

# Influence of Shaanxi People's Livelihood News Report on Social Audience's Participation in Public Affairs

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**Abstract:** This article aims to explore the influence of Shaanxi people's livelihood news reports on social audience's participation in public affairs, focusing on the mechanism of news types, communication channels and audience cognition. The research uses the combination of questionnaire survey ( $n = 523$ ) and in-depth interview, with the help of multiple regression model and intermediary effect analysis, and verifies the following assumptions: (1) People's livelihood news can obviously enhance the public's attention to public affairs; (2) Different news contents have different influences on participation behavior; (3) Compared with traditional media, new media can stimulate the public's willingness to participate. The analysis shows that 62.3% of the respondents who pay attention to the news of "policy interpretation" have participated in public affairs, which is significantly higher than that of "emergencies" (43.1%). In addition, 72.4% of new media users express their opinions or participate in discussions through online platforms, which is much higher than 41.3% of traditional media users. In addition, attention and trust play a partial intermediary role between news reporting and participation. The research shows that optimizing the content design and communication strategy of people's livelihood news can improve the level of public participation to a certain extent.

**Keywords:** People's livelihood news; Public participation; Communication channels; Shaanxi; Empirical research

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## 1. Introduction

In the information society, news media is not only an important carrier of information dissemination, but also a key link to connect the government and the public and promote the modernization of social governance <sup>[1]</sup>. As an important part of news reports, people's livelihood news plays an irreplaceable role in promoting social fairness and justice and enhancing civic awareness by virtue of its characteristics of being close to life and paying attention to the actual needs of the people <sup>[2]</sup>. Especially in China, a country with a vast territory and unbalanced regional development, local livelihood news is an important tool for local governments to understand people's feelings and public opinions and solve practical problems <sup>[3]</sup>. As an important province in the west, Shaanxi's livelihood news practice has distinct local characteristics, which also reflects the common problems in the development of this field in the country <sup>[4]</sup>. Based on this factor, studying the influence of Shaanxi people's livelihood news reports on the social audience's participation in public affairs is helpful to understand the actual effect of local news communication, and also provides valuable experience for optimizing the

function of local media and enhancing public participation ability.

The social value of people's livelihood news is that it can transform complex policy language into easy-to-understand content and present it in a form acceptable to the people<sup>[5]</sup>. This expression of "grounding gas" makes serious issues close to public life. For example, the topic of housing subsidies, medical reform or equal educational opportunities, through vivid cases, let the audience feel the direct impact of policies on their own lives<sup>[6]</sup>. In addition, people's livelihood news also undertakes the function of supervising the operation of power and revealing social problems. From environmental pollution to food safety, from traffic congestion to uneven distribution of educational resources, these problems have entered the public eye because of the exposure of people's livelihood news, prompting relevant departments to take action to improve<sup>[7]</sup>. It can be said that people's livelihood news is an important help to build a harmonious society, which not only satisfies the public's right to know, but also provides a reference for government decision-making<sup>[8]</sup>. But to achieve these goals, we need the public to really participate in public affairs, form a benign interaction and promote social progress.

In recent years, with the acceleration of economic globalization and technological innovation, the social structure has undergone profound changes, and the public's willingness and ability to participate in public affairs have shown a new trend. The younger generation, such as the post-90s and post-00s, has gradually become the main force of society. They are highly educated, open-minded and willing to express themselves, but they are easily influenced by online public opinion and lack systematic thinking habits<sup>[9]</sup>. The aging society makes the proportion of the elderly population increase. Although they have rich social experience, due to technical limitations, they may encounter obstacles in using digital media and it is difficult to obtain information in time<sup>[10]</sup>. The gap between urban and rural areas is still an important factor restricting public participation. Rural infrastructure is relatively backward, cultural resources are scarce, and grassroots people's attention and support for public affairs are generally low<sup>[11]</sup>. In this context, how to use people's livelihood news to build a communication bridge and guide people of different classes and ages to participate in social governance has become a topic worthy of discussion.

