

Listening to the Voices of China's Future: A Qualitative Study of Social Media Usage and Elite Trust Among Chinese Urban University Students

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Abstract:

This study uses qualitative interviews to explore social media usage and trust in elites among Chinese urban college students. Ten in-depth interviews were conducted to understand how social media interacts with students' judgments and perceptions of elite groups such as entrepreneurs and politicians. The results revealed that social media content influences students by corroborating personal experiences, providing descriptive information, and disseminating various perspectives. Social media also serves as a platform for students to find role models and verify or defy authoritative discourse, which may be a response to feelings of social isolation. Both personal experiences and social media information play similar roles in shaping opinions about elites. Negative evaluations of elites centered on meaninglessness, vanity, and exploitation. The findings provide insight into how social media interacts with trust among young people in China amid the country's rapid economic changes.

Keywords: Social media, trust, elites, Chinese college students, qualitative research

1 Introduction

At the beginning of the pandemic, Bilibili, the YouTube of China, invited a famous actor to make a speech and published a video called "The Rising Wave," trying to show the charming and colorful life of the young Chinese. The CEO of Bilibili commented under that video: "What you love is your life." However, a user replied to the CEO's comment insultingly: "When will your mother die?" This reply immediately received countless likes. Many people have made memes of this comment and this screenshot of the reply and have publicly displayed it related to this video software on many occasions.

At this point, the most liked comment on the video reads: "I was a little sad after watching it because I'm not as 'rising wave' as this video says, and I'm still in my twenties wondering what I like."

Studying young people's social media use and their trust in elites is important. In today's digital age, young people are social media's primary users and early adopters. They actively participate in social media platforms to interact with other users and share information and opinions. Therefore, understanding how young people use social media and how much they trust elites gives us insight into the impact of social media on the younger generation. At the same time, social media has become an important communication and connection tool in People's Daily lives. It has changed the way people interact with each other and has had a profound impact on social

relationships. Studying young people's use of social media and their trust in elites can help us understand how social media is changing communication and connections among young people and the impact of this change on social cohesion and social order. More importantly, young people's level of trust in elites reflects their confidence in social institutions, authorities, and public leaders. Understanding young people's propensity to trust and the impact of social media on their trust formation can help us assess the state of trust in society, identify potential problems, and suggest measures to improve it.

Much of the recent literature on how social media affects the social relationships of users, especially urban users, focuses on the positive. Evans(2022) explores the role of social media in fostering a sense of connection. Using a qualitative sociological approach, the researchers found that social media provides a platform for people to connect and interact with each other. It promotes social contact and communication among people, thus enhancing social relations among urban residents. Social media can help people expand their social circles, strengthen social networks, and build closer ties in urban communities. Lane and Stuart(2022) explore how social media use can alleviate the problem of urban violence. The study found that social media can provide a channel for information dissemination and organizing action, enabling urban residents to better understand and respond to violence. Information sharing and community mobilization on social media platforms can increase mutual understanding

and support among urban residents, reducing violence. This shows that social media has a positive impact on promoting trust and cooperation among city residents. Baldor(2022) focuses on how social media use affects offline interactions between acquaintances. The study found that social media provides people with a social environment interwoven online and offline. Social media use leads to offline encounters between online acquaintances, frequently occurring daily. However, such offline encounters are often accompanied by uncertainty in cognition and social approval, adding to interaction difficulty. This suggests that social media use may complexly impact social relationships and trust among city dwellers.

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore social media use and trust in elites among urban college students in China. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were used as the main data collection method. The researchers selected college students in several Chinese cities for the study. They interviewed them to understand their social media use patterns, their level of trust in elites, and the relationship between social media use and trust. In terms of data analysis, I used coding techniques to organize and analyze interview data. I transcribed the interview recordings verbatim and then conducted multiple rounds of inductive and deductive coding on the transcribed texts to label relevant topics and concepts. Researchers use topic coding and content analysis to identify key themes and patterns and extract their findings and conclusions.

From this research, I came to some important conclusions. The main conclusions are as follows: First, there are three ways for social media content to influence college students: First, to explain and confirm social media content through personal life experience; The second is to understand elite groups through the information described and portrayed on social media; The third is to choose various views and value orientations spread on social media according to personal identity. Both personal life experiences and information described online can influence people's judgment of elite content, and both play similar functions to some extent. At the same time, various opinions and positions transmitted on the Internet, especially those with identity as the medium, can be widely disseminated without personal experience as evidence.

