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Interactive-Driven Visibility Structure and Public Opinion Polarization: A Case Study of Fertility and Family Policy on Short-Video Platforms in China

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Abstract. Existing studies on platform communication mainly focus on algorithms, user behavior, and emotional stimulation, but pay less attention to how visibility structures shape public opinion on public policy issues. This study examines fertility and family policy content on Douyin, China's largest short-video platform. Using content analysis, the study analyzes 271 videos posted from January 2025 to March 2026. Visibility is measured through total engagement, including the numbers of likes, comments, and shares. The study also compares standpoint, emotional intensity, and narrative style across different visibility levels. The results show a clear hierarchical visibility structure with a long-tail distribution. A small number of videos receive very high engagement, while most videos stay at low visibility levels. But highly visible content isn't more emotional, polarized, or centered on personal narrative. Most high-visibility videos focus on neutral and rational policy interpretation. These findings suggest that platform communication is unequal, but the logic of visibility depends on the issue itself. In public policy communication, informational value and practical relevance may matter more than emotional expression. This study provides evidence from a non-Western platform context and offers implications for digital public policy communication.

Keywords: Visibility Structure, Public Opinion Polarization, Fertility Policy, Short-Video Platform, Public Policy Communication

1. Introduction

1.1. Research background

Digital platforms are reshaping the way how public issues are communicated around the world. In traditional media systems, professional news organizations mainly controlled agenda-setting. But on short-video platforms, algorithms and user interactions now play a much important role in content distribution. "Likes", "comments", and "shares" have become key indexes of visibility. These indexes influence which content reaches wider audiences and gains public attention.

At the same time, the decline of fertility rates and the change of family structures have become major governance challenges, especially in East Asia. Discussions about childcare support,

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parenting leave, family welfare, and gender roles are common on digital platforms. Fertility and family policy connects national governance with everyday life experience. For this reason, it provides a useful case for studying the relationship between platform visibility and public opinion formation.

Many existing studies argue that interaction-driven platforms tend to amplify emotional expression, extreme discourse, and identity conflict. But it is still unclear whether the same pattern appears in public policy communication. Fertility and family policy is an appropriate case because it includes policy interpretation, practical information needs, emotional experience, and public debate at the same time. Studying how this content appears across different visibility levels can help explain how platform logic shapes public policy communication.

1.2. Formulation of the research question

Research on the communication of platforms has mostly focused on users' behavior, algorithmic recommendations, emotional contagion, etc. However, the above studies have paid less attention to how visibility structures influence the portrayal of public policy issues. Visibility in the Digital Space is Not Uniform. Different Exposure may affect which views, narratives and types of information are more prominent and popular in public discussion.

Given the above background, this paper will analyze the fertility and family policy content on short-video platforms through content analysis. Research on Visibility Structures and the Presentation of Public Opinion. The following are the research questions.

RQ1: Is there a discernible organization of fertility and family policy content on short-video platforms?

RQ2: Do the different stance types change with different levels of visibility?

RQ3: Do highly visible contents show stronger emotional expression and more personal narratives?

2. Literature review

2.1. The structural transformation of public opinion communication

In the past, mass media mainly disseminated the problems of the people and the communication system was highly centralized. Traditional agenda-setting theory posits that mass media influence the public's perception of what issues are most important by selecting, highlighting, and repeatedly covering specific topics [1].

Li Qingqing believes that agenda-setting actors in the digital age now include platforms, institutional media and ordinary users, in addition to the traditional media organizations [2]. With the development of digital media, the places from which the public problem originates and spreads have expanded dramatically and no longer be limited to one location.

Users of social media are also content creators and spread the information that has been posted. Chen Gang believes that the communication of controversial public issues has changed from a one-way spread to a process of participation and negotiation among all sides [3]. At the same time, fragmented communication has also become more frequent, and people's own experiences and emotions are now more prominent in online discussions.

But the different communication subjects are not given the same attention by default. Communication of public interests on digital platforms now mainly uses recommendation systems and user interactions. Therefore, the study will also consider the various degrees of dissemination of

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the information released by the platform. Existing studies show that digital platforms have changed how the public is addressed, but they have not fully explained why some kinds of public policy content are more visible than others on these platforms, and how this difference in visibility affects public opinion.

