

Article

Comparing Audience Participation Mechanisms of Chinese Social Media News and Television News under Interactive versus One-way Communication Models

Huanhuan Zhang*

Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty 050040, Kazakhstan.

*Corresponded Author: Huanhuan Zhang, 1424335624@qq.com.

CITATION

Zhang HH. Comparing Audience Participation Mechanisms of Chinese Social Media News and Television News under Interactive versus One-way Communication Models. *Perspectives of Communication & Media*. 2025; 1(3): 224.

<https://doi.org/10.63808/pcm.v1i3.224>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 29 September 2025

Accepted: 30 September 2025

Available online: 20 October 2025

COPYRIGHT



Copyright © 2025 by author(s).

Perspectives of Communication & Media is published by Wisdom Academic Press Ltd.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license.

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Abstract: Digital technology has created two different ways people get their news in China. This study looks at how audiences interact with traditional television news compared to social media platforms like WeChat, Weibo, and Douyin. We found that social media lets people do much more – they can comment, share, and even create their own news content. Television, on the other hand, only lets people watch. While TV news has fixed schedules and one-way communication that limit what audiences can do, it still has strengths in being trusted and reaching many people at once. New approaches that mix both TV and social media features are emerging because neither system alone gives people everything they need. These changes show how news consumption is changing and who has power in today's media world.

Keywords: audience participation; interactive communication; social media news; television broadcasting; media engagement

1. Introduction

China's media world has changed dramatically in recent years. Traditional TV stations that have delivered news for decades now share the stage with social media platforms like WeChat, Weibo, and Douyin. These platforms have completely changed how people get and interact with news. WeChat alone has over a billion users who not only read news but also share articles in group chats, comment on stories, and even create their own news channels (Wu & Pan, 2022). Weibo functions like a public square where breaking news spreads in minutes, while Douyin's short videos make news more entertaining and accessible to younger audiences. This isn't just about having more choices – it's about a complete change in how news organizations and audiences relate to each other. People are no longer just viewers; they're becoming participants who shape the news conversation (Zhang et al., 2024).

Traditional TV news works in a straightforward way: professional journalists decide what news to report and how to present it, then broadcast it at set times to viewers who can only watch. News anchors read stories from teleprompters, reporters file segments from the field, and everything is carefully edited before going on air. Social media works very differently. It creates spaces where anyone can share news, add comments, or question what's being reported. A single person with a smartphone can record an event and have it seen by millions within hours. These different approaches affect everything about news – how it's made, how it spreads, and how people use it.

News organizations need to decide where to spend their money – on traditional TV or digital platforms. Many are struggling with this choice as advertising money moves from television to online platforms. Government officials need to understand how information spreads to make good policies about media regulation and information control. For all of us who consume news, understanding these differences helps us make better choices about where to get our information and how to evaluate what we see. The way we get news shapes our understanding of the world around us.

2. Theoretical Framework

To understand these systems, we need to look at how information flows through society. Television uses what we call “one-to-many” communication – one TV station sends the same message to many viewers. It’s like a teacher standing in front of a classroom where students just listen and take notes. The TV station creates content, and viewers watch it. The station decides what’s important, how to present it, and when to broadcast it. If viewers want to give feedback, they can’t do it directly – they might affect ratings over time or occasionally write letters or call in, but that’s about it. This feedback is slow and often doesn’t reach the people making editorial decisions.

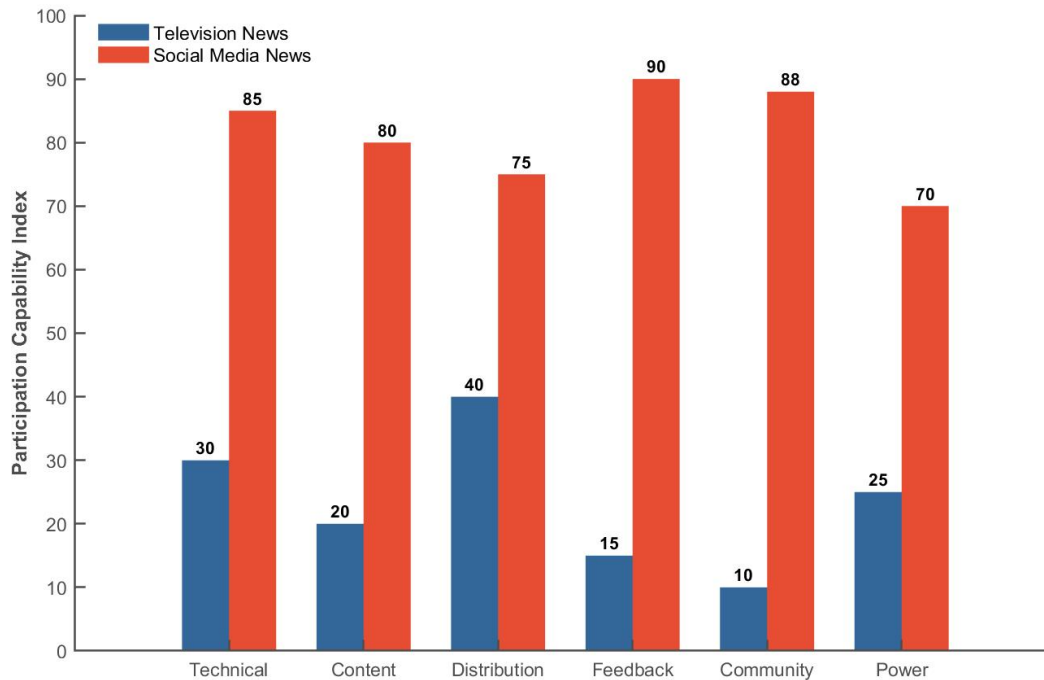
Social media uses “many-to-many” communication – everyone can send and receive messages. It’s more like a group conversation at a dinner party where anyone can speak up, respond to others, or change the topic. People constantly switch roles: one minute they’re reading news, the next they’re commenting on it, then sharing it with friends, maybe even creating their own version with added context or corrections. Information bounces around the network like a ball in a pinball machine, changing direction and picking up new meanings as people add their thoughts and experiences.

