

Same Event, Different Worlds: How Platform Mindsets Produce Divergent Meanings and Digital Identities in Social Media Publics

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Abstract. In platformized communication, the same public event can have various meanings, forms of participation and digital identities in different social media platforms. This research investigates how different platform perspectives influence the cross-platform meaning creation and digital identity construction. Based on the analytical framework of *Platform Mindset → Discursive/Affective Environment → Digital Identity Construction*, a qualitative thematic analysis is conducted using 462 highly interactive comments selected from an original pool of 165,505 comments about the LV–Molly Tea trademark dispute on Douyin, Xiaohongshu and Weibo. The results show different recontextualization processes in these platforms. On Douyin, the controversy becomes a meme via humor, imitation and joint play, forming a participatory identity. On Xiaohongshu, it is redefined through common life, lifestyle and aesthetic activities, creating a consumer–brand co-creator identity. On Weibo, it is restated as a major public issue concerning cultural property rights, intellectual property, fairness and shared values, resulting in a value-oriented public identity. These findings indicate that platform perspectives not only affect the visibility and organization of public event discussions but also the discursive and emotional conditions through which users present and negotiate their digital identities. The study broadens the research on platform perspective by providing a cross-platform structure that links platform rules, meaning-making and identity formation.

Keywords: Platform Mindset, Cross-Platform Communication, Public Events, Digital Identity, Online Public Opinion

1. Introduction

1.1. Research background

Public events are no longer understood in one sense as algorithms get more and more deeply integrated into social life. The same event can take on diverse meanings and social and cultural understandings within various platforms.

The discussion on the LV-Molly Tea trademark symbolizes such a circumstance. On Douyin, Xiaohongshu and Weibo, there is no identical story; however, the opinions on each site are different. This difference leads to the first problem: how it is possible to see the same event in different ways as social phenomena on different web pages?

It is considered that embedded 'platform mindsets' act as the primary architects of user interpretation. Consequently, this study examines how these orientations reshape the way the event is understood, producing distinct affective environments and different forms of digital identity construction.

1.2. Current research gaps and research questions

The algorithmic recommendations, platform affordances, and platform governance have been thoroughly studied in the existing work. Within these strands, existing literature has extensively examined how algorithmic recommendations, platform affordances, and governance mechanisms shape user behavior, opinion expression, and digital identity. However, these dimensions are generally analysed separately or in single-platform settings, with much focus on the platform governance and disciplining, as well as public opinion contexts at macro levels.

Consequently, the micro-level dynamics by which users make sense of events, act, and build identities in differentiated platform environments have received comparatively little attention, and there is no integrated analytical framework that links platform-level mechanisms and cultural logics with user discursive practices, affective participation and identity construction across platforms [1].

To answer this, this study asks:

RQ1: How is the same public event represented differently in different discursive patterns on social media platforms like Weibo, Douyin and Xiaohongshu?

RQ2: How do people employ differentiated platform mindsets in creating and negotiating their digital identity in the affective communication context of public events?

2. Literature review & theoretical framework

2.1. Research status

2.1.1. Algorithmic mechanisms and platform-specific visibility

Walter Lippmann proposed that the public's perception of reality relies more on the "pseudo-environment" constructed by the media than on the objective environment [2]. In the present day of platform communication, this process is mainly determined by algorithmic methods. The recommendations, rankings and personalized distributions not only affect what information can be seen, but also increase the chances of certain issues and expressions being widely spread.

According to this viewpoint, the studies on platforms have investigated how algorithms and interface designs organize the visibility of information and user expression. Klinger and Svensson demonstrate that algorithms embody platform rules and commercial objectives [3], cultivating distinct perceptual mechanisms across platforms. This suggests that the same public event may acquire different forms of visibility and discursive prominence across platforms.

Importantly, such influence extends beyond information exposure. Zulli's concept of "technomimesis" further suggests that technological systems can become imperceptibly internalized into users' expressive frameworks [4].

Together, these studies highlight the role of platform mechanisms in shaping cross-platform discursive differences.