At the same time, in addition to serving as a content provider, social media also plays a role in elite trust as a platform to connect people. We can understand this through the concept of social isolation. Some respondents said they could not find the daily reference and confidence support they needed. So, they looked for role models and refuted authoritative discourse through social media to

make up for possible social isolation. At the same time, once elites can provide effective information on social media, this positive evaluation can offset the elites' sense of isolation from respondents. The respondents' evaluation of the elite group showed positive and negative polarization, and a small number expressed a positive attitude. Negative evaluation categories include meaninglessness, satisfaction with vanity, emptiness, etc. This is closely related to personal life experiences and social media use. Overall, social media has a complex and multi-faceted impact on college students, which can either play a positive role in judging elites and forming trust levels or lead to higher levels of suspicion and distrust. Need to combine individual factors to give personalized interpretation.

The importance of this study is that it provides an in-depth understanding of young Chinese people's social media use and trust in elites. In today's digital age, young people are social media's primary users and early adopters. Understanding how they use social media and their level of trust in elites helps us understand the impact of social media on the younger generation. In addition, the study explores how social media is changing how young people communicate and connect and the impact of this change on social cohesion and social order. Young people's level of trust in elites also reflects their confidence in social institutions, authority, and public leaders. Understanding how young people's propensity to trust is formed and the impact of social media on trust can help assess the state of social trust and identify potential problems.

2 Literature review

While almost all students frequently use social media in their personal lives, only a few use it regularly for academic purposes. Popular social media like Facebook, Wikipedia, and YouTube are rarely mentioned for educational purposes and are seen more as places for information retrieval(Hrastinski and Aghaee,2012). Selwyn (2009) explored several purposes when university students use social media: expressing disappointment or confusion about learning experiences, exchanging practical, logistical information about classes when unsure, and discussing academic information like assignment requirements and deadlines.

Emerging social media have impacted students in several ways, and we already know how young people use social media. Prensky(2001) argues that the "Digital Natives" are the students born after 1980 and have spent their lives surrounded by digital technology like computers--their attention spans are not short. Still, unlike games, they choose not to pay attention to non-interactive, passive

content. Reflection and linear thinking may have been somewhat affected by their media diets. Athukorala(2018) examined several factors that influence university students' social media use, which include legal risk, privacy, credibility, convenience, copyright, cost, time, and permanency. He also found that social media can help students socially adjust to university life by connecting them with peers and providing social and informational support. Research shows this connection helps with persistence at the university. Madge, Meek, Wellens, and Hooley(2009) examined British university students' pre-registration of a university Facebook network. Many students join social media sites like Facebook before starting university to connect with other incoming students, especially those living in the same dorm or taking the same courses. This helps them start making friends and eases the transition to university life. Once at university, students use Facebook even more frequently to stay in touch with friends from home and share photos of their university experiences. This helps offset feelings of homesickness. Li and Peng(2019) examined how social media use relates to acculturative stress experienced by international students. Acculturative stress refers to the anxiety, depression, and feelings of marginality that occur when adapting to a new culture. It proposes that SNS use with host nationals would be positively associated with perceived social support from the host country, which would relate to lower acculturative stress. The paper explores SNS use with distant vs. local conationals separately. It also controls other factors like face-to-face contact, non-SNS communication, language ability, length of stay, gender, and home/host country media use. The results found that social support from both home and host countries reduced acculturative stress, as hypothesized.

The literature above shows how social media can impact people's social relationships. At the same time, with the rapid growth of China's economy, the Chinese people may suffer from pressure and a massive loss of trust in their social interaction. Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2019) revealed that technologies like smartphones, the Internet, and social media have made blending together easier for work and personal life by enabling constant connectivity regardless of location. This has both benefits and drawbacks. Temporal boundaries between work and non-work time have blurred as people are contactable at all hours via devices. Spatial boundaries have also weakened as people can work remotely anywhere. Su, Ye, and Wang(2018) used data from the Chinese General Social Survey and found that higher per capita GDP at the county level, representing greater economic development, is negatively correlated with social trust. Evidence presented that social anomie has increased, including rising cases of debt and

tort disputes in courts, people being reluctant to help others for fear of being scammed, and fewer civil disputes being resolved through negotiation. At the same time, young Chinese have lower trust in authority compared to older citizens. Wang(2005) found that, despite citizens in China expressing great satisfaction with the government's performance in handling national affairs and political reforms because of the economic contribution, economic development would also give rise to new cultural values over the long run that could promote more "critical citizens" with lower trust in authority. Younger Chinese were shown to hold stronger "self-expression values" of tolerance, democratic aspirations, and emphasis on individual liberty - values that typically correlate with distrust of public institutions.

