Weibo Sites	(2018) Journal of International Communication	Content analysis	The 12 news value elements have significant overall effects on audience commenting, sharing, and liking behaviour, with the six elements of newness, periodicity, interest, salience, individuality, and controversy being significant predictors of audience engagement.
Qian, Q	Audience engagement and ways to enhance the new media for government affairs in the new communication pattern	(2021) Journalist observation	Comprehensive Review	Provide quality services and create a multi-value participation system for audiences; take a practical route to the masses and make audiences love the new media crowd sourcing space.

Wu & Pan (2021) analyzed how news discourse is created and delivered to pique listeners' interest. Ksiazek, Peer, & Lessard (2014) explored the connection between online news videos and audience engagement, and they contrasted audience engagement between "tough" and "gentle" news, "neutral" and "biased" news. Chen & Ke (2013) found out the degree of influence of issue is relatively large, especially the issue-related and issue knowledge, indicating that audiences tend to express their opinions on issues with which they are more familiar. Liu & Han (2015) found positive or negative of the theme influences audience engagement.

Content features or attributes also influence audience engagement. Janét, Richards, & Landrum (2020) found out the structure of a headline affects participants' assessments of the trustworthiness of both the headline and the narrative. As a result, journalists should take into account how different styles affect readers. Opgenhaffen (2020) discovered that media organizations adjust their articles' headlines, pictures, and even emojis to persuade readers to read their material.

Guo & Sun (2020) examined how different news post features (news topics, message vividness and interactivity, post time, and length of the post) affect three dimensions of news engagement indicated by reactions, comments, and shares. Chen (2020) identified news content attributes as one of three key factors of news consumption on social media. Fishman E (2016) explored how video length influences engagement. Li, Guan, Hammond, & Berrey (2021) collected information on video format, including video length, subtitle, text, spoken language, caption, and music. Wu & Xiao (2014) tested that the post time, the use of hyperlinks, the originality of content, and the form of a post (text, pictures, links, etc.) are also important factors influencing audience engagement.

Compared with the speed and strength of the new media communication platform, the participation of the audience is not satisfactory. The typical problems of audience engagement in the current governmental new media are focused on the following aspects: First, the interactivity of the governmental new media is poor, and the response rate is not high. Just like building a platform but not operating it, the phenomenon of “posting but not responding” is still common in the new government media. Secondly, there is still much room for improvement in the convenience of audience participation in the new government affairs media. Once again, the management of new government media is not perfect enough to effectively increase the willingness of audience participation (Fang & Shengli, 2019). Xu (2020) suggested government media lacks content innovation and appropriate new media marketing skills, does not understand the habits of the fans and audiences in terms of their use of the relevant media, clicking time, and frequency of tweeting.

To address the above issues, several scholars have proposed ways to enhance audience engagement from a media perspective. Zhang (2021) suggested the new media for government affairs must adhere to the content is king, create original content to show personalization, and improve the attractiveness of news content. Lai & Liang (2020) suggested new media for government affairs needs to transform the understanding of audience roles and develop audience thinking, see the audience as a “public” with the ability to claim interests and ask questions, fully satisfy the public’s rights to expression, participation, and supervision. Wang (2019) proposed media should form packaging, push strategy, and operation strategy, take language improvement as a breakthrough to reform news reporting expressions, set topics in time to catch the public’s attention and excitement, and push news at the right time. Xu (2020) suggested highlighting localized government information and establishing a comprehensive new media matrix.

3.2. Public Factors

Public factors can explain the variability and complexity of audience engagement indicators such as emotions, attitudes, and behaviors in terms of demographic characteristics, inherent audience positions, and perspectives (Table 2).

Table 2. Summary of public factors.

Authors	Title	Journal	Methodology	Result and Advantages
Brandt, J., Buckingham, K., Buntain, C., (...), Pool, J. -R., Ferrari, N.	Identifying social media user demographics and topic diversity with computational social science: a case study of a major international policy forum	(2020) <i>Journal of Computational Social Science</i> 3(1), pp. 167-188	Case study	Compared to the previous GLF in Bonn, Germany, holding the GLF in Nairobi, Kenya, raised the voices of African leaders. Substantial racial, ethnic, and gender disparities in topic-level participation among different age groups.
Savolainen, L., Trilling, D., Liotsiou, D.	Delighting and Detesting Engagement: Emotional Politics of Junk News	(2020) <i>Social Media and Society</i> 6(4)	Quantitatively analyzing their engagement metrics, and a qualitative comment analysis	To demonstrate how the interaction between audiences, platform architecture, and political junk news produces a bivalent emotional dynamic that consistently separates postings into highly “liked” and very “angry,” they suggest the notions of delighting and detesting engagement.
Zhou, J.	An empirical study of college students’ audience groups in government microblogs	(2019) <i>News Knowledge</i>	Questionnaires and In-depth interviews	The college students have high expectations of political participation and affirm the social role of political participation, but the willingness to actively participate in political expression is not strong.
Li, Y.	Analysis of Attitudes and Preferences of Audience Participation in New Media of Government Affairs in the Context of Epidemic Prevention—An Example of “Nanning Release” Government Affairs TikTok Account	(2022) <i>New Media Research</i>	Hybrid Research, Grounded theory	Audience rational participation is slightly more than emotional expression; audience participation attitude is significantly positively biased; audience participation attitude is influenced by both media context and group context.