2.2. Visibility and dissemination mechanisms of digital platforms

On digital platforms, content circulation does not happen naturally. Platform mechanisms strongly shape what users can see. Research on digital visibility argues that platforms control content exposure through algorithmic ranking, recommendation systems, and interactive design. Visibility has therefore become an important form of platform power.

Van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal argue that platforms have developed into a kind of social infrastructure. Platforms reshape information flow through datafication, commodification, and selection mechanism [4]. Selection mechanisms decide which content is promoted and which content receives less attention. In this way, platforms influence the structure of public discourse. Huszár found that Twitter's recommendation system amplified some political content more than others, showing that visibility on platforms is unevenly distributed [5] .

User interaction also affects visibility. Likes, comments, and shares are often viewed as signals of communication potential. These signals can create a cycle of "high interaction → high exposure → more interaction." Liu Jing and Pan Nanjun argue that algorithmic recommendation has changed how public issues enter public discussion and may also affect the balance of online discourse [6] .

But existing studies still do not clearly explain whether highly visible public policy content follows the same emotional and polarized communication logic found in political conflict or entertainment issues. Research on visibility structures, policy communication, and public opinion representation on Chinese short-video platforms also remains limited.

2.3. The formation and differentiation of public opinion on public policy

Public opinion on public policy refers to how people form opinions and discuss policy issues in public spaces. Policy communication is shaped by policy content, media structure, and social emotions. In the field of fertility policy, declining birth rates, population aging, and changing family structures have become common governance challenges in many countries. As a result, public discussion about childcare subsidies, women's employment protection, and family welfare policies has increased.

In China, fertility policy discussions show clear platform-based characteristics. Yao Dan and Yan Chunhui argue that short-video platforms have become important channels for communicating issues such as the "three-child policy" [7]. These platforms combine policy interpretation, information sharing, and public interaction. Compared with traditional one-way policy communication, platform-based communication places more emphasis on visual presentation, scenario-based storytelling, and user participation.

International research also shows that policy communication is closely related to content form. Cheng and Li find that narrative style, emotional expression, and content characteristics significantly influence user engagement with political videos on TikTok [8]. This suggests that the spread of public policy content depends not only on the policy itself but also on platform communication logic.

But existing studies mainly focus on user attitudes, emotional expression, and polarization. Researchers still pay less attention to how different types of policy content are distributed across

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visibility levels or whether highly visible content systematically amplifies certain stances, emotions, or narrative styles.

2.4. Limitations and research gaps in existing studies

Existing studies provide important insights into public issue communication, platform visibility, and policy-related public opinion. But several gaps still remain.

First, most studies focus on algorithms, user behavior, and emotional communication effects. Researchers pay less attention to visibility structures themselves, especially to how different types of content are distributed across visibility levels. This gap is directly related to the first research question of this study.

Second, many studies argue that emotional expression and conflicting positions are more likely to gain visibility on digital platforms. But these conclusions mainly come from research on political conflict and entertainment content in Western platform environments. Researchers still know little about whether different stance types in public policy communication appear differently across visibility levels. This issue is closely connected to the second research question of this study.

Third, existing research on policy communication and online polarization mainly focuses on emotional contagion and user attitudes. Researchers pay less attention to whether highly visible content systematically amplifies emotional expression and personal storytelling. In particular, it remains unclear whether public policy communication on Chinese short-video platforms follows the same "emotion-driven" communication logic. This gap forms the basis for the third research question of this study.

3. Theoretical framework and research hypotheses

3.1. Theoretical basis and analysis model construction

3.1.1. Digital visibility and the public policy communication on platform

This study uses digital visibility theory as the main analytical framework to explain how platform mechanisms shape public policy communication. With the rise of digital platforms, public issues no longer enter public discussion mainly through traditional media selection. Instead, platform distribution and user interaction now play a central role. Public communication has become more dispersive, dynamic, and data-driven.