As we can see, the student group is willing to use the power of social media to find partners to help them complete their tasks, and this behavior shapes the interaction and connection between people. But at the same time, China's economic development has led to social anomia, young people's pursuit of multiculturalism, and distrust of authority. Social media already has over 300 million users in China(Chiu, Ip, and Silverman,2012). How does social media interact with trust issues in Chinese people's social relationships in China's economic development, increasing inequality, and social anomia? Since young people are the most familiar users of new social media products in China, at the same time, the "elite group" under the general definition - a small group of powerful people who hold a disproportionate amount of wealth, privilege, political power, or skill, has the highest exposure. Therefore, this study explores the impact of social media on young Chinese college students' use of social media and their trust in elites.

To describe the interaction of Chinese college students with others through social media in the context of rapid economic growth, I apply Emile Durkheim's theoretical framework here. According to Durkheim(1933), rapid economic change and development periods are more likely to produce anomic conditions in society. Traditional norms and value systems may no longer apply during transitions, while new norms have yet to emerge and take hold. People experience a sense of uncertainty and lack of direction. On an interpersonal level, anomie weakens social cohesion and the bonds between people. Strong, predictable social relationships provide a sense of purpose, belonging, and mental well-being. However, during periods of normlessness, people experience more uncertainty and competition in their interactions with others. Social relationships become less stable and supportive. On an interpersonal level, anomie weakens social cohesion and the bonds between people. Strong,

predictable social relationships provide a sense of purpose, belonging, and mental well-being. However, during periods of normlessness, people experience more uncertainty and competition in their interactions with others. Social relationships become less stable and supportive. This echoes the subjective drive I observed for respondents to use social media. I observed that respondents turn to social media to find role models with their ideal traits, experience with their career paths, and similar voices - all the information and support they need that they can't find around them. Our interviewees are experiencing a certain level of anomie: no role models around them, no help from their predecessors, and no support from their peers. And the specific content they find on social media affects their trust in certain groups. I believe that the importance of social media should be highlighted in Durkheim's theoretical framework.

3 Methods

The first thing to note is that this study was an effort to describe the respondents' personal experiences. Regarding social media use and their trust in elites, there are no tightly controlled experimental conditions: I can control for age, grade, and gender, but each person's personal experience is too complex to control for variables. Thus, precise causality is difficult to probe, but I can try to describe the personal experiences of the interviewees and point out some important new issues for later study. This is our research question: What is the experience of Chinese urban undergraduates about social media usage and their trust in elites?

Second, I drew on previous literature reviews and studies by Verdugo and Villarroel(2021) and Gan et al. (2017) to arrive at our five hypotheses about how social media interacts with young users:

1. Social media helps people meet people they may not have met outside the social media forums.
2. It helps to share ideas beyond the geographical boundaries.
3. It provides an open opportunity for all writers and bloggers to connect with their clients.
4. It unites people on a huge platform to achieve specific goals.
5. Social media provides awareness among society through campaigns, advertisement articles, and promotions, which helps society stay updated with current information.

Then, I conducted a convenience sample of urban college students in Shanghai, China, and collected ten valid interviewees in the most week, with each respondent at least 10,000 words of interview information. I define

the elite as a small group of powerful people who hold a disproportionate amount of wealth, privilege, political power, or skill in a group. I paid particular attention to respondents' perceptions of entrepreneurs and politicians who belong to the elite group.

After that, I conducted a convenience sample of urban college students in Shanghai and collected ten interviewees, each respondent at least 10,000 words of interview information. To understand their perception and behavior, before the unstructured interview began, I first went to find out what social media software they used most often and what kind of content and bloggers they followed on social media. Then, I invited them to watch three people talk about how to promote technological innovation. The first was Li Keqiang, the former Chinese premier; the second was Ma Huateng, the Chinese entrepreneur; and the third was Elon Musk, the American entrepreneur. I selected these three people because I tried to quickly locate the variables that had an impact by increasing the international sample. If, for example, one thinks the same thing about two entrepreneurs and another about a former prime minister, there is reason to suspect that official propaganda or power disparities within China are having an important effect. If people agree with the first two and think otherwise about Musk, it may be that some new cultural phenomenon in globalization has influenced them. After watching the video of the three people, I invited them to share their opinions and associations with the content of the video, as well as the possible reasons for their opinions and the specific details of the things they associated with them. If these contents are related to social media, I will further ask them what content they see on social media that influences them and how and why they pay attention to these contents.