The dispositions, developmental stages, and perceptions of social norms of audience members all have an impact on whether they choose to consume certain media and how they respond to it. For instance, research demonstrates that people frequently seek for and avoid incompatible media content, either consciously or unconsciously, depending on their values and beliefs (Van der Meer, Hameleers, & Kroon, 2020). According to Janét, Richards, & Landrum (2020), people’s political beliefs and scientific skepticism predicted both their engagement with environmental issues and their opinions regarding the veracity of the headline and story.

Brandt et al. (2020) found significant disparities in topic-level participation between races, ages, and genders. Zhou (2019) proposed an influence factor model in which perceived usefulness, ease of use, and trust in governmental microblogs positively correlated with college students' political participation intention and political participation behavior.

Li (2022) depicted the attitude types and bias of audience engagement in governmental new media communication in the context of epidemic prevention and control and found a strong correlation between media context and audience attitude bias; To demonstrate how the interaction between audiences, platform architecture, and political junk news produces a bivalent emotional dynamic that routinely divides posts into highly "loved" and highly "angry," Savolainen, Trilling, and Liotsiou (2020) proposed the concepts of delighting and detesting engagement. Chen & Ke (2013) suggested that audience social psychology impacts audience opinion expression.

3.3. Environmental Factors

Environmental factors influence audience engagement (Table 3). Cushion, Morani, Kyriakidou, & Soo (2021) found that the UK's unbiased media ecosystem and public service ethos create an environment where viewers are mostly open to journalists' fact-checking and refuting misinformation. According to research by Mihelj, Kondor, & Štětka (2021), changes in news consumption, such as the rise of television and the decline of print consumption, were not only influenced by audience demand for up-to-date information but also by the practical limitations of a home-bound lifestyle during a lockdown and the introduction of live briefings.

3.4. Government Factors

Government factors influence audience engagement (Table 4). The changing political dynamics in disease portrayal and crisis communications are revealed by Tian & Yang (2022).

4. Discussion

Domestic governmental new media research mostly takes Weibo, WeChat, and TikTok as research platforms (Gu, Min, & Zhan, 2018; Xu, 2020; Zhou, 2019; Li, 2022). In contrast, foreign governmental new media research mainly uses Twitter and Facebook as research or data acquisition platforms (Mourão & Molyneux, 2021; Brandt et al., 2020; Tian & Yang, 2022; Mohd Fathir, Mohd Lokman, Abd Kadir, & Sualman, 2022; Sahly, Shao, & Kwon, 2019). The common denominator is that the proportion of video platform-related studies is on the rise, which is in line with the changes in the layout of government platforms and the rising trend of short videos. Cross-platform studies still need to be included. The comprehensive study of audience engagement behavior on different platforms will become an important direction for future research.

Table 3. Summary of Environmental factors.

Authors	Title	Journal	Methodology	Result and Advantages
Cushion, S., Morani, M., Kyriakidou, M., Soo, N.	Why Media Systems Matter: A Fact-Checking Study of UK Television News during the Coronavirus Pandemic	(2022) <i>Digital Journalism</i> 10(5), pp. 698-716	Content analysis	Because of the UK's unbiased media landscape and public service values, viewers are often open to fact-checking and debunking false information.
Mihelj, S., Kondor, K., Štětka, V.	Audience Engagement with COVID-19 News: The Impact of Lockdown and Live Coverage, and the Role of Polarization	(2022) <i>Journalism Studies</i> 23(5-6), pp. 569-587	Qualitative interviews and media diaries	The rise of television and the loss of print news consumption were not only because of audience demand for current news; other factors included the practical limitations of a home-bound lifestyle during a lockdown and the introduction of live briefings.

Table 4. Summary of Government factors.