In this process, visibility has become an important communication resource. Researches on digital visibility argue that being "seen" on platforms is not natural or equal. Platform algorithms, recommendation systems, and user interaction together shape visibility distribution.

Platforms rank and distribute content based on user preferences and interaction data. Metrics such as likes, comments, shares, favorites, and viewing duration help recommendation systems evaluate communication potential. As a result, platform communication is uneven. A small amount of content receives very high exposure, while most content stays at low visibility levels.

Based on this perspective, this study defines a visibility structure as the unequal distribution of exposure created through the interaction between platform recommendation systems and user engagement during public issue communication. This concept highlights that visibility on digital platforms is hierarchical rather than equal.

This study also places visibility structures within the broader transformation of digital public communication. Drawing on Jürgen Habermas's theory of the public sphere, digital platforms can be

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understood as new spaces for public discussion where ordinary users increasingly participate in discussing public affairs [9]. Compared with traditional public spheres, short-video platforms have lower participation barriers, faster information circulation, and more fragmented and visual forms of expression. But platform algorithms and commercial logic strongly shape communication in these spaces. Visibility therefore becomes an important factor which influences whose voices gain attention online.

This transformation is especially clear in public policy communication. In digital media environments, policy communication has become more platform-based and participatory. Government agencies, institutional media, Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs), and ordinary users all participate in the interpretation and circulation of policy information [10]. Audiences are no longer only receivers of policy information. They also evaluate, share, and reinterpret policy content.

Fertility and family policy is a useful case for studying this process because it combines governance concerns with personal life experience. Discussions about childbirth subsidies, childcare costs, parental leave, gender roles, and work-family balance involve policy interpretation, emotional expression, and value judgment at the same time. This issue therefore provides a good case for examining how visibility structures shape public policy discourse on short-video platforms.

3.1.2. Overall analysis model construction

Based on the aforementioned theories, this paper constructs the following analytical model: Algorithmic recommendation+user interaction (initial variable)→visibility structure (intermediate variable)→characteristics of public opinion on fertility policies (outcome variable).

Platforms determine the initial exposure of content through recommendation systems and further adjust dissemination opportunities according to interaction data such as the number of "likes", "comments", and "shares". Through this process, different types of content enter different visibility levels, including "high", "medium", and "low".

The visibility structure then influences what kinds of policy content users are more likely to encounter and how these issues are presented in public discussion. This includes differences in stance distribution, emotional intensity, and narrative style.

Therefore, this study treats visibility structure as the key variable connecting platform dissemination mechanisms and the representation of public opinion on public policy issues.

3.2. Research hypotheses

H1: Fertility and family policy content on Douyin has a clear hierarchical visibility structure.

Research on digital visibility has shown that the platforms' communication resources are not the same. Recommendation systems will continuously increase the spread of popular content, and most other content will remain at a low exposure level. Therefore, platform communication generally has a long-tail distribution and prominent visibility inequality. Given that short-video platforms are driven by algorithms and interaction data, fertility and family policy content will also be ranked differently in terms of visibility.

H2: Different Stance types have varying degrees of visibility at different times, and content with more positive attitudes is more likely to be displayed widely.

Many of the previous studies have indicated that controversial or strongly opinionated content is likely to generate more interactions and thus be promoted by algorithms. Emotional disagreement, values and identities are likely to draw attention from the public. Therefore, it is expected that

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content which supports or opposes the fertility policy will be more popular than neutral interpretations of the policy.

However, this expectation may not be fully met by public policy communication. Fertility and family policy are not for entertainment or a party function; they aim to provide people with practical policy information, welfare services, etc. In the Chinese platform environment, government organs, main-stream media organizations and professional communities are also used to spread policies. The ecology of this platform may reduce the visibility advantage of high-polarisation content.

H3: Content with strong emotions and more personal narratives is more likely to appear in the high-visibility tier.

Most studies have shown that emotional content is more likely to attract attention and trigger comments, as emotions such as anxiety, anger and moral outrage can motivate users to share or discuss. People's stories are in general more interesting and relatable to us than abstract facts. The above will increase the promotion reach of this content on social media.