Based on this, this study aims to explore the specific impact of Shaanxi people's livelihood news reports on social audiences' participation in public affairs, and try to answer several core questions: First, can Shaanxi people's livelihood news effectively enhance public attention to public affairs? Second, what are the differences between different types of content (such as emergencies, policy interpretation, and people's livelihood hotspots) on audience participation behavior? Third, are there significant differences between different communication channels (such as traditional media and new media) in shaping the public's willingness to participate? In order to verify these hypotheses, we will use the method of questionnaire survey and in-depth interview to collect sample data from several cities in Shaanxi, and draw conclusions through quantitative and qualitative analysis. It is believed that this research can not only fill the gap in the field of the relationship between local people's livelihood news and public participation, but also provide scientific basis for government departments to formulate policies and provide a useful reference for media organizations to improve their reporting strategies.

## 2. Research design

### 2.1. Research objectives and problem orientation

The purpose of this study is to explore the influence of Shaanxi people's livelihood news reports on the social audience's participation in public affairs. It includes analyzing how Shaanxi people's livelihood news reports affect the audience's attention and attitude towards public affairs, discussing the different effects of different types of news content (policy interpretation, people's livelihood hotspots, emergencies, etc.) on the audience's participation behavior, and comparing the effects of traditional media and new media in shaping the public's willingness to participate.

Based on the above objectives, the following research hypotheses are put forward:

- (1) H1: Shaanxi people's livelihood news reports can significantly enhance the audience's attention to public affairs;
- (2) H2: There are significant differences in the influence of different types of news content on audience participation

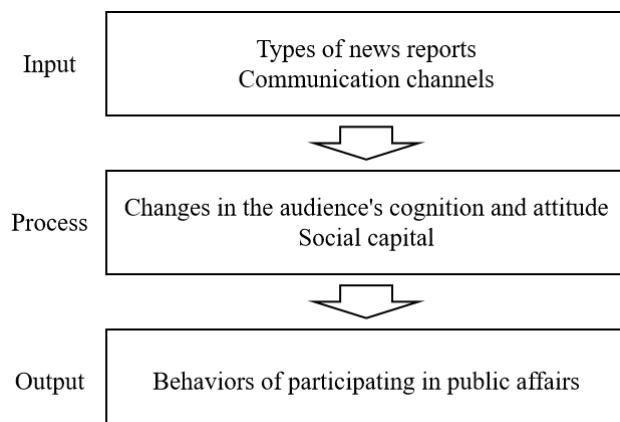
behavior;

(3) H3: Compared with traditional media, new media can stimulate the audience's willingness to participate in public affairs.

In order to verify these hypotheses, the research adopts a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, collects data through questionnaires, and makes supplementary analysis combined with in-depth interviews.

## 2.2. Research framework and variable selection

**Figure 1** shows the overall framework of this study. The framework is divided into three main parts: input, process and output.



**Figure 1.** Research frame diagram.

The types of news reports and communication channels are the core independent variables, while the changes of audience's cognition and attitude are intermediary variables, and the final output result is the changes of public participation behavior. **Table 1** shows the definition and measurement methods of core variables.

**Table 1.** Core variables and measurement methods

Variable Type	Variable Name	Definition	Measurement Method
Independent	News Type	Themes of livelihood news, including policy interpretation, hotspots, events	Multiple-choice question asking about preferred news types
	Media Channel	Main sources of news, e.g., TV, newspapers, WeChat, short video platforms	Single-choice question on primary news source
Mediating	Attention Level	Interest in public affairs-related topics	Likert 5-point scale (1=Not at all, 5=Very much)
	Trust Level	Perceived credibility and authority of news content	Likert 5-point scale (1=No trust, 5=Full trust)
Dependent	Public Participation	Frequency of engaging in public affairs activities	Multiple-choice question listing specific behaviors

## 2.3. Data collection methods

The questionnaire design is divided into several parts around the core variables. The basic information part covers the demographic characteristics such as gender, age, occupation and education level of the interviewee. In the part of news contact habits, we mainly know the frequency and content of people's livelihood news, as well as the main channels to get news. The cognition and attitude part is used to evaluate the audience's attention to public affairs and their trust in news content. The participation behavior part records the specific behaviors and frequency of the audience's participation in

public affairs in the past year.

After the questionnaire design is completed, a pre-test is carried out to ensure that the question setting is reasonable and the language expression is clear, and then appropriate adjustments are made according to the feedback. Formal questionnaires are distributed online and offline. Online questionnaires are promoted by social media platforms, while offline questionnaires are distributed by random sampling in cities such as Xi 'an, Xianyang and Baoji in Shaanxi Province.