Finally, I verified my previous hypotheses and discovered new phenomena using three rounds of coding (Linneberg and Korsgaard, 2019). Firstly, I use inductive coding to mark the parts of the interview content that conform to the original hypothesis. Then, In the last few interviews, I used deductive coding to summarize the non-hypothetical topics about the use of social media and their attitudes toward elites. After that, I processed the remaining interview texts by inductive coding based on these summarized topics. In addition, I used a more intuitive way to mark the positive or negative evaluation language of the interviewees on the elites in the interview.

Interestingly, only 3 out of 10 respondents to the in-depth interview expressed positive comments about the elite. I categorize positive comments into seven categories: Meaningless, accommodating ambition, emptiness, doubt, avoidance, deception for the sake of manipulation, and exploitation; at the same time, negative evaluation can

be divided into five kinds: characteristic, exceptional, admiration, ambitious, positive image. I'll explain what some of these words mean. Meaningless is a direct statement from the interviewee, such as: "But in my opinion, it is just not that valuable. Meaningless is not that meaningful." accommodate ambition refers to a kind of overtaking and almost out-of-control desire for power, for example: "Those who have a lot of money and a lot of weight are usually self-inflated by the desire to become a savior." deception for the sake of manipulation refers to an expression such as: "Haven't we been screwed enough by the two remaining entrepreneurs? For example, Nintendo has been pushing many of its games lately. It is sometimes

possible to say that Zelda's second book, he said this year, has now been pushed to next year. If something like this doesn't work out, someone will pay." Regarding positive evaluation, the positive image also refers to respondents' general positive evaluation of elites: "Such a (trustworthy) image is that the scenes that these politicians appear in my life are some formal official occasions."

4 Results

This is how positive and negative expressions are distributed among my interviewees:

Negative:

	Xu	Wang	Dai	Yan	Lu	Zhu	Si	Gao	Yang	Lou
Meaningless	✓			✓						
Accommodate ambition	✓			✓						
Emptiness				✓		✓				
Doubt	✓	✓		✓						✓
In avoidance	✓					✓				
Deception for the sake of manipulation		✓						✓	✓ (for capitalists)	✓
Exploitation			✓							

Positive:

	Xu	Wang	Dai	Yan	Lu	Zhu	Si	Gao	Yang	Lou
Characteristic					✓					
Exceptional					✓					
Admiration							✓			
Ambitious					✓					
Positive image							✓		✓ (for a politician)	

In this section, I describe how people use social media and their attitudes toward elites. I will focus on respondents' associations with specific social media content, what they actively follow, and what that actively follows means to them. I'll describe it by dividing it into five main themes:

Corroborating daily experience

Getting information from descriptions

Getting perspectives on some phenomenon

Looking for role models

Verifying or defying authority discourse

Honestly, some of these themes have been discussed in previous literature. Hampton(2017) discussed how some

early online scholarly work reacted to more journalistic reports about virtual communities at the time. Some of these journalistic accounts portrayed online spaces sensationally, so some early sociological studies aimed to provide a more rigorous and nuanced understanding of online activities and identities. In the literature review part, Hampton introduced early sociological studies of online communities and explored community, identity, and role-playing issues in online spaces. Some studies examined how people represented aspects of their identity, like gender and sexuality, online. Li and Peng(2019) noted that qualitative studies have reported host SNS

could aid cultural adaptation through various features such as informal communication and private groups for information seeking. International students can use SNS to get information from descriptions provided by others. However, there is still little research on how social media affects people's social relationships in the Chinese context. This paper can provide evidence for subsequent research on similar topics.

4.1 Resonance of knowledge: experience, description, and perspective

Social media is a platform for information when it doesn't help establish regular relationships with frequent interactions. When it comes to understanding a group of people (such as elites), the most important thing is the knowledge contained in various kinds of information, mainly expressed in descriptions and opinions. The way that users learn this knowledge is not static, but like building a wall, constantly creating their cognition on the existing life experience of users. In the following, I will describe this "knowledge resonance" according to the cases I have interviewed.