But fertility and family policy also have strong information-sharing and policy-design functions. People will be more interested in learning about the practical application of policies and other useful information rather than emotional content. Therefore, the rational and information-oriented policy content can still be communicated effectively within the platform environment.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research paradigm and methods

This study uses a positivist research approach and observes and systematically analyzes platform communication data. Interaction data, spread patterns and text features of short-video platforms are all highly observable and suitable for quantitative studies.

The three reasons for this study are content analysis. First, short-video platforms have accumulated a large amount of new material and analysis can be conducted on multiple samples of this material. Second, this paper examines the connections among stance, emotion, narrative style and visibility structure, and will convert these content features into quantifiable variables. Third, short-video platforms offer publicly available data such as titles, captions, interaction metrics and account information that can be used for analysis.

Based on the above method, this study will conduct a quantitative content analysis of fertility and family policy videos on Douyin to examine the distribution of different content attributes at various levels of visibility.

4.2. Research context and case selection

4.2.1. Research field: The Douyin platform

Douyin has been chosen as the research area of this paper because it has a large number of users, powerful platform influence and clear algorithmic communication mechanisms. Douyin is now a place where people can obtain information, express themselves and take part in social activities. The Communication System of the platform is based on algorithm recommendation and user interaction. Likes, comments, shares and watch-time are all related to how much people see and share content. Interaction-driven mode: Douyin is a suitable case for the study of visibility structures.

Recently, Douyin has also begun to be used for the spread of social issues. At the time of major policy announcements and other hot topics in society, many policy-related materials are posted on

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the platform. The above features make Douyin a typical case study for studying the influence of visibility structures on public policy communication.

4.2.2. Case study: The issues of fertility and family policy

This study selects fertility and family policy as the case study because the issue combines public policy relevance with strong connections to everyday life. In recent years, discussions about childbirth subsidies, childcare services, parental leave, and family welfare have become increasingly important in China and other low-fertility societies. At the same time, fertility issues are closely connected to personal experiences such as housing costs, childcare expenses, career pressure, and family responsibilities. Different social groups also hold different views on childbirth willingness, gender roles, and policy support. These discussions often involve both policy interpretation and personal opinion.

Because fertility and family policy links macro-level governance issues with micro-level life experiences, it provides a suitable case for examining how digital platforms shape public policy communication and public opinion formation.

4.3. Data sources and sample collection

4.3.1. Data source

The data come from short videos on Douyin. This study used web crawling methods to search videos through predefined keywords and collected public information from the platform's comprehensive ranking system. The dataset includes video titles, account names, publication dates, likes, shares, favorites, and comment counts.

4.3.2. Search keyword

To cover policy communication, public discussion, and personal experience sharing, this study used the following keywords: "fertility policy," "fertility and women," "fertility and family policy," "fertility costs," "fertility subsidies," "three-child policy," "population policy," and "maternity leave."

4.3.3. Time range

The sample covers the period from January 2025 to March 2026. During this period, discussions about fertility support policies remained active in China. The sample also includes content related to the 2026 National People's Congress (NPC) and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), which are important periods for policy discussion and public communication.

4.3.4. Sample screening criteria

After the initial data collection, the study manually screened the samples using four criteria: (1) the video had to clearly discuss fertility, family, or related policy issues; (2) highly repetitive or mass-produced marketing content was removed; (3) low-relevance traffic-oriented content was excluded; (4) videos with missing interaction data or incomplete information were deleted.

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4.3.5. Sample size

After crawling, filtering, and deduplication, the final dataset included 271 valid short videos. The sample size is sufficient for analyzing visibility structure, stance distribution, emotional expression, and narrative style.

5. Research findings

5.1. Hypothesis testing for the existence of a visibility structure (H1)

This study analyzed 271 short videos and used total interaction volume (likes + comments + shares) as the indexes of visibility. Based on interaction volume, the videos were divided into three visibility levels: high visibility (more than 100,000 interactions), medium visibility (10,000–100,000 interactions), and low visibility (fewer than 10,000 interactions).