Sample selection adheres to the principle of stratified random sampling, aiming at covering people of different ages, occupations and educational backgrounds. It is planned to collect at least 500 valid samples to ensure the reliability of data analysis. In view of the obvious difference between urban and rural areas in Shaanxi Province, the ratio of urban residents to rural residents in the sample is set at 7: 3.

## 2.4. Data analysis method

First, make descriptive statistics on the basic characteristics of the sample, covering the distribution of gender, age, occupation and other aspects, as well as the habits and preferences of respondents in contact with people's livelihood news. **Table 2** presents the distribution of preferences of respondents of different age groups for news types in the preliminary sample.

**Table 2.** Preferences for news types by age group

Age Group	Policy Interpretation (%)	Livelihood Hotspots (%)	Emergency Events (%)	Others (%)
18–25	20	50	25	5
26–40	30	40	20	10
41–60	40	30	15	15
Over 60	50	20	10	20

In order to further test the hypothesis, this article uses multiple regression model to analyze the influence of news report types and communication channels on public affairs participation behavior:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 M + \epsilon \quad (1)$$

Among them:

$Y$  stands for dependent variable (public affairs participation behavior);

$X_1$  stands for news report type;

$X_2$  stands for communication channel;

$M$  represents intermediary variables (such as attention and trust);

$\epsilon$  is the error term.

Through stepwise regression method, we can determine the contribution degree of each variable to the dependent variable and test whether the intermediary effect exists. Interactive items (such as news type  $\times$  communication channel) will also be introduced to explore the synergy between different variables.

In order to overcome the possible limitations of quantitative analysis, a semi-structured interview outline was specially designed, and 20 representative interviewees were selected for in-depth interviews. The interview mainly focused on the following questions:

(1) What types of people's livelihood news do you think can attract your attention? What is the reason?

(2) What channels do you usually use to get people's livelihood news? Will these channels affect your willingness to

participate in public affairs?

(3) What difficulties or obstacles have you encountered in participating in public affairs?

## 2.5. Research ethics and quality control

In the data collection stage, we always strictly follow the research ethics. On the one hand, ensure that all interviewees are fully informed and agree to participate in the research; on the other hand, keep their personal information strictly confidential. In order to improve the recovery rate and data quality of the questionnaire, a brief explanation was added at the beginning of the questionnaire to clearly explain the purpose of the study and the purpose of the data. For those invalid questionnaires whose answers are too perfunctory or lack key information, they will be eliminated.

## 3. Empirical analysis

### 3.1. Sample characteristics and descriptive statistics

A total of 523 valid questionnaires were collected in this study, covering six major cities in Shaanxi Province, including Xi'an, Xianyang and Baoji, and their surrounding rural areas. **Table 3** shows the distribution of the basic characteristics of the sample, of which 48.7% are males and 51.3% are females. In terms of age, people aged 26-40 account for the highest proportion, reaching 42.1%, and people aged 18-25 account for 28.3%. In terms of education level, most of them have bachelor degree or above, accounting for 56.4%, and rural residents account for 29.8% of the sample. This is roughly consistent with the urban-rural ratio (7: 3) in the research design.

**Table 3.** Distribution of sample basic characteristics

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	255	48.7
	Female	268	51.3
Age	18-25 years old	148	28.3
	26-40 years old	220	42.1
	41-60 years old	123	23.5
	Over 60 years old	32	6.1
	Junior high school and below	47	9.0
Education Level	High school/Technical secondary school	98	18.7
	Junior college	132	25.2
	Undergraduate and above	246	47.1
	City	367	70.2
Residence	Rural	156	29.8

### 3.2. The influence of news report types on participation behavior

**Table 4** shows the distribution of different types of news audience in public affairs participation behavior. The data shows that 62.3% of the respondents who pay attention to "policy interpretation" news have participated in online discussions or offline activities. This proportion is significantly higher than that of respondents who are concerned about "unexpected events" news (43.1%) and "people's livelihood hotspots" news (55.8%). This result preliminarily confirms the hypothesis H2, that is to say, the influence of different news content on audience participation behavior is indeed different.