2.1.2. Digital identity in cross-platform contexts

Users adjust their identity on different platforms, depending on the different communication contexts and situations, and change their self-representation as per the contexts and situations.

Recent research also has focused on the impact of platform characteristics on identity practices. Bhandari et al. conceptualize the "algorithmized self" as an identity shaped through users' engagement with platform-specific technological and cultural conditions [5], whereby recognizable forms of performance enable individuals to construct and maintain their identities across different platforms.

Thus, digital identity is not just transposed from platform to platform, but rather is created and developed within each platform. However, not much research has been conducted on how users from various platforms express their identities differently with respect to the same public event. The gap needs to be further explored to show the relationship of platform contexts to various types of digital identity.

2.2. Definition of core concepts

2.2.1. Platformization and platform mindset

The increasing integration of digital platforms into social life has transformed platforms from passive communication channels into active infrastructures that organize information circulation, social interaction, and meaning production. Poell, Nieborg, and van Dijck define platformization as the process through which platform infrastructures, economic models, and governance mechanisms penetrate different social domains and reorganize cultural practices around platforms [6].

To capture platform-specific differences, this study introduces the concept of platform mindset. In their examination of digital interaction and cross-platform user migration, Chinese scholars Tu and Chu conceptualize the "platform mindset" as the principles, values, and decision-making orientations that guide platform operations [7]. By investigating the changes in users' behaviors when they switch from one kind of digital environment to another (e.g., from TikTok to Xiaohongshu), their research shows that the platforms are not completely impartial technological intermediaries. On the contrary, this viewpoint emphasizes that the platforms have special cognitive and cultural orientations which influence the users' perceptions and develop particular communication behaviors.

Based on this viewpoint, this investigation considers the platform's attitude as a dynamic product resulting from the interaction of algorithmic systems, governing procedures, interface constructions and user practices. It plays the role of an algorithmic and cultural regulation which affects how users understand the events and participate.

2.2.2. Affective publics

While platform mechanisms shape the conditions of expression, emotions provide the connective force through which individual participation becomes collective action. Papacharissi's concept of affective publics highlights that digital publics are often not organized through rational deliberation but through emotional circulation and shared affective experiences [8].

In the platform environment, emotions like anger, amusement, anxiety and pride are strengthened by comments, sharing, imitation and the algorithmic recommendation. Therefore, emotional expressions become social practices by which the users communicate with each other, form common meanings and acquire a feeling of participation and belonging. During the public discussions, affective communication merges the individual responses into a collective identity by allowing the users to locate themselves in the broader emotional and value communities. Thus, affective publics play a theoretical role in connecting the platform environment, collective participation and the construction of digital identity.

2.3. Analytical framework

This research proposes the framework of Platform Mindset→Discursive/Affective Environment→Digital Identity Construction. The Platform Mindset influences the communication conditions in which users understand public events, express emotions and communicate with others, leading to special discursive and affective environments. These environments then affect the behavior and identity construction of individuals in the digital world.

By applying this framework to the trademark dispute of LV-Molly Tea, the study examines how different platform mindsets result in various discourses, emotional involvement and identity formation on Weibo, Douyin and Xiaohongshu.

3. Methodology

3.1. Case selection and research objects

In late June 2026, the Suzhou Intermediate People's Court announced a first-instance judgment regarding the trademark dispute between Louis Vuitton (LV) and the Chinese tea brand Molly Tea. The court decided that the similar flower design imitation by Molly Tea infringed upon their rights and ruled them to stop the business, pay a compensation of 10.3 million RMB and apologize.

The judgment was published in the media during early July and soon became a topic of public discussion. The flower design is also typically linked to the conventional Chinese decorative style, so the controversy also includes other aspects like intellectual property, brand competition, consumer culture, cultural symbols and national feelings.

The case serves as a good example for a cross-platform examination because the same controversy resulted in a different discursive orientation and different interaction patterns on Weibo, Douyin and Xiaohongshu. As a result, these platforms offer a comparative backdrop for exploring how platform orientations influence users' interpretation and expression practices and the development of digital selves, as they are made up of three different social media ecosystems: a public discussion platform, a short video entertainment platform, and a lifestyle and consumption platform, respectively.