As can be seen from Figure 1, low visibility content accounts for 60.89% of the sample. Medium visibility content makes up 30.63%, while high visibility content only accounts for 8.49%.

The distribution shows a clear long-tail pattern. A small number of videos received very high interaction and exposure, while most videos remained at low visibility levels. These findings support H1 and indicate that fertility and family policy communication on short-video platforms has a clear hierarchical visibility structure.

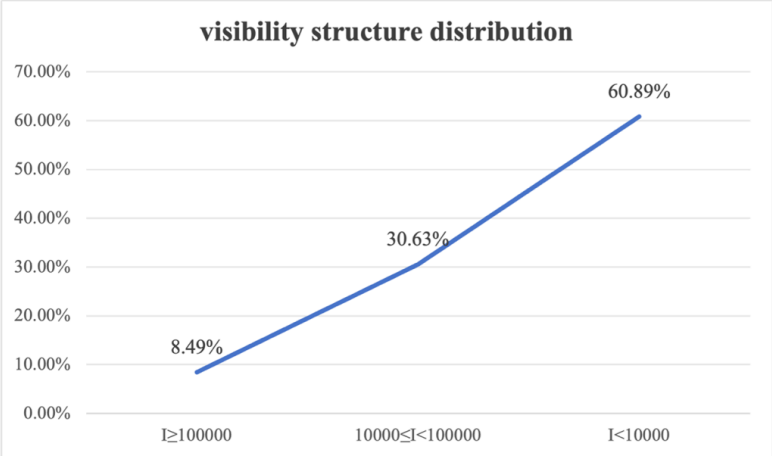

Figure 1. Line graph of visibility structure distribution

5.2. The relationship between content position and visibility (H2)

Table 1 shows that, at different visibility levels, there are only minor differences in the distribution of positions. Neutral content accounted for the largest proportion at all three levels. It represented 73.91% of high-visibility videos, 75.90% of medium-visibility videos, and 68.48% of low-visibility videos.

Supportive content accounted for 17.39% of high-visibility videos, 19.28% of medium-visibility videos, and 28.48% of low-visibility videos. Critical or oppositional content accounted for 8.70% of high-visibility videos, 4.82% of medium-visibility videos, and 3.03% of low-visibility videos.

The results do not show a clear concentration of stance-oriented content in the high-visibility tier. Stance distribution remains relatively stable across different visibility levels. Therefore, H2 is not supported.

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Table 1. Difference table of standing distribution

Visibility	neutrality	support	Question/Opposition
high	73.91%	17.39%	8.70%
Medium	75.90%	19.28%	4.82%
low	68.48%	28.48%	3.03%

5.3. The relationship between emotional expression, narrative style, and visibility (H3)

5.3.1. Emotional expression

Table 2 indicates that low-emotion content dominated all visibility levels. In the high-visibility level, 73.91% of videos were coded as low emotion, while medium-emotion and high-emotion content each accounted for 13.04%.

In the medium-visibility tier, low-emotion content accounted for 75.90% of videos, compared with 16.87% for medium emotion and 7.23% for high emotion. In the low-visibility tier, low-emotion content represented 66.67% of videos, while medium-emotion and high-emotion content accounted for 20.00% and 13.33%.

The findings do not show a positive relationship between emotional intensity and visibility. High-visibility content was not more emotional than medium- or low-visibility content. Therefore, the emotional-expression dimension of H3 is not supported.

Table 2. Difference table of emotional distribution

Visibility	Low (no obvious emotion; purely informational)	Medium (Rational)	High (Anger/Anxiety/Complaint/Satisfaction/Expectation)
high	73.91%	13.04%	13.04%
Medium	75.90%	16.87%	7.23%
low	66.67%	20.00%	13.33%

5.3.2. Narrative technique

As can be seen from Table 3, policy interpretation and information-sharing content dominated all visibility levels. This type of content accounted for 86.96% of high-visibility videos, 91.57% of medium-visibility videos, and 91.52% of low-visibility videos.