Research shows that audiences today aren’t satisfied just watching or reading – they want to participate in the news process (Ferrer-Conill & Tandoc, 2020). This can be as simple as hitting a “like” button to show approval or as complex as making videos about news events from their own perspective. Some people fact-check stories, others provide eyewitness accounts, and many share personal experiences related to news topics. Technology has made it easy for regular people to join conversations that used to be controlled entirely by media companies. A smartphone with internet access is all someone needs to become part of the news ecosystem.

We looked at several key areas to compare these systems: the technology needed to participate, who makes content and how, the ways content spreads to audiences, how people give feedback to news producers (Gajardo & Costera Meijer, 2023), and whether communities form around news topics (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1

Participation Dimensions in Television Versus Social Media News



Note. Comparative analysis framework showing participation capabilities. Television scores reflect centralized control; social media scores reflect distributed engagement.

3. Television News: One-Way Communication

TV news runs through big organizations with many layers of decision-making. Reporters find stories by talking to sources (Schmidt & Lawrence, 2022), attending events, and monitoring other news outlets. Editors then choose which stories deserve coverage based on news value, audience interest, and editorial policies. Producers decide how to present these stories – how long each segment should be, what visuals to use, and in what order to broadcast them. Every story goes through many hands before reaching viewers. This process helps ensure accuracy and maintains professional standards, but it also means a small group of professionals’ controls what becomes news and how it’s presented to the public.

Running a TV station requires millions of dollars in equipment and infrastructure. Studios need cameras, lighting, sound equipment, and control rooms. Transmitters and satellite links carry signals to homes (García-Perdomo, 2021). Professional staff including journalists, camera operators, editors, and technicians all need salaries. Only big companies or government organizations can afford this. Plus, the government strictly limits how many TV channels can exist in each area through licensing. This

means just a handful of organizations control TV news, essentially deciding what millions of people learn about the world. They act as gatekeepers, filtering information according to their own standards and interests.

The biggest limitation with TV news is its rigid timing. News programs come on at specific times – morning news at 7 AM, evening news at 7 PM – and if you’re busy then, you miss them entirely. Unlike checking news on your phone whenever you have a free moment, TV demands you adjust your schedule to its programming. This is especially difficult for people with irregular work schedules or family responsibilities. People usually watch TV at home, often alone or with family, but not as part of a larger community discussing the news together. This isolation means viewers can’t immediately share reactions or get different perspectives on what they’re watching.

People who watch TV news regularly often make it part of their daily routine, like watching the evening news during dinner. But research shows they’re usually doing other things too – cooking, talking with family, checking phones, or doing household chores – treating news as background noise rather than giving it full attention. People feel loyal to certain channels or familiar news anchors they’ve watched for years, but not deeply connected to the actual news stories. They might discuss major stories with friends the next day, but there’s no immediate community reaction (**Table 1**).

Table 1

Comparative Participation Characteristics

Dimension	Television News Characteristics	Participation Implications	Audience Impact
Production Model	Centralized hierarchical control	Professional gatekeeping dominates	Excludes citizen voices
Distribution	Scheduled broadcast transmission	Fixed temporal windows	Requires schedule adaptation
Feedback Channels	Indirect asynchronous mechanisms	No real-time interaction	Minimal content influence
Content Control	Editorial predetermined framing	Cannot modify narratives	Passive acceptance only
Social Features	Individual isolated viewing	No peer discussion	Prevents community building
Customization	Uniform mass programming	No personalization options	Mismatched individual relevance



Note. Structural comparison of television and social media news platforms across six participation dimensions.