**Table 4.** Distribution of participation behaviors of audiences with different news types

News Type	Participation Behavio (%)	Non - participation Behavior (%)	Chi-Square Value	p - value
Policy Interpretation	62.3	37.7	12.45	< 0.001
Livelihood Hotspots	55.8	44.2	8.12	0.004
Emergency Events	43.1	56.9	4.67	0.031

After in-depth analysis, it is found that the audience who pay attention to “policy interpretation” news prefer to use official channels (such as government websites) to give feedback (38.6%). Those who pay attention to the news of “people’s livelihood hotspots” are more involved in community volunteer service (31.2%). This means that the depth and practicality of news content will directly affect the specific forms of audience participation.

### 3.3. Differences in communication channels’ willingness to participate

**Table 5** compares the differences between users of traditional media (TV, newspapers) and new media (WeChat official account, short video platform) in their participation behavior. According to the data, 72.4% of new media users have expressed their opinions or participated in topic discussions on the online platform, but the proportion of traditional media users is only 41.3%. In addition, new media users participate in online activities (such as voting and public welfare crowdfunding) more frequently, while traditional media users participate in offline community meetings or through letters and visits. This result verifies hypothesis H3, that is to say, the new media channel is more effective in stimulating the willingness to participate.

**Table 5.** Comparison of participation behaviors of users of different communication channels

Communication Channel	Online Discussion (%)	Offline Activity (%)	Policy Feedback (%)	t - value	p - value
Traditional Media	41.3	35.6	23.1		
New Media	72.4	27.6	15.8	4.67	<0.001

### 3.4. The role of attention and trust

With the help of hierarchical regression model (**Table 6**), this article examines the mediating effect of attention and trust between news report types and participation behavior. The results show that the direct influence coefficient of news types on participation behavior is 0.23 ( $p < 0.01$ ). However, when attention and trust are included in the model, the direct influence coefficient is reduced to 0.15 ( $p < 0.05$ ), and the intermediary effect accounts for 34.8%. This means that the audience’s attention and trust in news content explain the influence mechanism of news types on participation behavior to some extent.

**Table 6.** Results of mediation effect regression analysis

Variable	Model 1 (Dependent Variable: Participation Behavior)	Model 2 (with Mediating Variables Added)
News Type	0.23***	0.15**
Attention Level	/	0.31***
Trust Level	/	0.18**
R <sup>2</sup>	0.12	0.28
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	/	0.16***

### 3.5. Dynamic relationship between age and channel preference

Figure 2 shows the changes in the proportion of audiences of different ages who get news by means of traditional media and new media. The results show that 84.6% of the people aged 18–25 mainly rely on new media (such as Tik Tok and WeChat) to get news. In the group over 60 years old, 68.3% people still use TV and newspapers as their main sources of news. In particular, among the 41–60-year-old group, the proportion of using new media has risen to 45.7%, which shows that the middle-aged and elderly groups are changing their media usage habits.

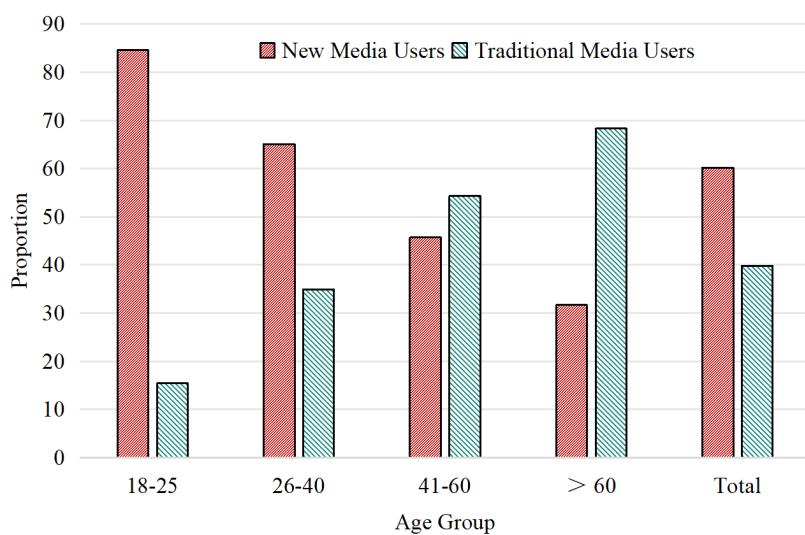


Figure 2. News channel preferences of audiences of different ages.