Xu is an undergraduate student majoring in English literature. When she saw Musk at the factory, wearing an "Occupy Mars" T-shirt, describing how close his company is to colonizing Mars and how to make it happen, she told me: "I just thought of such an example, that is, I once watched a movie adapted from a real event, it is said that a very rich person has realized.....has made a lot of money, and his family was also very happy, whether in the society or the family are relatively high recognition. He felt unsatisfied with such a life and went to the mountain. The reason is that he feels that the peak of society has been climbed, and he is beginning to climb the peak of nature." She disdained such stories: "Is this peak spiritually satisfying for him, or is it just a commercial stunt or something? But in my opinion, they are just not that valuable or meaningful things. I climbed it, but that did not affect the mountain or anyone else who couldn't climb that mountain."

Musk's news can naturally be seen everywhere on the Internet, and the news that Musk wants to land on Mars is already common Internet content. I asked her how her thoughts had changed since she saw all the news about Musk on social media. "No, my thoughts were the same before and after I saw the Musk news," she said. Then, she explained her daily life experience: "For example, one of my friends now works successfully, and then the lifetime arrangement will be more free, and then the finances will be relatively independent. Sometimes, he would come and give me a similar feeling; sometimes, he would tell me he could not buy more suitable or sharper business clothes. I

don't think that's necessary. There are many other friends around me, and they may even struggle to find a more stable job and a relatively independent life and even put in a lot of time for it. But he is different from most people around me who are still struggling or trading their time for freedom. It can be said that it has been in a relatively free position!"

Wang, a gamer, said to me, "For these entrepreneurs, what I know about them first comes from what I know about the services they offer or the products they offer. For example, Ma Huateng uses his products every day. And or service, and then anyway many places to eat is difficult to see; every consumer should feel." Yang added, "his company may not be very focused on technological innovation. I feel that QQ and King of Glory are in many places; it will require you to top up to get some to get some of the full functions of the software. And then I felt like there were some charging features, which was kind of disgusting. Therefore, I feel that this enterprise may have more speculative aspects. So I just. Probably not a very good impression."

We can see that, in this case, the influence of the information provided by the Internet on people depends on people's interpretation. In this case, the respondent's interpretation is derived from her real-life case: Musk is like her friend who has achieved wealth and freedom but is still struggling to buy a suit, in contrast to herself. At the same time, she also found a way to read Musk's example from her professional studies, namely film and literature: Only those who have climbed the peak of society will climb the peak of nature. She interprets the social media content through mutual corroboration with her daily experience, leading to her negative assessment of Musk. And entrepreneurs, as providers of products, entrepreneurs interact with young people daily, and these daily experiences can influence how people interpret Internet content about elites.

As a rapidly developing and reforming socialism-ideology economy, we often see loud denunciations of inequality and excessive working hours in economic development on the Chinese Internet. In one of the most popular media outlets on the Chinese-language web, People magazine published a nonfiction article called "Delivery Riders, Stuck in the System," which gave a vivid account of how food delivery workers in China's big cities are pressured by delivery time constraints in food delivery software, making it a risky job. One of our interviewees, Dai, said, "I feel that since Jack Ma started to do China's online shopping, I feel that our country has indeed begun to develop and began to do enterprises, but I feel that there is still a kind of..... the feeling that capitalism is beginning to exploit domestic labor. An article said the delivery guy

was stuck in the algorithm. That's the article. I feel that he is exploiting us and capitalism is slowly invading our country, but, as Shanghai's GDP growth is relatively high, it feels like capitalism is everywhere."

I asked her why she sees entrepreneurs so quickly associated with exploitation and capitalism. She told me: "For example, there is a kind of enterprise that you work overtime, and then what benefits will be given - that is, to encourage everyone to work overtime, but not to pay the corresponding overtime pay, but he will have certain benefits, such as the ticket you go home after you work overtime can be reimbursed." It seems that many people just want to be reimbursed for this, and then they will stay in the office for a while, which is a disguised way to let you do more work." I then asked her where she got this information. She replied that she had seen it on Weibo, that Zhihu had something similar, and that her friends had told her about it.

This case shows a different interpretation path from Xu's. Xu interprets social media materials through the knowledge gained from his life experience, while Dai understands elites by depicting reality on social media. This indicates that social media information and personal experience have similar functions for people's opinions to some extent. They influence people's judgment of an object by providing certain information or knowledge.

I've talked about above how personal experiences or objective descriptions on the Internet can affect people's interpretation of online information, especially about elite content. However, there is another way to influence the trust and judgment of elites through "knowledge": direct output of perspectives. Si likes a blogger on Bilibili who teaches "economic history." To be more specific. He once described to me the appeal of this blogger: "He tells it with some techniques, or the feeling of it as a novel, and then he sometimes expresses his own opinions in the process of telling it! Sometimes, it's diss or just bad taste in some way, like America is a bully or something like that. He would throw in a little bit of this sort of banter and ridicule. In this way, I think it can make people feel that he is not just a cold, telling machine, but as someone who conveys his thoughts and feelings to us."