4. Social Media News: Interactive Communication

Social media platforms let anyone with a smartphone become a news creator or distributor (Chen & Wen, 2021). You don't need expensive equipment, professional training, or institutional backing. If you witness something newsworthy – an accident, a protest, a heartwarming moment – you can share it immediately with your network. This breaks down the traditional wall between professional journalists and regular citizens, letting many different voices join the news conversation. Minority groups, rural communities, and young people who rarely appeared in traditional news can now share their stories directly.

On social media, information travels through multiple channels simultaneously. It flows through friend networks where people share stories with those they know personally. It spreads through interest groups where people with similar hobbies or concerns gather. Platform algorithms also push content to users based on their past behavior and preferences. It's like news flowing through many interconnected pipes instead of from one broadcast tower.

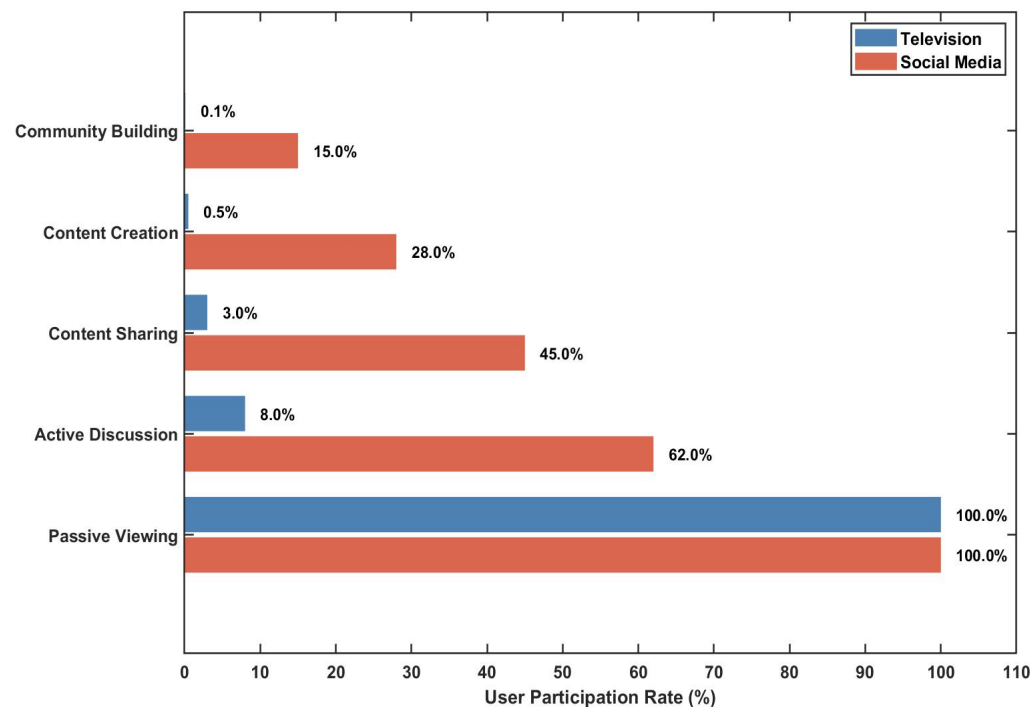
What you see on the platform depends on who you follow, what your friends share, which groups you join, and how computer programs guess that somebody will find something interesting. Comments, likes, shares, and viewing time all affect which news the system shows out to more people.

Social media accommodates different levels of involvement, making it accessible to everyone. Some people simply scroll and read, receiving news passively like television viewers. Others press the like or add emoji as they want to give approval. More active users write comments from their own perspectives and experiences. They might share posts to their own timeline, sometimes adding their own commentary. Some create their own posts about news events, maybe including photos or videos they took. The most involved might start online campaigns, create discussion groups, or build communities around issues they care about. Everything happens instantly – when someone posts news, they immediately see who's reading, liking, responding, and sharing (Wu & Fitzgerald, 2025).

People check social media throughout their entire day – on the bus during commutes, during lunch breaks at work, while waiting in line at stores, even in bed before sleeping. They have many quick interactions with news rather than sitting down for a long TV program. Groups naturally form around shared interests or concerns, working together to understand events, verify information, and support each other. When major news breaks, these communities become very active, with members sharing updates, checking facts, and providing emotional support. When people share or comment on news, they feel personally involved in the story, creating stronger emotional connections than just watching TV (**Figure 2**).

Figure 2

Engagement Levels Across Media Platforms



Note. Percentages indicate user participation rates at each engagement level. Data shows participation depth across platforms.