### 3.6. Supplementary findings of qualitative interviews

In-depth interviews further revealed the deep logic behind quantitative data. For example, a 32-year-old new media user mentioned: “People’s livelihood news on the short video platform is more intuitive, and different opinions can be seen in the comment area, which makes me more willing to participate in the discussion.” A 58-year-old traditional media user said: “TV news has strong authority, but lacks interactive channels, so I am more accustomed to directly reflecting problems to the community.” These feedbacks show that the interactivity and authority of communication channels jointly affect the audience’s participation motivation.

## 4. Discussion

This study uses empirical analysis of Shaanxi people’s livelihood news reports to reveal the influence mechanism of news content types, communication channels and audience characteristics on public participation in public affairs. The research shows that the news of “policy interpretation” plays the most significant role in promoting public participation. This is because this kind of news covers the details of policy implementation and potential impact, which can help the audience better understand and evaluate government decisions. In contrast, although “unexpected events” news can attract short-term attention, its continuous influence is limited. News of “People’s Livelihood Hotspots” can promote public participation to a certain extent, but its actual effect is slightly inferior because of its entertaining and immediate characteristics. It can be seen that the depth and practicality of news content are the key factors affecting public participation.

In stimulating public participation, new media have obvious advantages. There are 72.4% new media users who have expressed their opinions or participated in discussions with the help of online platforms, while the proportion of traditional media users is only 41.3%. New media has outstanding interactivity and convenience, while traditional media has high authority and credibility, but its interactivity is insufficient. This shortcoming limits its appeal to the public. Furthermore,

the popularity of new media among young people is extremely high, and middle-aged and elderly people are gradually adapting to this change. The proportion of new media use among the 41-60 age group has risen to 45.7%.

Regression analysis shows that attention and trust play an important intermediary role between news types and participation behavior. With the support of data and expert interpretation, policy interpretation news gains high attention and trust, thus prompting the audience to take action. Due to the rapid update of information and the lack of systematic analysis, emergency news reduces the audience's attention and trust.

Audiences of different ages have different preferences for using traditional media and new media. The 18-25-year-old group almost completely relies on new media to obtain information, while the group over 60 years old mainly relies on traditional media. However, the media usage habits of middle-aged and elderly people are also changing. Among new media users, short video platform has become the main position for young people to express their opinions, while social media is more suitable for in-depth discussion and long-term attention.

Based on these findings, we can get the following practical enlightenment: First, optimize news content and increase investment in policy interpretation news; The second is to strengthen the interactive function and attach importance to the design of interactive links; Third, pay attention to intergenerational differences and formulate differentiated communication strategies; The fourth is to strengthen cross-platform cooperation and promote the deep integration of traditional media and new media. Future research can continue to explore the specific mode of public participation in the new media environment, investigate the heterogeneity in different regions, and analyze the impact of new technologies on news dissemination and public participation.

## 5. Conclusion

This study reveals the influence of Shaanxi people's livelihood news reports on public participation in public affairs and its mechanism. People's livelihood news is not only a tool to simply disseminate information, but also an important medium to promote the public to actively participate in public affairs.

The news of "policy interpretation" has the most significant effect on promoting public behavior (62.3% of the respondents participated in the activities), while the news of "unexpected events" has a weak long-term incentive effect (43.1%).

Communication channels directly affect the form of participation: 72.4% of new media users participate through the network, while only 41.3% of traditional media users. There is a significant age difference. 84.6% of people aged 18-25 use new media, and 68.3% of people over 60 still prefer traditional media, but the usage rate of new media among middle-aged and elderly people is gradually increasing.

Attention and trust are key mediating variables. The regression model shows that the direct influence coefficient of news types is reduced from 0.23 to 0.15, and the intermediary effect accounts for 34.8%, indicating that audience identification is the key to news transformation into action.

Based on these conclusions, the following suggestions are put forward: (1) Strengthen the authority and practicability of news of "policy interpretation"; (2) Use the interactive function of new media to enhance its influence; (3) Build a perfect feedback mechanism to enhance public trust.

## Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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