3.2. Research methods

This research uses a qualitative case study method to investigate user comments concerning the same public event on various platforms. The aim of our investigation is not to estimate the distribution of opinions statistically, but to investigate the different discursive patterns, emotional backgrounds and identity formations generated by these platforms. Therefore, purposive sampling has been adopted.

The collected data has been analyzed by means of thematic analysis, in which the comments were repeatedly examined to find out the repeated themes, emotional tendencies and interaction styles. Then, the comments with similar meanings were classified into major thematic categories, so that we could compare the discourse environments of the different platforms. At last, the effect of platform characteristics on users' identity formation through distinct discursive and emotional activities has been studied.

3.3. Sampling strategy and data selection

The study chose the relevant information which was published during the active discussion time of the event (from July 2 to 10, 2026). At the same time, some unimportant or irrelevant events like the support activities of Jasmine Milk Tea in Guangxi were discarded.

Purposive sampling was applied to pick up posts from various origins, such as official news papers, advertising accounts, professional bloggers and common people. The comments were eliminated if they included (1) advertisements or commercial promotions; (2) meaningless contents consisting of only emoticons or random symbols; (3) repeated materials; or (4) discussions without any analytical significance.

Since the interaction mechanisms and the traffic on different platforms are different, the selection criteria were adjusted for each platform as listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Platform-specific sampling criteria and engagement thresholds

Platform	Post Selection Criteria	Primary Comment Selection Criteria	Secondary Comment Selection Criteria
Weibo	Selected 10 representative posts under relevant hashtags with more than 8,000 likes	Selected highly interactive comments with ≥ 200 likes	Selected highly interactive replies with ≥ 400 likes
Douyin	Selected 10 popular videos; top-ranked videos were identified through cross-account browsing to reduce ranking bias	Selected the top 20 comments based on likes ranking	Selected replies with ≥ 500 likes
Xiaohongshu	Selected highly ranked posts; 11 posts were included (one additional post was added to meet the sampling requirement)	Selected the top 20 comments based on likes ranking, excluding low-engagement comments	Selected replies with ≥ 400 likes

Instead of using only one assessment standard, the study merged the quantitative indicators like the lowest limits of likes and replies with the ranking and the theme significance. Through this combination, the most excellent and actively involved discussions were identified, and at the same time, their relation to the main discussion trends on each site was taken into consideration.

Table 1 shows that the secondary comments need to meet higher requirements of engagement. The reason is that the highly liked replies usually indicate stronger communication and can give a better reflection of the discussion patterns at the platform level. Since the comment-level engagement is influenced by the platform activities, all the interaction indices were recorded at the time of data collection.

These screening and eliminating steps reduced the original data set to an adequate corpus for the qualitative thematic analysis. From Table 2, it is noted that the final sample consisted of 462 selected interactive comments among the initial 165,000 records.

Table 2. Overview of initial comment volume and final sample size by platform

Platform	Initial Comment Volume	Final Sample Size
Weibo	20,118	89
Douyin	99,554	200
Xiaohongshu	45,833	173
Total	165,505	462

4. Findings & comparative analysis

Although the three platforms addressed the same event, the discussions developed along markedly different lines, with the LV-Molly Tea dispute being recontextualized in platform-specific ways.

4.1. Douyin

Among the three platforms, Douyin stood out for the prominence of meme-based, humorous, and playful expressions.

This phenomenon can be seen in the humorous modification of the brand symbols. The users often called LV the "Donkey brand" (lú pái), taking advantage of the phonetic resemblance between "LV" and the Chinese character for donkey. Besides, other remarks like "LV=WC" (Water Closet) and "Buy Louis Vuitton, enjoy the dry-toilet life," compared the monogram patterns of LV to ordinary bathroom tiles. A comment which was greatly appreciated, "LV is already seated at the same table with the toilet—on the toilet tiles," further demonstrates how irony and exaggeration subverted LV's conventional luxury symbolism. The repeated circulation of such expressions across posts suggests meme-like reproduction through imitation and variation [9].