5. Comparative Analysis

When we compare these systems, major differences become immediately clear. The most obvious is flexibility – TV makes you watch at its scheduled time or miss out completely, while social media lets you check news whenever you want, wherever



you are. Response speed differs dramatically too. TV stations learn what viewers think through weekly ratings reports that show general trends, while social media shows instant, specific reactions through likes, comments, and shares that creators can see in real-time.

Both systems have their particular strengths which serve different purposes. Television is an effective way of getting one message out to everyone at exactly the same time, which is important for major announcements like election results or emergency warnings. Professional journalists and editors help ensure accuracy, balance, and good presentation. They verify facts, check sources, and provide the kind of background that enables audiences to see complex issues in context. Social media disseminates news more quickly through viral sharing of news stories and gives everyone a piece of news geared specifically to where they happen to be at that time or different interests. It also creates interactive communities that continue to discuss issues long after the initial reports have come out and often bring about genuine social change.

These variations have a significant and complicated influence on society. Television means a great many people all have the same shared experiences - Spring Festival Gala, big news events like major political announcements or performances by the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. This provides society with standard reference points and topics for discussion. Professional editors edit out misinformation and conspiracy theories, but they also decide what is considered news according to their own standards. Social media enables any voice to be heard, so that the “little people” can challenge official versions or bring neglected issues to public attention. However, it also permits misinformation to spread quickly without waiting for fact-checkers to verify it—and creates echo chambers where people only listen to opinions they already agree with, making polarization inevitable (Nelson, 2021).

6. Conclusion

Different news technologies fundamentally change the relationship between news organizations and their audiences. Television offers professional, coordinated news delivery with high production values and editorial oversight, but audiences can only watch what is presented.

Social media allows active participation among the audience, provides diverse voices, and encourages community building around news topics. Yet it struggles with false information, echo chambers, and social division. These changes reflect larger changes within Chinese society about who controls information and how the power of media is shared. The shift from passive watching to active participation shows power shifting from big media companies to networks of users who determine what becomes news and how that story is told. As new technologies like artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and 5G networks develop, they will create new ways to participate that we haven't yet imagined. These might include immersive news experiences (Steensen, Ferrer-Conill, & Peters, 2020), AI-personalized news summaries, or newer forms of collaborative journalism. This theoretical comparison, while comprehensive, lacks empirical validation through actual user behavior data and is constrained to mainstream platforms, suggesting the need for broader empirical investigation.

Neither television nor social media alone can fulfill all our news needs in modern society. Television provides the centralized mass communication required for major national events and emergencies. Social media is a place where diverse voices can be heard, in-depth discussion is possible, and communities respond to news. Media organizations must find creative ways to combine the strengths of both systems while addressing their weaknesses. This could mean TV stations offering more interactive online content or social media platforms cooperating with professional press for verification. Understanding these different systems of behavior better prepares us to go through the increasingly complex media world, where old and new modes live side by side, competing for attention but gradually melding into new structures — maybe ones that could better serve society's informational demands.

Conflict of interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

References

- [1] Chen, Y., & Wen, Z. (2021). The rise of short-video platforms and the transformation of Chinese media ecology. *Television & New Media*, 22(8), 867–884. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476420972920>
- [2] Ferrer-Conill, R., & Tandoc, E. C. (2020). (Against a) theory of audience engagement with news. *Journalism Studies*, 24(8), 1045–1062. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2020.1788414>.
- [3] Gajardo, C., & Costera Meijer, I. (2023). How to tackle the conceptual inconsistency of audience engagement? The introduction of the Dynamic Model of Audience Engagement. *Journalism*, 24(9), 1959–1979. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849221080356>
- [4] García-Perdomo, V. (2021). How social media influence TV newsrooms online engagement and video distribution. *Journalism Practice*, 15(4), 542–558. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2021.1927864>
- [5] Nelson, J. L. (2021). Imagining audiences: Shifting perceptions of the audience in news discourse. *Media and Communication*, 9(3), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v9i3.4022>
- [6] Schmidt, T., & Lawrence, R. G. (2022). Production perspectives on audience engagement: Community building for current affairs television. *Media Industries Journal*, *9*(1). <https://doi.org/10.3998/mij.3930>
- [7] Steensen, S., Ferrer-Conill, R., & Peters, C. (2020). (Against a) theory of audience engagement with news. *Journalism Studies*, 21(12), 1662–1680. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2020.1788414>
- [8] Wu, G., & Pan, C. (2022). Audience engagement with news on Chinese social media: A discourse analysis of the People's Daily official account on WeChat. *Discourse & Communication*, 16(1), 129–145. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17504813211026567>
- [9] Wu, X., & Fitzgerald, R. (2025). The danmu discourse of user engagement with cross-posted broadcast interviews in Chinese social media. *Journalism*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849241253900>
- [10] Zhang, H., Wang, M., & Chen, X. (2024). A path to Chinese traditional news media's integration with social platforms. *Media and Communication*, 12, Article 7429. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.2024.7429>