Personal experience narratives accounted for 13.04% of high-visibility videos, 6.02% of medium-visibility videos, and 7.27% of low-visibility videos. Emotion-centered narratives accounted for 0.00% of high-visibility videos, 2.41% of medium-visibility videos, and 1.21% of low-visibility videos.

The results do not show a concentration of personal storytelling or emotional narratives in the high-visibility tier. Therefore, the narrative-style dimension of H3 is also not supported.

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Table 3. Narrative distribution difference table

Visibility	Policy Sharing /Interpretation	Personal Experience /Daily Sharing	Emotional Expression
high	86.96%	13.04%	0.00%
Medium	91.57%	6.02%	2.41%
low	91.52%	7.27%	1.21%

5.4. Summary of results

The results show three main patterns. First, fertility and family policy content on Douyin displays a clear long-tail visibility structure, with interaction and exposure distributed unevenly across videos. Second, stance distribution remains relatively stable across visibility levels, and neutral content dominates all tiers. Third, highly visible content mainly consists of rational policy interpretation and informational content rather than emotional expression or personal storytelling.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Interpretation of key research findings

The visibility structure of the fertility and family policy content on Douyin was studied. The results indicate that there is a well-defined visibility hierarchy on the platform. There were very high levels of engagement on a handful of videos and low levels of engagement for the majority of videos. The overall distribution is long tailed. The discovery implies that communication resources on the short-video platform are distributed unevenly, influenced by the algorithmic recommendation and user interaction.

However, the findings also reveal that stance and emotionality do not significantly influence visibility. There was a dominant neutral content at all levels of visibility and the differences in the stance distribution between tiers were not significant. Highly visible content also did not have more emotional expression or personal storytelling. Instead, the most noticeable videos were of policy interpretation and informational content. These results indicate that visibility structures in the communication of fertility and family policy are not necessarily explained in terms of systematic amplification of emotional and/or polarized expressions but in terms of unequal exposure opportunities.

The refusal of H2 and H3 is particularly significant since it is a debunking of the "emotion-driven communication" model that is often cited in the analysis of western platforms. There are numerous studies already that say that emotional conflict can be more easily won over to interaction and visibility, as well as confrontation of identities and polarized expression. Yet, the findings of this study indicate that this cannot be fully transferred to the case of communication of public policy. This finding confirms an "issue dependent mechanism" of this study. That is: logic of Platform visibility is different for different issue types.

This outcome likely can be attributed to a number of factors. First, there are strong informational and practical characteristics of fertility and a family policy. Users are more concerned over usefulness, reliability and relevance to daily life of the information on a policy issue than on entertainment or political conflict issues. Thus, the informational value will be more important in determining visibility than the emotional stimulation. Secondly, the Chinese platform environment

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also is an influence on communication patterns. Government agencies, institutional media and professional policy accounts are important in communicating about fertility. The accounts typically feature depersonalized and standard language, and are already well established and trusted by their audience. Consequently, they are able to achieve high visibility without emotionally expressing. Thirdly, not everything that is emotional is executed well in the algorithm of social platforms. The distribution logic may be modified based on characteristics of the audience and the issues based on recommendations from the recommendation system. Users are more likely to save, share and use actionable policy information when the discussions happen in the public sphere. Platforms can thus continue to promote information instead of emotionally charged debates.

Overall, the results indicated that the information orientation of public policy communication on Chinese short-video platforms is still very strong. Platforms, in this context, serve as a space for emotional expression and a key vehicle for the dissemination of policy information, public discussion and knowledge.

6.2. Theoretical contributions

First, the study offers empirical evidence related to visibility structures in a Chinese platform context. Current studies on digital visibility primarily concentrate on platforms in the west, like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. This study, by looking at the content of fertility and family policy discussion on Douyin, demonstrates that hierarchical visibility structures are present on Chinese short-video platforms. The results thus expand the scope of visibility research to environments other than Western platform.

Secondly, it is suggested that the mechanism of platform communication is issue based. A number of current studies presume that emotionality and polarization in general boost visibility on a digital platform. However, this study reveals that the mechanisms of visibility vary with the type of issue. Public policy communication can be more about informational and pragmatic value than about emotional conflict. This discovery contradicts the notion of a universal platform logic "emotion-driven communication."