These patterns produced a carnivalesque [10] and playful affective environment in which the aesthetic hierarchy associated with global luxury capital was temporarily suspended. By transforming elite brand symbols into mundane or profane objects, users collectively stripped LV of its authoritative aura through mockery.

Douyin's entertainment-oriented platform mindset therefore provides not merely a more entertaining form of discourse but a distinctive mode of participation. Users can enter the discussion by understanding, reproducing, and extending memes rather than demonstrating legal or expert knowledge. The event is thus transformed from an issue to be interpreted into something to be collectively "played with," through which users construct a participatory digital identity through joking, imitation, interaction, and stance-taking.

4.2. Xiaohongshu

Compared with Weibo and Douyin, Xiaohongshu showed a stronger tendency to interpret the controversy through everyday experience, consumption, and lifestyle. Comments such as "I feel embarrassed even carrying LV now" and images of clothing featuring similar traditional motifs

shifted the discussion from trademark infringement to personal consumption, fashion, and aesthetics, bringing the controversy into the relatable question of how it affects everyday life.

This daily orientation was shown in the based evidence observations. The users referred to the historical evidence, design features and legal precedents, such as tracing the disputed motifs to the ancient Chinese sources, quoting the similar disputes between LV and Hanfu manufacturers, and separating the traditional symbols in public domain from the contemporary protected designs. In comparison with the slogan-oriented expressions on Weibo and the memetic interactions on Douyin, these discussions exhibited a more analytical and evidence-based atmosphere, which was strengthened by the professional creators in law and fashion.

Reflection and constructive engagement were the features of the affective environment. Some users said that they had to think about creating domestic brands, and some release has pointed out that China has few brand names in the field of luxury goods; some users even had specific suggestions, like saying "launch a Haitang-pattern limited-edition cup and merchandise" or "just remove one petal and then put it back." These are the kinds of comments made by users, and they show the people who were using Molly Tea not only evaluating the product as consumers, but also as they envision how the brand could react, redesign and evolve.

In the end, these co-creative interaction patterns create a digital identity. Users have the agency to avoid or advocate brands and also to engage in brand meaning-making through the research of history, aesthetic assessment, and design ideation. In this way they become more and more the "prosumers [11]" that consume, produce and circulate brand.

4.3. Weibo

In Weibo, Users did not focus solely on the trademark dispute itself, but frequently connected it with cultural ownership, intellectual property, fairness, and the development of domestic brands.

Many comments were concerned with the source of the controversial motif and linked it to Chinese traditional cultural symbols. Such as the users wrote, "They copied our baoxianghua and pipa motifs". Value judgments like "Traditional culture should not be monopolized" led to an individual trademark dispute becoming a discussion of cultural commons, commercial power and fairness.

Furthermore, there was an intense affective attitude towards perceived injustice and collective defense in this environment. Users explicitly linked the commercial dispute to historical trauma, writing, "Foreigners used to loot our cultural relics; now they are looting our culture" and "From the Opium War to another cultural war." By rhetorically collapsing the distance between a contemporary intellectual property dispute and historical humiliation, nationalism functions not merely as spontaneous patriotism, but as a strategic discursive mechanism to mobilize emotional solidarity and legitimize the defense of cultural sovereignty against perceived Western hegemony [12]. In this sense, the discussion represents a form of digital nationalist discourse, in which cultural identity becomes a resource for collective meaning-making and position-taking.

Importantly, however, the Weibo discourse was not entirely driven by emotion. Comments such as "If the trademark had already been registered, then why does it constitute infringement?" introduced legal and factual questions into the discussion, which suggesting a public-oriented space of value negotiation rather than mere emotional polarization.

By frequently changing from discussing historical trauma to arguing about legal regulations, the users show their roles as participants in a major public problem. Thus, their communications develop a complicated and oriented digital image, which varies from the enthusiastic "cultural supporter" to the "reasonable public member" in law.

5. Discussion

5.1. Platform mindset as a discipline of digital identity

The qualitative cross-platform comparison reveals that platform mindsets shape digital identity by fostering distinct, recognizable "platform atmospheres". Such platform atmospheres are the emergent, situational "vibes"—discernible through the recurring patterns of user comments, visual framing, and affective tones identified across the datasets—that render certain behaviors appropriate while marginalizing others.