This is the same as his attitude towards the elite: "We have eaten very thanks to this, and then before the United States and many other photovoltaic industries are concentrated together to attack, and then how we are out of this crisis." But I think this blogger shows the creativity and perseverance of Chinese entrepreneurs."

I deliberately raised some doubts about his description: "For example, in the academic text of more professional historical narration, this value preference needs to be

clearly stated at the beginning, then do you feel some value preference of his in the process of watching his videos?" Si replied, "Because it's mainly about an industry. There should be; it must be biased towards China's good part. In his story, I can feel that what China has done in this industry is indeed a miracle and is very powerful. In that generation, it was under the leadership of China and under their struggles that this industry could improve. So if one tells it, he's leaning on the good side."

This example creates an exception: the dissemination of perspectives does not require strong evidence and experience to be widely disseminated, so I have listed "Getting perspectives" as a stand-alone topic. The subject seems to be more about identity. Xu's answer is quite complete, and we can also list her relevant answers here for reference. "I pay attention to a blogger; first, I approve of her character. She has a boyfriend herself, and she is usually very happy or enjoys sharing things with her and her boyfriend. The style of dress is also, that is, how she likes to dress- being willing to show off some of her body. She said women's strengths should not be differentiated early when everything is still in the air. Or what we should be defining now is not positive freedom, but negative freedom; that is, we should not be saying what we should do as feminists, but if I want to support equal rights for men and women, we can have the right not to do something. I think that was a big touch for me."

Taken together, readers can see how the transfer of knowledge and corroboration can affect the image of elites on and off the Internet. Respondents' experiences influence the interpretation of elite content on the Internet, and the description of Internet content has a similar function to personal experiences. At the same time, various perspectives and value preferences are transmitted through the Internet, and in particular, these are often transmitted through identity rather than through user experience.

4.2 Possible result of social isolation: finding role model and reacting to authority

Parigi and Henson II(2017) defined social isolation as having many social ties that lack cohesiveness and generate feelings of loneliness due to the mental effort of navigating disparate social contexts. Some researchers assert that modernization processes like urbanization, secularization, and rising individualism should be seen as weakening traditional community bonds and familial ties. This dislocates people from tight-knit support networks. Some argue that new social media primarily weaken "strong ties" and interpersonal interactions, leading to increased loneliness and isolation. Others argue new tools expand social networking potentials and openings for

interaction beyond strong ties, which could counterbalance isolation tendencies.

Under such a research background, we can smoothly understand this part: respondents' use patterns of social media. Zhu, an interviewee preparing for the Chinese postgraduate exam and always participating in tea parties with businessman alumni, told me that he doesn't think there are too many useful materials on social media. Still, there are many "hidden masters": "I feel that a group of people on Zhihu is more magical. If I want to search for some information, search some views ah, answer ah, I will search on Zhihu because I feel that the people there are hidden masters. Let me give you an example; there is a question like this: if a person's position to the deputy office (deputy mayor of a prefecture-level city) is to promote? And then there were piles and piles of answers. It seems like there are so many high-ranking officials on Zhihu. If you are, for example, what is it like to study abroad? It's all over the place, Stanford, Harvard. What is life like at Tsinghua and Peking Universities? Then there is also a lot of self-introduction of their life in Tsinghua and Peking University".

Later, I asked him if our school often arranges for students to listen to speeches by senior officials and business elites. Does it feel different to interact with them on social media? And he said, "Yeah, yeah. It's different. It's different. If he posts some comments on social media, I dare to reply, dare to comment, dare to comment. If he gave me a lecture in front of me, I would probably be very nervous if I raised my hand. This is a specific psychological manifestation of me. I feel more comfortable with them on social media."

Coincidentally, Lu, a business job seeker, said he saw the relevant Internet content is mainly divided into: "one is a fake post, one is an emotional sharing post, one is an information exchange post," for these are also in the job search stage, but, most of the people who have been successfully admitted to graduate school or get a job to share, his views are as follows:

"He has some experience to share, which is always useful for you. Do you know 'One acre of land divided into three'(an overseas study information platform that users often show off and compare with each other)? This platform is full of anxiety and complaints, but it does not affect it; it has many North American job search facts and useful staff. Right? Well, sometimes it's not a conflict. In addition, some people may just say that they want to show off the size of their package, but he does not affect his information, whether valid or not, true or untrue, but at least he is an effective information sharing platform..... For example, (users can know)whether my writing is bad or my study abroad agency is unreliable. It's just that I

think it's normal and has a positive impact."