Third, the study supports a new understanding of the communication of digital public policies. The study views platforms as not only a channel for communicating information on policy, but also as a structuring force that configures the distribution, interpretation and discussion of policy information in public places. This study brings visibility structures to policy communication research, making it possible to bring together platform studies, political communication and public policy research in the same analytical framework.

6.3. Practical implications

Firstly, the interpretation of policies in the form of content that is clear and reliable should be strengthened in the production that is owned by the government and mainstream media, through short video platforms. The results indicate that policy content practical and information oriented is very much desired by users. Simpler language, visual explanation and using everyday examples can help to promote public understanding and the effective communication of information. More public value needs to be paid attention to with regard to policy communication on second platforms. The interaction efficiency and traffic performance should not be the only two aspects that a recommendation system should consider. In practice, platforms can make authoritative policy information more visible during critical policy windows, or periods of public debate, to help enhance the quality of public dialogue. Furthermore, there is a need to enhance users' media literacy

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when they are viewing policy information via the Internet. The users have to differentiate the official policy documents from the professional interpretations and their personal opinions, to avoid misunderstandings due to fragmented information. Lastly, the research results may offer valuable experience to other low fertility societies, particularly the East Asian nations of Japan, South Korea and Singapore. There are common problems in these countries in relation to low birth rates and family policy communication. Short videos platforms can play a key role in enhancing policy explanation and public involvement.

6.4. Dialogue with existing research

There are numerous studies that suggest that content with emotional appeal is more likely to engage the audience and have its content amplified by the algorithm. This pattern has been extensively documented in the literature on political conflict, social movements, online polarization, etc. However, the results of this study are not entirely in line with this explanation in the context of fertility and family policy communication. The results lend weight to the concept of platform communication that is dependent on the issue. Fertility and family policy is much more tightly linked to issues of reality like housing, education, childcare costs, and work-family balance than is political conflict or entertainment. What matters, thus, is that users are more interested in information value and policy relevance than mere emotional stimulation.

There are also differences in how the Chinese platform environment influences the way communication unfolds, compared to certain Western platform environments. There are four types of actors involved in the process of policy communication: government accounts, institutional media, professional interpreters, and ordinary users. This mixed-communication situation is not only characterized by the dominance of the emotional expression of grassroots or by the conflict of identity, but also by the presence of highly visible content.

This study does not invalidate previous theories relating to emotional communication. Rather it claims that the visibility of platforms varies depending on the issue situation. Research needs to be focused more on how these three dimensions (issue attributes, country, and platform ecology) interact in the future and less on the use of a single communication logic in every digital communication context.

6.5. Research limitations

In the first place, this study only concentrates on Douyin. The results cannot be transferred to other platforms because different platforms have different user structure, algorithmic systems and communication culture. Second, as this is mainly a content analysis study, the researchers are not able to provide full explanations of users' motivations, perceptions or the inner rules of the operation of these recommendation algorithms. Third, the data is cross-sectional, and does not reflect the long-term trends in public opinion on fertility policy issues. Finally, visibility is calculated based on engagement metrics, which cannot wholly reflect the true extent of visibility, recommendation reach or audience viewing depth.

6.6. Future research directions and prospects

For one thing, comparative study could be conducted on the structures of the visibility on platforms like Douyin, Weibo, RedNote, Bilibili, and other platforms to find out the differences between the platform communication mechanisms. Additionally, other mixed methods could be used, such as

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content analysis with interviews, surveys, digital ethnography, or experimental approaches, to gain a deeper insight into user behavior and algorithmic perception. Thirdly, longitudinal studies could explore the shifts in the structure of public opinion that occur when there are major policy events, political meetings or social crises. Fourth, further research is needed on algorithmic governance, such as making recommendations transparent, holding public information to account and holding platforms responsible.

In a wider sense, there is a great interdisciplinary potential in the field of visibility structure research. Future scholarship could also draw on communication studies, political science, sociology, and computational communication research disciplines to explore the interplay between platform power, algorithmic governance and the rebuilding of the digital public sphere.

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