This dynamic raises a more critical question concerning user autonomy. If a few of these expressions are also familiar and known to the group, it is possible that the users will eventually get used to this platform's expectations and present identities that seem to be chosen freely, but are really influenced by society.

But this does not mean that users completely lose agency. Users, in a way, have the power of resist. As José van Dijck and other scholars of platform power have frequently emphasized [6], the relationship between platform architectures and user practices is inherently relational, contested, and fluid. While platform mindsets impose structural constraints, users continuously negotiate, circumvent, or creatively subvert these logics in their everyday interactions. This potential for resistance manifests when users deliberately employ irony, adopt decentralized identities, or cross platform boundaries to disrupt the seamless operation of a single platform's atmospheric norms. Far from being entirely scripted, digital identity is constantly forged through a tense, ongoing negotiation between infrastructural power and user-driven tactics.

So, the trend towards differentiation and closure of platform environments is gaining in momentum, but user agency is a force to be reckoned with that is shaping the platform society as a whole, not just top-down and corporate-directed.

5.2. The fragmentation of publicness

The findings of this study about differences between the cross-platforms point to a fundamental shift in digital publicness. The fragmentation of public discourse does not necessarily mean the disappearance of publicness; rather, it means that public events are increasingly interpreted through multiple, platform-specific meaning environments. Smyrnaio and Baisnée argue that platformization simultaneously produces concentration and fragmentation [13]: platforms centralize control over communication infrastructures while fragmenting public discourse through personalization and differentiated experiences.

This fragmentation has a complex connection to social cohesion in this view. The core crisis is not simply ideological disagreement, but ontological separation. Users primarily encountering the event through Douyin inhabit a reality of playful irony, whereas Weibo users navigate a reality of moral urgency. When these meaning environments become weakly connected, the disagreement is not only inside a public place; it leads to the distinction between partly divided publics.

Therefore, the issue is whether or not the diversity created by platformization leaves room for different platform publics to come into contact with and engage with one another. Publicness can thus be more and more plural but not truly interrelated.

5.3. The alienation of affective publics

The findings further invite a critical reconsideration of affective publics under algorithmic conditions—when emotional expressions circulate through engagement-driven infrastructures, affect may acquire another function: it becomes a resource for visibility, attention, and platform circulation. The key issue is therefore not simply whether algorithms amplify emotions, but whether they gradually reformat emotional participation according to the logic of visibility and engagement.

Driven by algorithm-driven affective mobilization, public events in cross-platform communication frequently fall into the double-edged dilemma of "Hypervisibility." Although algorithms grant immense exposure to issues such as "national cultural protection" or brand rights defense, this hypervisibility often comes at the expense of the issue's complexity and depth.

This is clearly visible on social media platform Weibo, where the complex legal and cultural battle over the LV–Molly Tea case was quickly reduced to the binary nationalist rhetoric. As Rabe warns, hypervisibility on digital platforms is prone to breeding "clicktivism" and "affective alienation [14]." Engagement-driven infrastructures reward emotionally legible outrage while filtering out nuance, transforming substantive debates over intellectual property and cultural ownership into fleeting spectacles of nationalist polarization. As a result, public issues are further instrumentalized as they are made visible via algorithms and gain traction according to the traffic of engagement, which can compromise long-term deliberation and the development of social consensus.

Finally, affective publics have a two-sided nature: While emotion generates solidarity and collective action, under hypervisible algorithmic conditions it may privilege immediacy over deliberation. When complex socio-legal controversies are systematically flattened into traffic-optimized emotional signifiers, high levels of digital engagement paradoxically coexist with the erosion of substantive public consensus.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Main finding

6.1.1. Platform mindsets and discursive divergence

This research indicates that the same public event does not create a common discussion area on Weibo, Douyin and Xiaohongshu. Rather, the different platform perspectives influence how the controversy is recontextualized, emotionally arranged and given social significance.