What is interesting about these two responses is that although the Internet is dominated by content showing the wealth and status gap, they both have a more positive assessment of conspicuous content posted by senior officials and elite students. Zhu's comparison between daily communication and Internet communication is worth our attention. Daily, his interactions with senior officials are less equal than on the Internet. In this case, it seems they are not getting enough help from the people they crave for information in their daily communication, so they turn to the Internet for business content to look for role models. Despite the need to endure show-off and arrogance, as Lu says, the Internet helps them enough to offset the negative emotions of facing show-off content. However, this contributes to their trust in elites who always appear online.

While potential social isolation means that the role models we need may not come from around us, it may also mean that we don't have adequate answers and phenomena around us when we need to verify information - in this case, I've observed people trying to use the Internet and find peers. A typical example comes from Xu, who was once troubled by the government's policy of encouraging childbearing and marriage. "I recently saw a blogger's tweet, that is, many of our current ideas about marriage and love, or the concept between men and women, may be caused by official guidance. For example, if he wants you to get married, it may be through a policy interpretation or a policy interpretation promoted by the media. To induce you to think that you might get some financial or emotional benefit from marriage and to induce you to get married, and if he doesn't want you to get married, he will do the opposite. That's for personal decisions. Maybe it's still about thinking about yourself, what you can get out of the relationship, what you can get out of the marriage, and the risks you face.

"For me, Li Keqiang's speech may be the kind of broad orientation I just said. But those comments on Weibo can be perceived by analyzing specific social events. When people get a sense of how certain topics are interpreted, or when they perceive certain policy directions, they start not expressing views consistent with those of the official media."

Lou told me about her uncomfortable experience as a teacher at the Marine Academy. One of her teachers, who graduated from Cambridge with a master's degree and a PhD, "had no idea," she says. The pain of a low college GPA, he thinks that if you don't work hard, you don't learn. His concern about this state of mind is hypocritical. Is that he can no longer imagine your life?"

So, when she showed what her social media app

recommended, I found a lot of very life-like, warm content. “Just to see how everyone is doing. Well, I think it’s a strength, and if I see people around me who are very happy or doing well, it’s a kind of courage for me. It just makes you feel like life has a rush. Like me. If I look at my own feelings, I will feel a little ignorant, but if I look at the love of one of my graduate students, I will feel that there is still sweet love in this world or others love you.”

From these two examples, we can see that people are not only seeking information and relationships they desire through the Internet in social isolation but also interacting with certain words of authority, especially resistance: Xu is not satisfied with the official fertility and marriage policies of the government, so he finds similar views on the Internet to support each other; Lou is not satisfied with the superior posture of the academic elite, so she turns to the life content of “ordinary people” on social media while looking for the support and warmth that cannot be obtained in academic selection.

Of course, in addition to opposition, spreading official information through social media creates a sense of trust by shaping a certain “scene.” Yang said of her trust in the former prime minister: “This statement from the prime minister may be particularly credible because he gave a very strong image of this. The feeling is that the national leader is still far from us, but there are few aspects to understand him. But I have a feeling that what he says is more reliable. Because, after all, if he can speak out, he must have some system or law to verify it!” Wang made a similar point: “The trust gap also comes from the fact that the prime minister’s speech was delivered in a formal setting. I don’t pay much attention to politicians, so my knowledge of them is limited to what they say or do, where they go, and who they meet. The scenes in which these politicians appear in my life are some formal official occasions. And then for these entrepreneurs, what I know about them, first of all, comes from what I know about the service or the product that they provide.”

While shaping trust through “scenes” is not unique to social media, as Wang suggests, political elites, who don’t have much of a life connection with social media users, are more likely to gain trust through social media than business elites who offer visible products.