Authors	Title	Journal	Methodology	Result and Advantages
Tian, Y., Yang, J.	Deny or bolster? A Comparative Study of Crisis Communication Strategies between Trump and Cuomo in COVID-19	(2022) <i>Public Relations Review</i>	A comparative study, content analysis	Deny, minimize, and bolster are three SCCT (situational crisis communication theory) categories of methods that appeared with significance for both Trump and Cuomo. The strategic narratives between Trump and Cuomo were very different, which highlights the changing political dynamics in disease portrayal and crisis messaging.

Most studies on news content and audience engagement have been conducted using the content analysis method (Gu, Min, & Zhan, 2018; Mourão & Molyneux, 2021; Cushion, Morani, Kyriakidou, & Soo, 2021; Tian & Yang, 2022; Mohd Fathir, Mohd Lokman, Abd Kadir, & Sualman, 2022; Sahly, Shao, & Kwon, 2019), which is a single method that can verify the regression relationship between content attributes and audience engagement. Only one article used the experimental method (Janét, Richards, & Landrum, 2020), one article used the case study method (Brandt et al., 2020), and one article used interviews (Mihelj, Kondor, & Štětka, 2021). Interviews, questionnaires, experimental methods, and grounded theory can be used as methodological innovations to conduct research in this area and be applied more often in future studies to explain more comprehensively the influencing factors and motivations behind audience engagement.

The number of empirical studies in China is lower than abroad, quantitative research is less than qualitative research, which needs further strengthening. In this systematic review, only three China articles are empirical studies, while all the articles from the Scopus database are empirical studies.

From the perspective of research content, the current research on audience engagement in China's new government affairs media mainly focuses on summarizing the new characteristics of audience engagement in the new communication pattern, the factors influencing audience engagement, the problems of audience engagement, and the improvement paths (Zhang, 2020; Lai & Liang, 2020; Zhang, 2021; Wang, 2019; Qian, 2021). While foreign research has focused on drawing specific conclusions based on operational data that affect audience engagement (Brandt et al., 2020; Cushion, Morani, Kyriakidou, & Soo, 2021; Mohd Fathir, Mohd Lokman, Abd Kadir, & Sualman, 2022).

Domestic studies on audience engagement in government media are often placed in the context of the government's efforts to improve communication, guidance, influence, and credibility (Zhang, 2020; Lai & Liang, 2020; Zhang, 2021; Wang, 2019; Qian, 2021). In contrast, foreign studies have focused on the impact of leaders' political campaigns and citizens' political views on audience participation in a multiparty and different political ideology context (Mourão & Molyneux, 2021; Tian & Yang, 2022; Sahly, Shao, & Kwon, 2019). In addition, related studies in China have paid less attention to the influence of environmental and government factors on audience engagement.

In general, Chinese and foreign studies on political media and audience engagement differ in terms of research platforms, research methods, and research contents. In terms of research platforms, Chinese studies focus on platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, and TikTok, while foreign studies focus on platforms such as Twitter and Facebook; in terms of research methods, content analysis is the most used method, but Chinese studies are mostly qualitative, while foreign studies are mostly quantitative; in terms of research contents, Chinese studies prefer strategy studies, feature studies, etc. and focuses more on the influence of media factors on audience engagement. Foreign research prefers empirical research, which covers four aspects: media factors, public factors, government factors, and environmental factors.

5. Conclusion

This study tested the hypothesis "A combination of media, public, environmental, and government factors influences audience engagement in new government media" using a systematic review approach. It answers how four factors, especially media factors, influence audience engagement in new media. Specifically, media factors include media content factors, media content attribute factors, and other factors. The news value, originality, discourse, positive or negative, hard or soft, types, and themes of the media content all influence audience engagement. In terms of media content attribute factors, the length, posting time, the use of hashtags, the use of hyperlinks, title, music, and the form of the post all influence

audience engagement, but these attributes and characteristics change as the platform changes, such as news headlines in WeChat, hashtag in Weibo, and background music in TikTok. For public factors, demographic characteristics, inherent audience positions, and perspectives all influence audience engagement. Environmental factors such as the media ecosystem and home-bound lifestyle affect audience engagement. Governmental factors such as the ruling party influence audience engagement in political media. Although Chinese and foreign studies agree on four influencing factors of audience engagement in political media, they still show differences in research platforms methods, and contents.

When thinking about the operation strategy of new governmental media, it should not be just about the content itself but the content ecology. More specifically, the five dimensions of content production, organization, distribution, consumption, and operation should all be considered (Li & Zhang, 2019). These are not captured in this systematic review but deserve further study.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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