The cross-platform comparison reveals three recontextualization trajectories: meme on Douyin, everyday life on Xiaohongshu, and public issue on Weibo.

6.1.2. Platform differences and digital identity construction

Platform mindset shapes the discursive, affective, and interactional environments through which identity construction takes place. Rather than directly determining users' identities, platform logics provide different conditions of visibility, participation, and meaning-making, within which users develop recognizable modes of self-presentation and collective identification.

The same event therefore generates distinct forms of identity participation under different platform mindsets: the entertainment participant on Douyin, who engages through meme creation and playful interaction; the consumer co-creator on Xiaohongshu, who constructs identity through

consumption practices, aesthetic judgments, and experiential sharing; and the public value advocate on Weibo, who participates in debates concerning cultural ownership, social values, and collective interests.

Taken together, as Table 3 summarized: platform mindsets function as divergent interpretive frameworks that recontextualize the same public event into different social objects, generate distinct discursive and affective environments, and consequently enable different forms of digital identity construction.

Table 3. Divergent recontextualization pathways and identity constructions

Platform	Platform Mindset	Recontextualization	Discursive/Affective Environment	Digital Identity
Weibo	Entertainment-oriented	Event → Meme	Playful, carnivalesque, meme-based	Participatory Identity
Douyin	Consumption-oriented	Event → Everyday Life	Experiential, reflective, constructive	Consumer-Brand Co-creator
Xiaohongshu	Public-issue-oriented	Event → Public Issue	Value-oriented, emotional, negotiative	Public-Issue Participant

6.2. Theoretical and practical contributions

6.2.1. Theoretical contributions

This study makes two theoretical contributions.

Firstly, it broadens the research on platform mentality by showing that the same public event can be transformed into different forms—such as memes, everyday life and public issues—by using various platform logics, instead of just generating different subjects.

Secondly, the study offers a qualitative framework for analyzing the connection between platform surroundings, user involvement and identity formation. By conducting a cross-platform comparison on Douyin, Xiaohongshu and Weibo regarding the same public event, the study integrates the cross-platform analysis with the micro-level examination of users' discourse, emotional expression and identity display. This method provides a model for going beyond single-platform study and investigating how platform differences are reflected in users' daily communication behaviors.

6.2.2. Practical contributions

From a practical point of view, this research gives useful suggestions for cross-media communication, digital marketing and brand crisis management. The results show that a uniform public relations plan is no longer suitable in the current highly diversified era, because it may cause "meaning collapse" in different digital areas. Therefore, companies and public organizations need to develop specific communication methods according to the characteristics of each platform. For example, actions on Douyin should make use of the playful and meme-oriented participation; plans on Xiaohongshu should emphasize the joint creation of the brand and the consistency with lifestyle; while the communications on Weibo should mainly focus on the underlying public values, cultural sensitivity and social fairness.

6.3. Limitations and future prospects

6.3.1. Limitations

Several limitations should be taken into account.

First, the research is conducted in the Chinese Internet environment. Although Weibo, Douyin and Xiaohongshu have distinct features concerning public, entertainment and consumption aspects, the attitudes on these platforms are influenced by some social and regulatory conditions which limit the generalization of the findings to other situations.

Secondly, the uncertainty of algorithms and the accuracy of the data may affect the representativeness of the sample. Personalized ranking, traffic distribution and the artificial enhancement of attention, like astroturfing or "water army", might cause bias. Even though specific selection criteria were applied for each platform, these influences cannot be completely eliminated.

Moreover, the biases in data selection, coding and interpretation may arise from the viewpoints of the researchers. As a qualitative study, it is necessary to depend on the researchers' judgments in recognizing representative discourses and in comprehending the emotions and identity performances. In the future research, we can enhance the reliability by employing multiple coders, testing intercoder reliability and integrating quantitative and qualitative methods.

6.3.2. Future prospects

To address these limitations, future research may combine computational communication techniques like text mining, natural language processing and network analysis, to validate this framework across larger datasets [15]. These methods could further visualize cross-platform propagation, reduce algorithmic noise, and quantitatively examine how different platform mindsets contribute to divergent forms of digital identity.

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