5 Discussion

This paper aims to describe how urban college students in China use social media and examine how such use relates to their attitudes toward elites in their real experiences. We found that respondents overall expressed distrust of political and business elites, with only three respondents having a positive opinion of elites. In this process, we find

that knowledge plays a big role. Respondents’ personal experience influences their subjective interpretation of elite content, and the descriptive articles they selectively read on the Internet confirm each other and strengthen their impressions of their experience. At the same time, respondents’ identities influenced what opinions they gleaned from the Internet. Overall, the descriptive content of the Internet and the user’s personal experience, opinions on the Internet, and the user’s identity should, in many cases, be seen as mutually reinforcing congruence. And as China’s economy grows, the exploitation, fatigue, and multiculturalism that permeates the Internet have reinforced users’ distrust of the elite. Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2019) have a similar point of view: the use of social media does not separate a “virtual world” from the “real world” but, to some extent, increasingly blurs the boundary between personal experience and public space.

At the same time, my paper also uses the emergence of social isolation in urbanization to understand the process of young urban users seeking role models and peers and interacting with authorities. I’ve found that young urban users struggle to get the information, perspective, interpretation, and peer support they need directly around them, which encourages them to seek out critical information on social media. But, because the respective elites provide most of the information in the context of successful experiences, their utility counteracts the division and anxiety users feel and thus increases trust. When faced with elites who cannot provide useful information, young users will seek out peers on social media to gain support. This is consistent with the study of Li and Peng (2019), which shows that people will find peers on social media to relieve cultural pressure. Political elites have a special interaction mode with users on social media. By creating a certain “scene” and distancing themselves from users, they gain trust, which makes it easier for them to gain on social media than business elites who directly provide products to users.

This paper has some implications for the research question by exploring the effects of social media use and elite trust among urban college students in China. Through the investigation of social media use and trust, I reveal the role of social media in the social relations of young Chinese people and discuss the interaction between social media and trust issues in the context of China’s rapid economic development. In addition, the paper applies Emil Durkheim’s theoretical framework to link issues of social media use and trust to nameless states in society, highlighting the importance of social media in this context.

However, there are some limitations and shortcomings in this paper. First, the research method adopts convenience

sampling and only selects a limited sample in Shanghai, which may not represent the views and experiences of the entire Chinese college student population. Second, the paper mentions five hypotheses about social media interaction with young users but does not provide more quantitative research results and data support, which may affect the verification and interpretation of these hypotheses. In addition, due to the complexity of personal experience, the paper finds it difficult to explore the precise causal relationship. It can only describe the interviewees' personal experience and highlight important new problems.

6 Conclusion

First, social media plays an important role among Chinese college students. College students use social media to find partners, gain career development experience, and find like-minded voices. Social media provides them with information and support that makes up for what they lack in real life.

China's rapid economic development has led to social alienation and young people's distrust of authority. The use of social media interacts with Chinese people's trust issues in social relations. Young people's distrust of authority is linked to new cultural values brought about by economic development that emphasize individual freedom, democratic pursuits, and pluralism of voices and is often associated with distrust of public institutions. Content on social media, corroborated by personal experience, reinforces distrust of elites.

In the context of social media, social relationships become unstable and unsupportive. Young college students seek out role models, career experiences, and similar voices on social media because they don't have those resources around them. Specific, effective content on social media enhances their trust in certain elite groups.

Through Emile Durkheim's theoretical framework, we can better understand Chinese college students' interaction with others on social media. The rapid change and development of the economy will lead to disorder in society and affect people's social cohesion and social relations. The importance of social media in this context should be appreciated.

However, some unresolved issues in this paper still need further study. First, the causal relationship between social media use and trust issues must be explored more deeply. More quantitative studies are needed to verify and explain this relationship. Second, the paper only focuses on the views and experiences of urban college students in China, and future studies could expand the sample to include rural areas and other age groups to gain

a more comprehensive understanding. In addition, the paper mentions the positive role of social media in young people's social relationships but also needs to delve into its potential negative effects and risks.

In summary, the paper's impact on the research question is enlightening, revealing the role of social media in the social relationships and trust of young people in China. However, it also has some limitations and shortcomings, including the limitations of sample selection, the inadequate validation of hypotheses, and the descriptive characteristics of the research results. Future research could further explore the causal relationship between social media use and trust, expand the sample size, and delve into social media's negative effects and risks. Through more comprehensive and quantitative research methods, we can better understand the role and influence of social media in Chinese society and provide useful suggestions and strategies for solving the trust crisis and improving social relations.

Unfinished conclusions may include a summary of the research limitations and shortcomings mentioned above and suggest directions for future research. In addition, the importance of social media in Chinese society and the need for further research on social media use and trust relationships can be emphasized. Finally, some suggestions can be made, including strengthening education and guidance on using social media, promoting positive social media interactions, and strengthening the regulation and governance of social media platforms to maintain social trust and stable development.

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